

As my last semester in my journey as an undergraduate student in Public Health approaches, I reflect on all of the experiences that prepared me to continue my education in the graduate program of Public Health, here at Northern Illinois University. Being given the opportunity to work alongside two of my professors who will be teaching some of my graduate level courses, has been a wonderful experience that I am so thankful for. In this short amount of time I have observed, learned, and grown more than I initially expected to. Being actively involved in this research project has challenged me positively, forcing me to let go of my uncertainty and embrace this amazing learning process. From the beginning I was honest with Dr. Gray and Dr. Kim with my research experience outside of the classroom, which was none. Throughout this process, they have been patient and supportive, always reassuring me that I am doing a good job.

During this summer research project, I took on the role of a project manager for a CNA training program that focused on palliative care. Being in this role, I had to be very detail oriented, communicate efficiently with my team as well as with the participants, and exercise my time management skills. I was responsible for updating the progress file, which was used to track the progress of over 140 participants who have volunteered to take part in the training. We had a control group and an experimental group which differed in the timeline of when each group was given access to the training, as well as some of the training sections that were intended to evaluate the impact that the training had. I checked the training site on a daily basis to see who had completed each training section and then input this information into the progress file; this allowed my professors to easily identify who they need to pay for completing the training sections. Once new participants were enrolled in the training system, I sent out formal invitations with the participant's username and password so they could access their account and begin their training. To encourage participants to complete the entire training, I sent out (separate) weekly

reminders to participants who have not started the training, and to those who have started but have not completed all of the sections. Occasionally, participants would respond to my reminders with a variety of questions that I would assist them with. Along with being involved in this training program, I also worked on several side projects for Dr. Gray and Dr. Kim such as: revising manuscripts and regression tables, double checking older training participant identifications, and comparing training content.

This experience has helped me grow both as a student and future professional in the field of public health. Taking on a role similar to that of a project manager for this research, I realized that I really enjoy this type of work and it has sparked my interest in potentially having this type of position as a career. I have had the opportunity to form a closer relationship with Dr. Gray and Dr. Kim, who will also be teaching some of my graduate level courses. I appreciated being able to take what I have learned from an academic setting and apply it to the “real world”. I learned so much by working alongside these professors and have gained a greater understanding and appreciation for what they do outside of the classroom. Although this was my first research experience, I realize how important the content I learn in my classes is, because I was able to pick up many of the tasks/responsibilities fairly quickly. Coming into this research project, I was nervous and questioned my capabilities. With the passing of each week I became more confident with my work and ability to carry out what was expected of me. This experience has made me excited to learn more about the public health field and look forward to my future career in this profession. I will forever be grateful for this amazing opportunity that was given to me by Dr. Gray, Dr. Kim, and through the Student Engagement Fund.