

Aly Sonnen

**Graduation Year:** Senior

**College:** Science

**Major(s):** Neuroscience and Behavior

**Minors(s):** Peace Studies

**Scholar Group Membership:** No

**Did you received other funding for this project?:** Career Center

**Could you have completed this project without CUSE funding?** No

**More details on CUSE funding assistance?**

**Project Title:** Summer Research Assistantship at Seattle Children's Research Institutes' Center for Child Health, Behavior, and Development

**Project Location:** Seattle Children's Research Institute Center for Child Health, Behavior, and Development

**ND Faculty Mentor:** N/A

**Project Type:** Research Assistantship

**Why did you undertake this project/experience?** Deepen your knowledge of a topic or issue, Prepare for professional school (MD, MBA, JD), Career discernment and/or preparation

**Did your funded experience help you:**

**[Deepen your understanding of your coursework or field of study]:** Yes

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

**[Become confident in your ability to set and achieve your goals]:** Yes

**[Gain a more nuanced view of local, national, or global communities]:** A Little

**[Improve your written and verbal communications skills]:**A Little

**Tell us about your experience.**

This summer I interned at Seattle Children's Research Institute's Center for Child Health, Behavior, and Development. I split my time between two different labs in the institute. The Palermo Lab studies psychological treatments for chronic pain. In the lab I work on a variety of projects including a review paper that focused on the effectiveness of treatments for parents in order to help address their children's health problems and one that looked at the relationship between cortisol and pain. The other lab that I was involved with, Seattle Pediatric Concussion Research Collaborative, studies all aspects of concussions, but the projects I worked on were focused on concussion education. One project focused on developing a concussion education program for coaches in the PAC12 and the other focused on understanding the distribution of youth football teams based on community socioeconomic characteristics.

During this internship I obviously learned a lot about chronic pain and concussions, but I also learned a lot about working in a lab environment. The two labs that I was in operated very differently and it was very valuable to learn about what I like and dislike about the two different kinds of environments. I also learned a lot about the connection between research and clinical

work. One lab was very integrated with the hospital and worked directly with patients, while the other was far more distant from the patients they were serving.

Overall, I had a great experience working at Seattle Children's and am very grateful for all the great people that I worked with and CUSE and the Career Center for making it possible.

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

Part of the reason that I did this internship was to consider research as a potential option for my future. While I really liked doing research, I definitely think that I want to focus on the more clinical side of medicine. Even so, research and medicine are becoming more and more connected and I think this internship prepared me well for that side of medicine. Additionally, having this on my resume when applying to medical school will be very beneficial.

My work in the Palermo Lab had an impact on kids with chronic pain. It's a condition that is very hard to treat, but cognitive behavioral therapy, a type of psychological treatment, has showed a lot of promise. During my internship I was able to shadow in the pain clinic that is connected to the lab and seeing directly the impact that the lab's work had on the kids was a really great experience.

My work in the concussion lab was less directly with patients, but did have an indirect impact on kids who play football. Youth football is very popular in the United States, but the concussion risk associated with it is very real. In the future, making football safer is something that needs to be thought about. Hopefully my work will be one step towards an eventual goal of making football safe for kids.

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

I plan to apply to medical school and eventually become a doctor and doing research that was connected to a hospital both gave me a better picture of what that will look like and gave me an advantage in the admissions process. Research is highly valued in medicine and having the experience that I have had will take me far. Additionally, I worked with a lot of MDs and being able to talk to them about their experiences was great.

I will also hopefully have a paper published in the next few months as a result of my work this summer.

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

I would definitely advise students to go into this experience with specific goals about what they want to get out of it. I did not have specific enough goals at the beginning and because of that it took me a while to get started in the lab.

I would also advise people to talk to as many people during their internship as possible. Seattle Children's is very big and interconnected so I got to talk to a lot of people about their experiences and get advice from them which was great.

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.  
asonnen@nd.edu

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