

Victoria Erdel

Graduation Year: Junior

College: Arts & Letters

Major(s): Sociology

Minors(s): Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)

Scholar Group Membership: International Scholars Program, QuestBridge Scholars

Did you received other funding for this project?: N/A

Could you have completed this project without CUSE funding? No

More details on CUSE funding assistance? I am a student from a low-income background. Without CUSE funding or funding from another campus source, I would not have been able to complete my internship. I would not have been able to buy plane tickets or get my Chinese visa -- much less spend seven weeks abroad -- without funding.

Project Title: Starfish Project Internship

Project Location: Beijing, China (However, they keep their location a secret to the public for security purposes. They just say they are located in Asia.)

ND Faculty Mentor: N/A (John Duffy wrote my recommendation letter, however)

Project Type: Internship

Why did you undertake this project/experience? Deepen your knowledge of a topic or issue, Research/experience necessary for senior thesis or capstone project, Career discernment and/or preparation, Internationalize your Notre Dame experience

Did your funded experience help you:

[Deepen your understanding of your coursework or field of study]: Very Much

[Discern your interests and post-bac goals]: Yes

[Become confident in your ability to set and achieve your goals]: Very Much

[Gain a more nuanced view of local, national, or global communities]: Very Much

[Improve your written and verbal communications skills]:Very Much

Tell us about your experience.

I was the marketing and communications intern at Starfish Project, a jewelry-making social enterprise that helps previously trafficked women establish careers and gain their independence. As an intern, I began by creating behind-the-scenes content for their social media accounts. However, during my third week I was assigned to come up with new ways to share the women's stories. Starfish Project had previously been writing their stories and publishing them on their website. I had the idea to create "draw my life" videos for each woman's story. This would bring their stories to life in a visual form that had not previously been done. This idea was met with approval, so I spent the rest of my time creating one of these videos per day. By the time I left, I had told the stories of 19 of the women through these videos. The videos will be posted on their website to give customers a better understanding of what the women went through and how purchasing their jewelry helps them. Through this project, I was

able to work on my interviewing, written and visual communication, and editing skills. I also gained a more nuanced view of the circumstances that force women into sex trafficking.

Describe the impact this project had, both on you as a student-scholar and on the people you worked with.

I pursued this internship because I knew I wanted my senior thesis to center around some aspect of human trafficking. Through this internship, I learned a lot of things about sex trafficking that I had not previously known, and I also gained an inside view of how written and visual communications affect anti-trafficking social enterprises. While I am still trying to narrow down on a specific thesis topic, I am now certain that I want to research the intersection between art/communications and anti-trafficking social enterprises. In terms of the impact this internship had on the people I worked with, the videos I created to tell each woman's story were met with high approval and will help increase traffic to their website and increase sales. Additionally, some of the women whose stories I illustrated told me that they appreciated my work and telling their stories in a dignified manner.

Describe how this experience is connected to your plans as a student or future professional.

This internship has helped me narrow down on a specific theme for my senior thesis research, and has also helped me discern what kind of career I would like to pursue in the anti-trafficking field. While I am not 100% sure of my future career, I am certain that I would want to be some sort of communications/art anti-trafficking job because I really enjoyed combining my interest in anti-trafficking work and art in this internship. The new things I learned about sex trafficking and working with other interns also inspired me to create an anti-trafficking podcast by and for college students. I am currently collaborating with other interns and Notre Dame students to bring this podcast to life so that we can debut it in the fall.

What advice would you give other students who are planning to pursue similar projects?

Start looking into opportunities and funding options early on. When you are done with your experience, keep in touch with your supervisors/partners so that you can return to the organization if needed, or so that they can continue providing advice even after you've left.

I acknowledge that this form has been filled out truthfully and to the best of my ability. I understand that this information will be shared with many different CUSE constituencies. As such, I have provided as much useful information as I was able. I understand that CUSE will not complete my award disbursement until this form is successfully completed. If I have any questions or concerns, I will contact CUSE before submitting this form. To illustrate that you understand all of these points, please enter your Notre Dame email in the box below.
verdel@nd.edu

