

Intern of Interest

"My journey is far from over!" – Jessica Linus

Name: Jessica Linus

Major(s)/Minor(s): Health Administration and Policy, Track III

What was your internship?

I was able to work on a team with the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) under Dr. Hillary Schwandt and Seth Feinberg at Western Washington University in Washington State as well as do research in Rwanda.

How would you describe your internship experience?

The internship consisted of two weeks at WWU studying qualitative research methods, understanding how to conduct interviews and learning about the research already being conducted in Rwanda. The research looked at Rwanda's family planning program which has increased in access and use in the past decade. Our research wanted to understand and highlight how Rwanda was able to institute a governmental policy which ultimately helped provide women with the necessary tools to take control of themselves. We then got to spend 4 weeks in Rwanda where my cohort was responsible for interviewing these women -- the users or discontinuers -- of the family planning methods. I was able to learn how to use different software to collected data. I learned how to conduct interviews, and I even learned a little Kinyarwanda which is the language of Rwanda.

How did you find this internship/ what interested you in this internship?

My experience would never have been possible if it were not for Dr. Trevitt. One day I went to her and explained that I knew I wanted to do research and to be in and around the African populations. Dr. Trevitt was able to set me up with one of her grad school colleagues who worked with the program, who then became my professor for this internship. Thanks to Dr. Trevitt I was able to apply for the internship, get an interview, and the rest is history.

What did you enjoy the most about your internship?

I enjoyed being on the African continent. Being from Nigeria, I enjoyed seeing another African country excel. Typically, when you look at Sub-Saharan African online, you only get to read negative statistics about the population and see Africa in a negative light. Waking up in Africa and being able to see how beautiful Rwanda is and see the country doing so well inspires me to do further research to be able to better other communities.

What about your internship was the most surprising to you? (i.e., what did you least expect going into the experience)

I was honestly surprised to see the lack of representation of Black women in research. During each stop we made I noticed I was probably one of maybe two to three black women doing research in sub-Saharan Africa. There is a need for black researchers which inspired me to establish opportunities -- hopefully during and through my future career -- for black researchers to go to African countries and work on projects in a place of familiarity for the community. There is a difference between having someone who looks like you and is doing research for you to better your community than having someone who doesn't understand your cultural background doing research on you.

What was the biggest lesson you learned through your experience?

Sometimes you just need to be in the room. Be present. You never know what you're going to hear that will inspire you or what information you're going to come across. Sometimes we tend to count ourselves out because we feel we may not have the qualifications for this or we're not the most outgoing or we may have different personalities than others. But just by being in the room, you will be able to listen and absorb all the information presented to you. You become open to so many opportunities that you may have missed if you weren't listening. I was able to meet, talk to and learn from people who have previously researched and traveled -- what I would love to be able to do in the future. So, the biggest lesson I learned was to be in the room and be present in the experience.

What are some connections between what you learned through this experience and what you learned here at UMBC?

I went into the internship with the basic knowledge thanks to the quality education I have received from UMBC. I was able to apply what I learned about qualitative research from Dr. Trevitt's class, and what I learned about statistical analysis from Stat 121 into my research. I used what I learned through my global health course and sociology classes to understand my environment and understand that things never really isolated and may be more complex.

What did you learn about yourself through this experience?

I learned a lot about myself! I learned I needed to be more disciplined when it comes to my emotions and mental health. I learned that I should be more open to other opinions. I am generally someone who likes to take on everything and do everything myself but that doesn't work in a team environment. I learned I needed to let some things go and work collectively which will help in both my professional and personal lives.

How do you believe you have made an impact through your work?

I know my work hasn't even started yet. I view my internship not as an end but something that serves as a larger goal, a larger purpose. I am setting a path for myself and for other people who will come and follow behind me to be able to go back to African countries and do work that creates a better quality of life for those who are there. My journey is far from over and my internship was a great stepping stone to get me where I see myself in the future.

How does this internship relate to your long-term educational or career goals?

My internship spearheaded other research endeavors and put me into the direction of where I want to go. It gave me the blueprint for what I wanted to propose for the Fulbright. I am currently a semifinalist for the 2019/2020 Fulbright U.S. Student Program and it is truly humbling to know someone is interested in what I have to offer. This experience has also motivated me to do more and do what I can for my immediate environment and leave my impact on UMBC. As for my future research, I want to visit the African countries that are doing well, study their systems, and see how they can be integrated into other countries given other social environments. I want to apply what I have learned and will learn to ultimately work toward my Ph.D. in Public Health.

