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Final Preceptorship Report

The International Institute of Minnesota is a non-profit social services organization that serves new Americans to the country. The mission states “Helping New Americans achieve self-sufficiency and full membership in American life” (iimn.org). There are various programs within the building such as refugee services, education classes, workforce development, and immigration services. For a lot of clients, the Institute becomes like a 2nd home. This December of 2019, the Institute will celebrate its 100th birthday. The Institute also recently purchased land from the Minnesota State Fair, as it is located right next to the fair grounds. This extra space will be used to expand the Institute as the demand for more space has been high and the funding is available. This was the first time a student, which happen to be myself, had completed a preceptorship at the Institute. While I am so glad to have been the first to intern here, I wonder why or how the Institute hadn’t been on anyone’s radar at UWL as a potential place for a preceptorship. It is such a unique place that offers a hands-on experience with people from all backgrounds, which ties into the Seven Areas well. I hope the work I did here will open new doors in UWL’s public health program, as I feel covering more culturally diverse practices was a needed experience for a student to have.

When it came to my major program involvement, I had mentioned I was in the refugee resettlement department. I was involved in various projects throughout the semester all working towards successful resettlement. In previous reports, I had talked about the Bus Buddies program at the Institute where I showed clients how to ride the bus to work,

appointments, or any other place that would be important to know. During these trainings, I would teach the clients how to catch the correct bus and when to get off the bus. The most interesting bus trainings involved multiple busses to one place. If the client and I could not communicate by words, I had to improvise by using hand signals or using only 1-2 words at a time. I usually knew ahead of time if we didn't share a language so I had time to print off helpful documents such as pictures to help clients understand the routes better. Sometimes when we got off the bus we would need to safely cross streets at stoplights. I had to communicate when to walk and when to not. This activity demonstrated well how language isn't a barrier, one just has to be willing to put a little more effort into communicating effectively.

Cultural orientation class was very health education related as it discussed culture in the United States and educated on important topics. My first week at the Institute was the week before the polar vortex cold weather that hit the Twin Cities area. That week we went over dressing for cold weather and how the cold can be dangerous if precautions were not taken in covering exposed skin. Other weeks we went over safety in the kitchen, local community resources, or what to do in case of emergencies. I would often have to call interpreters on the phone if an in person one wasn't available. Sitting in on this class and helping out with demonstrations really woke me up to how I take a lot of things for granted throughout the day whether it is communicating in public or being able to cook a meal in the kitchen safely. I couldn't imagine how someone who had just moved from a different country would feel learning so much information at once.

Planning a health fair was also an event I took part in, which will take place about a week after graduation. This idea stemmed from the health programs in refugee resettlement. Within the health programs through refugee resettlement, The Female Genital Cutting (FGC) workshops took place with volunteers in the community, and with an educator educating the target population on FGC. The main goal is preventing FGC from taking place in the Twin Cities. Recommendations are being written for how to involve various people such as practitioners or law enforcement on this topic. The recommendations are due in the middle of May, so very soon. It was a topic I had heard of but not gotten education on so this was good to sit in on and learn about a practice that is performed on girls in other cultures that is seen as beneficial to their safety. FGC being a taboo topic in the United States carries over to practitioners. Practitioners such as nurses are not well educated on this subject. When a girl considers going to the doctor, this may be on her mind and may prevent her from even visiting a doctor due to her fear of being judged. This is problematic since primary measures aren't being taken to keep a girl healthy and also shows a lack of cultural competency among providers. Law enforcement also isn't educated so when lawfully dealing with FGC cases, there aren't set guidelines on how to handle a case.

When it came to working with diverse populations, there wasn't a time that I wasn't working with a diverse group of people. I could probably write the whole 6-8 page paper about this section working with people of all backgrounds if I had the assignment. Not only did I work with clients who were various identities, but my co-workers were all very different from one another as well. The people I worked with in the refugee resettlement department came from various racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds to name a few. Many of them had a personal

connection to the work done at the Institute whether their family or themselves had been resettled in the past. The languages spoken around the office also were very diverse, many of which I had never been exposed to before coming to the Institute. I could expect to hear about 10 different languages on a daily basis which I loved. Working with a group of people who are passionate about their work and express interest in other cultures made coming into the office more enjoyable. For example, it was cool to be able to tell people about good Korean food around the area while hearing about other ethnic foods from others such as Somali or Ethiopian food.

