



Summer 8-7-2015

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Recommended Citation

Tun '16, Kathy, "Students in Summer Enrichment Program Gain Skills, Knowledge" (2015).
News and Events. 2875.

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Students in Summer Enrichment Program Gain Skills, Knowledge

Aug. 7, 2015

Story by Kathy Tun '16; Luncheon photo courtesy of Yolanda Juarez '17

Twelve students were selected for the Summer Enrichment Program (SEP), a 10-week program for current international and MALANA (Multiracial, African American, Latino/a, Asian American and Native American) students. The students work independently at internship placements, and they work together to build their leadership skills and their understanding of pressing social justice issues. Following is SEP member Kathy Tun's first-person account of her experience.

Working 9 to 5: The Internship

Through SEP, I had my first taste of the 9-to-5 grind that most adults experience on a day-to-day basis. No longer was I the student taking notes for 50 minutes at a time in class, and then studying the material back at my dorm for the rest of the evening. This summer was all about committing to an organization and seeing where that experience would take me. I was very lucky to interview and become an intern at the IWU Action Research Center (ARC).



Summer Enrichment Program Class of 2015

My main project was to contact ARC alums and learn about their professional and personal growth since graduating. We wanted to see the ways ARC alums used the skills they had learned through their community engagement to become the professionals they are now. I was thrilled to take on the project because I enjoy hearing people's stories and helping them share them. As I collected the replies, I realized that I wanted to do the work that they had done. Each project the ARC alums conducted as students followed three main steps: they went into the community, they recognized what people needed, and then they completed a project to address the need. It was a simple realization that I wanted to work with people, but I didn't understand how much that meant to me until I worked from 9 to 5 in an office, sitting at a computer the whole time.

The great part about the internship was that ARC Director Deborah Halperin and ARC Coordinator Bevin Cowie, always kept me inspired to think outside of my imaginary cubicle. They fostered a wonderful atmosphere where I could contribute ideas and start projects. One day Deborah mentioned that she would like to increase the resources available to first-generation students. I was eager to jump on this project. I'd found a community need, and I felt that I had the skills to complete a project. Along with Deborah and Bevin, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion supported me on a campaign to create a welcome video for first-generation students and to create individualized postcards for each first generation, first-year student. Not only did I feel that I was doing something meaningful for other students, but I was happy to learn that my filmmaking skills and my love for letter writing could be put to good use.



In a video from the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, 2015 alum Jonathan McBride talks about the benefits of the SEP program.

TGIF: A Safe Space for Discussion

Although I spent most of my summer working on my own, I definitely did not complete this SEP journey alone. I had the pleasure



SEP students and IWU staffers enjoyed lunch each Friday in a local restaurant (Photo courtesy of Yolanda Juarez '17)

of learning side by side with an intelligent, funny, and loving group of people who I am very grateful to have met. Each Friday, we met to practice our debate skills, engage in discussions with guest speakers, and discuss topics on race, activism and current events. We created this safe space for ourselves, to speak up about our personal experiences and the injustices we see in our societies. It was empowering to be in a space where everyone was heard and respected, but most of all encouraged to use their voices to enact change. Eating lunch each Friday at one of Bloomington–Normal’s multicultural restaurants after a heavy discussion on social justice issues was a real treat.

Looking back at what developed from those incredible SEP Fridays, I know we lived up to the theme of the program, which was to “Shed Light on The Shadows.” In our discussions of *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander, we learned about the downfalls of a colorblind society that has led to the acceptance of mass incarceration. We educated ourselves on the power struggles between police and citizens, and we shared our reflections on how we can move forward in spite of this destructive dynamic. We also learned about the declining high school graduation rates among at-risk youth.

Together, our SEP group project focused on creating a mentoring program that nourishes one-on-one interaction between a college student and a high school student.

All in all, the internship, SEP Friday, and the group projects made this summer unlike any summer vacation I’d had before, and I am glad for that. I learned about the type of work I would like to pursue. I found myself feeling more excited to engage in social justice conversations even if that meant feeling uncomfortable. And the best part of all was being able to live alongside a diverse group of students who taught me so much about being lighthearted and being open to new experiences—like spending summer vacation learning and working in Bloomington.