



Summer 7-26-2022

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Students Gain Experience, Camaraderie Through Summer Enrichment Program

July 25, 2022

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — A group of Titans are spending their summer gaining real-world experience as interns through the Illinois Wesleyan University Summer Enrichment Program.

Organized through the [Office of Diversity and Inclusion](#), directed by Sharla Brown-Ajayi, the program provides paid internship opportunities for IWU students of color and international students. The interns are paired with various departments at Illinois Wesleyan or local organizations to complete projects over the course of eight weeks.

“The main pillars of our program are the construction of an environment of learning, camaraderie, trust and enjoyment, as well as the expansion of our students' professional, academic and personal horizons,” said Raylene Gomez Hernandez, assistant director of ODI.

Gomez Hernandez said the internships aim to broaden students' perspectives and add to their professional experience while building a strong sense of belonging and encouragement from the University.

Mishwa Bhavsar '23, computer science major, is completing her internship at The Ames Library. She is working to place an assignment calculator on the library website and is formatting the diversity and social justice tiles on the website. For part of the internship, she will also work in the digital humanities program.

“The Summer Enrichment Program provides an amazing opportunity to develop different combinations of skills, such as technical skills that are required in my field and leadership skills as well,” said Bhavsar. “I love to serve the community and one of the reasons why I was interested in participating in the program was that we are provided with different ways to engage with each other and local community members.”

Samson Mosley '24, a sociology major, is interning with Western Avenue Community Center, a non-profit organization in Bloomington. His tasks include creating content for social media, helping with paperwork, assisting with the summer youth program and completing a presentation to share at the conclusion of the youth program.

“I’ve absolutely loved assisting with the youth program. My coworkers as well as the kids in the program are a joy to work with. It’s truly been one of my favorite experiences not only professionally but just in general,” said Mosley. “I think (SEP) is a great opportunity for students here at IWU and I would completely recommend it to any students who may be interested. It’s helped me a great deal both professionally and personally.”

Nathalie Romero '25 is an environmental studies major with a concentration in environmental sustainability. She is spending the summer at Bloomington’s Miller Park Zoo as a conservation intern.

Romero is helping care for endangered Puerto Rican Crested Toads, manage bee hives, observe birds in the aviary, upkeep the pollinator garden, create a pride butterfly sculpture and update displays in the aviary.

“I’ve been learning a lot about how much effort, collaboration and communication a zoo needs and how meticulous a zoo can be when it comes to routines,” said Romero. “I’ve enjoyed having this opportunity because the SEP program creates an open space for people of color and international students to build up our community with each other while also being able to build up our own professional life and unleash our greatest potential. ODI did really well in making this experience both extremely informative and enjoyable.”

Other students participating in the program include Em Chamberlain '25 with the Educational Studies Department at IWU, MJ Soria '25 with the Office of Communications at IWU, Tyrin Sykes '25 with the Conference Services Department at IWU and CJ



Eight Titans participated in IWU's Summer Enrichment Program while interning with various Wesleyan offices and local organizations.



SEP students pose at the Cloud Gate “The Bean” sculpture during a recent trip to Chicago with ODI director Sharla Brown-Ajayi and assistant director Raylene Gomez Hernandez

Metoyer '25 and Chrishana Simon '25, both with BCI (Breaking Chains and Advancing Increase - Cultural Arts and Humanities) in Bloomington.

The cohort of eight students meet weekly for activities and projects that promote cultural, career and leadership development.

Students recently gave a presentation on Juneteenth to members of Children's Home & Aid based in Bloomington. The group also interviewed international members of the local Park Drag soccer team and will contribute to a World Cup celebration and soccer exhibit to be hosted at IWU in the fall. Additionally, the SEP students are reading and discussing “Reclaiming Your Community” by Majora Carter ahead of an upcoming virtual Q&A session with the author.

More information about the IWU Summer Enrichment Program is [available here](#).

By Julia Perez