Blog #3

This summer has gone by in quite the whirlwind. I studied for and took the GRE, lived in a pseudo apartment (on Brandeis’s campus) with a close friend, and, of course, worked. Living in Waltham and commuting to work every morning made my internship feel more like a job. In my opinion, if you can see yourself performing a certain job for a long period of time and enjoy your time doing it, then you’ve found the right job for you. In my case, I enjoyed my time at Fenway so much that when my boss asked me if I could stay on next semester, it was an easy, almost automatic, “yes.”

The Fenway Institute really blew my mind in terms of the field of public health. By that, I mean that it showed me the different branches of public health (e.g., epidemiology, policy, education, etc.). If you asked me what I was interested in pursuing before my internship, I would’ve said policy because that was what I most enjoyed learning about in classes at Brandeis. As a result of this internship, I am much more interested in epidemiology – and also aware that another class or experience could change that. However, since this internship has allowed me to explore the different aspects of public health, the only change that is likely to occur is how I apply my epidemiological skills.

Speaking of interests and goals, at the beginning of this internship I had three expectations: 1. To learn the ins and outs of an epidemiological research study, 2. To narrow down my interests within the field of human health, and 3. To experience the interplay between this internship and my knowledge of health policy and epidemiology from my coursework as an HSSP major. Thinking back now, I think that my first expectation was a little too easily
attainable – of course I would learn the ins and outs of epidemiology studies if I worked with them for 8 weeks! But now that I have a working knowledge of them, I think it’s going to be easier for me to understand how things work outside of Fenway. The second and third expectations were both realistic in my opinion. I was kind of up in the air with what to study/research in the beginning of the summer, and Fenway helped me narrow that down. Relating coursework learned at Brandeis to my work at Fenway allowed me to fully learn new material, rather than focusing on the basics. As a reminder, while going through the software programs, I ran into incidence rate ratios, odds ratios, person years, t-tests, etc.—all terms that I was not only familiar with, but comfortable with calculating thanks to my coursework in Introduction to Epidemiology and Biostatistics and Population Health.

In my last blog post, I also wrote about two “supplementary” expectations before this internship ended: 1. To learn more biostatistics and statistical software, and 2. To become more involved with the other studies within the epidemiology team, especially the one happening in Peru. Unfortunately, I did not get the opportunity to learn the statistical software. That being said, I will probably start doing more of that when I am working with Fenway this fall. Regarding the study in Peru, I was able to help quite a bit! The study itself is looking to find the best way to give trans women in Peru access to health care. To do this, the researchers are performing a variety of interviews with health care providers, trans women, and national and local government officials. My assignment with this study was to code\(^1\) the interviews. It was a really interesting experience.

Overall, Fenway has given me an immense amount of knowledge. While a lot of this is somewhat specific to epidemiology, a fair amount of what I learned at Fenway is also useful to me in other settings. All of the information that I learned about the trans community is very

\(^{1}\)A way that interview data are categorized to facilitate analysis.
useful for me in better understanding the LGBTQ community. For example, my vocabulary and ability to speak about gender identity and biological aspects has improved tremendously. This knowledge has made me interested in trans research in a way that I never really thought about prior.

For those interested in the field of human health, more specifically public health, I suggest you keep an open mind to whatever comes your way. Public health is a vast field and you can go in a lot of directions with it. It’s important to try and take classes and work at places that allow you to fully experience the diversity of public health. Secondly, be mindful of the type of organization you work at. This is key for people when it comes to money. Organizations that are non-profit, or receive most of their funding through grants, have salary caps on employees. If you’re looking to make it “big time,” it’s very possible, but you have to work your way up (like most jobs). Lastly, never have static expectations of an internship because the internship itself will probably change. I went into my internship expecting to have one set of experiences, but ended up with many more. What’s funny is I think I enjoyed my time much more in the role that I had than the role I was hired for.

With that, I’d like to thank all of you who have followed me on my journey with The Fenway Institute. I can’t speak highly enough of the institute and its staff. I think this summer was pivotal in pointing me in a solid direction for the future. With the oh-so-fun senior year “What are you going to do after graduation?” question coming so soon, I’m a bit nervous for my final year at Brandeis to start. But, with this internship under my belt, I feel confident diving in!