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CPP Interns Grow Professionally, Impact the Community

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CPP Interns Grow Professionally, Impact the Community

Aug. 21, 2015

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— This summer, 10 Illinois Wesleyan University students participated in a unique experience through the **Community Partnership Program (CPP)**. As a joint effort between Illinois Wesleyan's **Action Research Center (ARC)** and State Farm, CPP is the only program in the country that employs a 3-2-1 format. During the 11-week program, the interns spend three days a week interning at State Farm, two days working at a community nonprofit and one night meeting with ARC to learn about community development, leadership and nonprofit infrastructure.

One participant, Kimberly Mensah '16 worked in the philanthropy department at State Farm and at **Unity Community Center** in Normal, a multicultural center that provides programming for youth from families with limited resources.

A psychology major from Bolingbrook, Ill., Mensah conducted pre-feasibility research at Unity for future expansion efforts. Her various projects involved developing parent surveys and drafting an initial expansion proposal, which Unity can utilize as the organization pursues plans for growth.

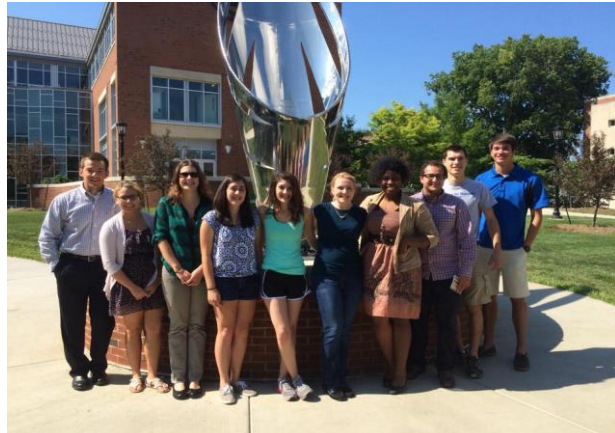
After graduation, Mensah hopes to work within the community. "CPP has definitely solidified my interest for interacting and providing service to my community and has also made me more passionate about public health," said Mensah, who is president and co-founder of Cross-Cultural Connections at Illinois Wesleyan, a student organization developed to bridging gaps and fostering mutual relationships between international and U.S. students.

Bloomington native Matthew Mardis '16 worked for the Resource Deployment team in the P&C Claims Department at State Farm, which handles catastrophe claims, and at the **West Bloomington Revitalization project**. Convened in 2008, the WBRP leads collaborative efforts within West Bloomington and facilitates a variety of local programs, including the Tool Library, a free tool-lending collection.

In addition to renovating the WBRP website, Mardis, a mathematics major, conducted research to update the West Bloomington Strategic Plan. "My job this summer was to interview both current and former board members to get their input on what progress has been made with the neighborhood plan since it was first developed and what areas still need focus," said Mardis, who plays baseball at Illinois Wesleyan.

"Not only did [CPP] give me the opportunity to expand my network by meeting a vast array of people, but it taught me the importance of viewing the world from different perspectives," Mardis said. "As a result, I feel confident and prepared as I begin looking for post-undergraduate opportunities because the CPP program has allowed me to experience so many different sides of the working world."

Brianna Piro '17, a psychology and sociology double major from Pekin, Ill., spent her summer working with the Total Rewards-Compensation department at State Farm. Her nonprofit was **Marcfirst** in Bloomington, which connects families and people with developmental disabilities to their community.



Community Partnership Program interns



Matthew Mardis '16 worked in the P&C Claims Department at State Farm, and at the West Bloomington Revitalization project – including its Tool Library.

At Marcfirst, Piro assisted with Friends First, a social group for individuals with developmental disabilities, and helped compile and revise curriculum for the Summer School to Work Program, which helps students with developmental disabilities transition from high school to the work force.



Brianna Piro '17

“My last main project was to create a business directory that was categorized by geographic location as well as career cluster,” said Piro. “This was to help the Supported Employment clients to find jobs near their homes.”

According to Piro, the CPP experience has strengthened her love for nonprofit work.

“I have always wanted to find a way to help as many people as possible, and CPP provided me with that opportunity this summer,” said Piro, who serves as president of the community service organization Circle K at Illinois Wesleyan. She will also continue her internship at Marcfirst during the fall.

As part of CPP, State Farm funds a mini-grant for which the CPP interns compete on behalf of their assigned nonprofits. The interns wrote grant proposals valued up to \$500, and this year Mardis and Piro were selected as winners.

“The grant that I wrote this summer was designed in hopes of funding a home weatherization workshop that will take place at the Tool Library in early October to help westside residents begin to prepare for the cold winter months,” Mardis said. The grant will provide window winterization kits for 20 Westside residents, and five heat guns available for checkout at the Tool Library.

With the goal of helping Marcfirst clients obtain independence, Piro wrote a grant for a financial literacy class about budgeting and saving techniques. Funds will also provide job interview-appropriate clothing for five clients.

Whether they see themselves going to graduate school, working in a nonprofit or going the corporate route, the CPP interns uncovered many new opportunities this summer.

“I think the biggest lesson I learned was the fact that while we have the ability to create and make the most of our own experiences, it is how we craft them which makes our experiences worthwhile,” Mensah said. “In CPP, you are forced to find your own resources and build your projects using knowledge and skillsets that you have and pick up along the way. You learn how to interact to bring about the best results in your projects.”

Rounding out the CPP 2015 interns and participating nonprofits were:

- Bryce Dolan '16 (Washington, Mo.); business administration major; Boys & Girls Club of Bloomington-Normal
- Adam Garcia '16 (Darien, Ill.); computer science and risk management majors; Mid Central Community Action
- Landon Hoffman '16 (Bonfield, Ill.); financial services and economics majors; Habitat for Humanity of McLean County
- Tara Isenberg '17 (Pontiac, Ill.); accounting major; Milestones Early Learning Center
- Christopher Kincheloe '17 (Des Plaines, Ill.); accounting major; Bloomington-Normal YMCA
- Tia Patsavas '16 (Plainfield, Ill.); English-writing major; YWCA McLean County
- Emily Shankar '16 (Skokie, Ill.); International Studies and Hispanic Studies double majors; Western Avenue Community Center

By Tia Patsavas '16