

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

