

Alexis Green

Graduation Year: Sophomore

College: Arts & Letters

Major(s): Anthropology

Minors(s): Arts & Letters Pre-Health

Scholar Group Membership: The Hesburgh-Yusko Scholars Program

Did you received other funding for this project?: none

Could you have completed this project without CUSE funding? No

More details on CUSE funding assistance?

Project Title: Role of empathy for German health professionals

Project Location: Kassel, Hessen, Germany

ND Faculty Mentor: Professor Denise Della Rossa

Project Type: Research

Why did you undertake this project/experience? Deepen your knowledge of a topic or issue, Research/experience necessary for senior thesis or capstone project, Prepare for professional school (MD, MBA, JD), 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]: Very Much

[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 able to work in two healthcare settings in Kassel, Germany over fall break, shadowing a healthcare professional and conducting semi-structured interviews about the role of empathy in the clinical setting. I wanted to get a better idea of the importance of empathy, but I also developed a curiosity about the ways in which empathy can be expressed in the patient-doctor relationship. I conducted this project with the goal of better understanding how this topic can be studied and determining if this could be a possible future senior thesis topic for me.

I was struck by the many ways in which Dr. Beate Radinger, a General Practitioner at Gemeinschaftspraxis, connected with her patients by showing empathy and compassion. I was particularly surprised by Dr. Radinger's genuine interest in understanding the stress that her patients are under in their everyday lives and how that affects their health and happiness. She also used physical touch--holding a hand, touching a shoulder, rubbing an arm--to comfort her patients, which seems to be very effective despite the stereotype that German people are cold and impersonal. Dr. Radinger believes that this focus on empathic care is crucial to her success as a

physician, aiding her ability to communicate and compromise with her patients, ultimately leading to better health outcomes.

Furthermore, I was surprised to find that the amount of empathy utilized by physicians in Germany does not occur much differently than the physician empathy in the United States, according to the doctors I met. I anticipated a vast cultural difference between the two western countries, but it seems to not exist, with empathy varying between individual physicians and specialties in both countries.

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

Academically, this experience has piqued my interest in further studying the patient-doctor relationship across countries and cultures to understand how empathy can be manifested and how it can benefit patient health. Furthermore, completing a project overseas on my own has helped me to gain a new confidence in my ability to pursue my research interests and to adapt to new environments.

Dr. Beate Radinger told me that she was glad to have me shadowing and asking her questions because it caused her to reevaluate the way that she interacts with her patients, as well as more carefully consider her medical decisions. I was also able to help out with smaller tasks around the office while I was shadowing, running prescriptions to the front desk and getting medical supplies that Dr. Radinger would otherwise have to spend her time with patients doing.

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

Professionally, this project gave me an opportunity to truly consider the kind of physician I want to strive to be and what kind of relationship I want to have with my future patients. I am more determined than ever to be the most compassionate, understanding physician I can be after spending a week witnessing the huge positive impact that doctors can have on patient lives without doing any medicine.

I believe that this experience has also made me a better candidate for medical school, as I have demonstrated a genuine interest in understanding a crucial part of medicine. I have also developed my critical thinking and communication skills through the creation and implementation of this project, which are invaluable in the medical field.

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

I would advise future students to be more aware of and proactive about the IRB exemption process. Waiting until after receiving the grant to apply for exemption does not allow enough time for it to be processed comfortably.

More importantly, I would tell future students to find quality contacts for their project. Being in

contact with reliable, quality experts made my project such a great experience, and I believe that it is worth taking the time to establish such relationships prior to completing the project.

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.
agreen12@nd.edu