The clients I got to see also came from various backgrounds. They came from various countries and spoke a variety of languages. This was clearly seen at Cultural orientation class. At this class, there were a couple times where we had five different interpreters in the classroom for all the different languages spoken, which was important to ensure students understood what was being taught. I had mentioned in the previous section in my major program involvement about the major types of work I did with clients, but I also did some small side tasks. A few times I had the chance to sit down and help clients create a resume. Seeing what they did before they came to the Twin Cities area was amazing. Immigrants have the negative stereotypes of stealing jobs and being lazy when many of them actually have more skills and a higher work ethic than people who have been in the US their whole lives. Throughout my work with clients sometimes they would be shy to speak English and would want an interpreter. Some spoke better English than they thought, so I had to encourage them that I was a good person to practice with and I would slow down speaking or clarify anything that didn't make sense.

The various meetings or other presentations the Institute is connected to also involved education about keeping an open mind on all cultural practices and not making assumptions, which is important to be educated on before one starts working. My third week here, we had a presentation by Minnesota Literacy Council called Social Equity 101. During this time we all discussed racism and the white privilege that exists in our society. We also did practice scenarios where examples of micro aggressive statements were made and how to respond effectively. This discussion was held mainly since most people the Institute works with are people whom identify as non-white. This reminded me of last spring semester and our policy projects, where mine covered the unaddressed racism around UWL and why staff need inclusivity training/education to keep classroom activity friendly to all students. A training like this could potentially open up staff at UWL to how some students on campus feel when hurtful language is used in classrooms.

It is difficult to talk about any improvements in the agency and the operations. I was so impressed with how everyone at the Institute interacted, whether it was crossing departments to grab someone to interpret for a client or volunteering at an event hosted by a different department. A suggestion I would say is a better system with room scheduling. Sometimes finding space to hold meetings could be tough due to other meetings and classes in the building. This is important to have uninterrupted spaces for all people to utilize not only for Institute run programs, but also for individual practices. For example, having a space for people to pray during the day would be beneficial to those in which this is part of their daily practice. Part of the problem of finding open space is due to the lack of rooms, so the expansion of the Institute will be a great benefit to everyone in the building.

The Institute also does a great job with external operations in having partnerships with other organizations that do similar work to the Institute or provide services to clients. I would suggest keeping the website and social media more updated. Especially on social media since many more people are utilizing this. It is a great way to reach other organizations on what the Institute is working on currently or any upcoming events at the Institute. I would also suggest having more open times for clients to come and enroll in various programs. The ESL classes have a set day in which students come and enroll for each round of language classes. But the time is limited and doesn't offer much flexibility for those who may have a conflict such as work or an appointment. Having an alternative day or a person to contact if the enrollment date is a problem would be a benefit to all ESL students.

When I look back and evaluate the experience, I have nothing but positive things to say about the work I did. Even when things didn't go as planned, I was able to take something positive away from every opportunity. This experience helped me develop better communication skills and become a more adaptable person to any work situation. I like it when things are planned out in advance, but this internship taught me to be open to unexpected events during the day, which can be a good thing. I also am more confident when communicating with people. Whether it's in person or on the phone, I have no worry calling someone or using communication through an interpreter if needed. I don't think any other student did work similar to what I did, which I love that this experience was unique. I can go back to campus next week and educate my fellow classmates on refugee resettlement, which is a topic unfamiliar to them. I'm happy I could spend this last semester with an organization that has respect for all cultures. In the classroom at UWL, I feel we could have touched more on the

importance of being culturally competent within the seven areas of responsibility, so it was nice to put into practice some skills I had about respectful communication.

My biggest advice to future students who will do a preceptorship is to find a site that you feel a personal connection to. This will make the work you do much more meaningful to you and motivate you to do your best work. I chose to Intern at International Institute of Minnesota not only because it was an option but because I was drawn to the work done with people of all identities. My family is of Asian descent and is influenced by Hawaiian, Japanese, and Korean culture. Having just gotten done with classes on a predominantly white campus, I felt like I needed to help other people that were marginalized. At UWL, my experiences as a student of color weren't all positive and I felt the need to contribute to a different community to ensure other people felt safe and valued.

I would also say make sure to take time for yourself. Between my hour commute both ways, studying for the CHES exam, and working on the weekends, I hardly had any time to stop and relax for about two months. Even giving yourself one day off from working on the weekends will help make your time during the week when interning more worth it. I found myself very tired during the preceptorship at times since I hadn't been giving myself time to relax or to be social and as a result, I found myself unhappy at times. If you do work, plan out a day in advance where you can take off and relax.

To conclude, when you do your preceptorship, know you are ready and capable of doing anything put in front of you. You've just spent the last 3-4 years in the classroom working hard. Know that your work ethic will make you successful in your final semester.