Beyond the Classroom, Internship in D.C.

Stephanie Medina, a senior in Human Development and Family Studies, is spending her Spring semester in an internship with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI) in Washington, D.C. CHCI is “dedicated to shaping the next generation of Latino leaders, by immersing them in the congressional experience on ‘the Hill.’” Through this organization, Stephanie has had the unique opportunity to work with Illinois Senator and Assistant Democratic Leader, Dick Durbin.

While working within this context, Stephanie has been involved in various governmental processes: attending Congressional confirmation hearings of Presidential nominees, witnessing the failed repeal of the Affordable Care Act, being privy to hearings/briefings on “a wide variety of topics, such as mercury poisoning, LGBTQ+ refugees, fair wages, among others.” She has been working with legislative aides on projects involving the national budget, labor, healthcare, women’s health, and immigration. She has also attended receptions and galas where she networks with members of Congress, including the first Latina Senator, Catherine Cortez-Mastro (D-NV). Stephanie says that her favorite part of this internship has been, “being in D.C. during such a difficult time and watching members of Congress and staff really work through the difficulties and still be optimistic about the future of the country. They’re still hopeful of creating a better future for everyone and seeing that attitude has really motivated me to stay on the Hill and continue to work in public service and public policy.” HDFS is tremendously proud to call Stephanie Medina one of our own, and we are confident that she will continue to do exceptional work for the betterment of people’s lives!

HDFS Abroad, Red Cross Children’s Hospital

Each year award-winning instructor, Jan Brooks leads a study abroad trip to Cape Town, South Africa. Recently, one of our own HDFS Ambassadors, Vanessa Farlow shared her experience on this life changing trip. While in Cape Town, Vanessa worked with the Red Cross Children’s Hospital and had the opportunity to assist children and their families. She worked diligently to keep the child’s mind off of the pain and stress that comes with a hospital stay. Vanessa was particularly struck with the challenges to accessing quality health care in the area. She saw how the Red Cross War Memorial Children’s Hospital helped aid those who are facing many life threatening diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

Overall, Vanessa noted that this study abroad trip gave her a truly new perspective. “I want to continue having more opportunities like this so I can further enhance my knowledge of how my life experiences compare to other people around the world. Seeing how many people value education and resources makes me appreciate being able to attend college so much more.”
Shawn Mendez began her journey within the HDFS Doctoral Program in the Fall of 2012. Her research focuses on understanding how people’s lives are influenced by the intersections of sexuality, gender, class, and race. Specifically, she is interested in “the lives of multiply marginalized people, particularly LGBTQ people of color.” Through case study methodology, Shawn’s dissertation “investigate[s] the ways that lesbian, gay, and queer parents in Black or mixed race families teach their teenage children about race, gender, sexuality, and family.” The National Council on Family Relations awarded Shawn the Jessie Bernard Outstanding Research Proposal from a Feminist Perspective Award (2016) for her dissertation. Shawn hopes that her research will facilitate better outcomes and acceptance for LGBTQ people of color. She is planning her final dissertation defense for this coming June and has already accepted a position as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of North Carolina-Ashville.

In her time at UIUC, Shawn has been the teaching assistant for several courses as well as the instructor/co-instructor for HDFS 120 and HDFS 105/online. Through these experiences, she discovered her passion for facilitating the development of students into mature and motivated adults. Always striving to better herself and her capacity to reach students, Shawn earned her Graduate Teaching Certificate in 2015. When an undergraduate student was asked what Shawn meant to her, she noted “Shawn was the person who gave me the confidence to dive into research and find my place at the U of I.”

We are proud to have Shawn Mendez in HDFS and know she will be an extraordinary researcher and assistant professor at the University of North Carolina-Ashville!

The Culture and Family Life Lab, headed by Dr. Gail Ferguson, investigates the complex impact of globalizaion on the cultural identities, relationships, and well-being of youth and families around the world. Currently, in research focused on Jamaica, Dr. Ferguson and her lab are investigating how adolescents’ and their mothers’ interactions, behaviors, and eating habits are associated with internalizing US culture (remote acculturation). Previous research found that feeling more American is linked to watching more US Cable TV which, in turn, is associated with unhealthy eating habits in Jamaican families (Ferguson, Muzzafar, Iturbide, Chu, & Meeks, 2017). In an effort to make a positive difference, Dr. Ferguson and Dr. Michelle Nelson (UIUC Department of Advertising) collaborated with Professor Julie Meeks at the University of West Indies in Jamaica to create the JUS Media? Programme – a transdisciplinary intervention aimed at addressing the potential aversive health effects of US Cable food advertising through education on remote acculturation, nutrition, and media literacy.

The Culture and Family Life Lab is now in the middle of an NIH-funded experimental study evaluating the efficacy of the JUS Media? Programme among families in Jamaica. This project involves a partnership between the UIUC team and an entire team on the ground in Jamaica, totaling 23 research personnel including 5 research assistants (RAs) at UIUC and 8 RAs in Jamaica. Kenz Martin, an HDFS undergraduate RA on the project, says that a remarkable part of the JUS Media? Programme is having the opportunity to work very closely with the Jamaican team in the design and implementation of the project. Additionally, she describes working with Çağla Giray, M.S. (the lead UIUC graduate student) as being “one of the most beneficial experiences” she has had in her college career. When asked for her perspective, Çağla exuded sentiments of gratitude and pride in being part of “such a successful and innovative multicultural team… and to collaborate with such hard-working, conscientious, and kind research assistants both in the US and in Jamaica.”

Memories of the Child Development Lab

The 75th Anniversary of the Child Development Lab is approaching! Please share stories about your time in the CDL or what the CDL has meant to you. Email your stories to Dr. Brent McBride at brentmcb@illinois.edu. Thank you!

For more information about HDFS and giving opportunities visit http://hdfs.illinois.edu