Kavya Marrapu

ETHD 197

3 December 2019

Final Essay

This semester in the fall of 2019, I had the opportunity to intern at UC Berkeley’s Basic Needs Center. The Basic Needs Center provides Basic Needs to students and staff. The center provides services, such as Rent Assistance, CAL Fresh Clinics, a space for students to study and to store food. I was in charge of the front desk. I am the first person the visitors see when they come into the center. I was their main source of information for all the services the Basic Needs Center. So, my job was to get informed about all the resources the Basic Needs Center has to offer and then support the visitor. If the visitor needed more help than I could give them, it was my job to direct them to the right place. I worked 2 hour shifts twice a week and helped out in outreach and community events.

Through this internship, I was exposed to many different experiences that I never would have been able to experience. I think the most memorable experience was when I attended a community event: The Basic Needs Panel Event. This was held as a part of the National Hunger Homeless Awareness week. This week is held at UC Berkeley to show the students that hunger and homelessness exists and is a serious problem in our world. This specific panel changed the way I looked at life. For most of my life, I lived in a very privileged town. It was normal for every child to own an iPhone, have their own car, and have an endless supply of clothing. No one ever worried about having a house to live in or food to eat. Those were basic needs everyone in my town had. Coming from a town so well off, I assumed everyone was well off or at least have the basic needs necessary to live life. Coming to Berkeley, I was shocked at what I saw. I noticed that food and shelter was a common issue for many people. My fellow peers would tell me about how they struggled to find food on somedays. That’s when I realized my small town was an anomaly. The world is not like this. Accessing basic needs is still a huge issue in our world. Although I realized basic needs was a current issue that effects many people, but the Basic Needs Panel made me realize how dire some people’s situation is. Something Osha Neumann, one of the panelists, said really stuck with me. He told the audience about this woman who only had one pot. She used this pot for everything from cooking to showering. She cleaned the pot by lighting a fire in between each usage. I was shocked that some people lived in such dire situations. It helped me realize how privileged I was. It made me realize the value of everything I had and that I should be grateful for having a house over my head and for having an endless supply of food. It also allowed me to realize how important it is to help make basic needs available for everyone.

During this internship, a lot of the work I did involved working at the front desk. This involved a lot of thinking on my feet and communicating with people. These two skills were both skills that I was not particularly great at. I am generally a shy and socially awkward person, so talking to people is hard for me. This internship forced me to talk to the visitors. This was difficult for me because I was scared to talk to people. Every time a visitor arrived, I knew I had to say something, but I would be too nervous to say anything. At first, I would just let my partner do the talking, but eventually I knew I had to start talking too. I slowly started to answer the questions that the visitors had. At first, it was scary and hard, but as I answered more and more questions, it got much easier. I eventually gained enough confidence to answer all the questions without any assistance from my partner. The work I did during this semester helped me gain more confidence and better communication skills. Another skill I struggled with is thinking on my feet. Running the front desk involved a lot of spontaneous responses. I have worked at another front desk before, but I had a strict protocol on what to say when I had to answer the customers’ questions. There were not many different situations. But running the front desk at The Basic Needs Center was much harder because it had a lot more different situations and there was no strict protocol to follow to solve each situation. I was not used to coming up with solutions on the spot. Every time I had to answer a question, I would panic! I knew there was answer, but at that specific moment I just could not think. I would just freeze, and my mind would go blank. I would frantically search for the answer, even though it was right in front of me. My partner would have to come and help me out and answer the visitor’s question for me. I knew I had to fix this issue. I had to find a way to get used to thinking on the spot and not panic. I started to take deep breaths before answering the questions. I tried to keep myself as calm as possible instead of panicking. This allowed me to think properly and clearly. I was able to come up with the solution with ease and without any frantic searching. Working at the front desk allowed me to learn how to think spontaneously and it also given me the opportunity to build this skill. Overall, working at the front desk allowed me to get better at two important life skills: communication and problem-solving skills.

Another important thing I gained through this whole experience of interning at The Basic Needs Center is that I gained a small community. As a freshman at UC Berkeley, I was still very new to campus. I was still getting used to getting around campus and being a college student. I did not know many people either as I was new on campus. Working at the front desk allowed me to meet new people. I was able to become closer to other interns, especially the intern that worked with me. It was really nice to have a few people to talk to during the semester. Adjusting to this new campus was very difficult. It was pretty stressful, but it was nice to have people to just rant to. They also gave me advice on some tough situations I had to deal with. Having people to talk with made adjusting at UC Berkeley much easier to deal with.

I am currently planning on majoring in Data Science with a Cognition concentration and Cognitive Science. Both Data Science and Cognitive Science are interdisciplinary fields of study which touch upon learning why people do what they do. Working at the front desk relates to my field of study because it involves working with people and understanding what they need. Part of what I am studying is understanding people are thinking and what they need. Working at The Basic Needs Center pushed me to learn this skill of understanding people. I was able to develop a skill that will be vital for my field of study.

In the future, I would like to be a software engineer that works with AI technology to create medical instruments. This involves a lot talking to others and collaborating with a group of people. You must be able to express your ideas to others, take their feedback and then apply it to the task you are working on. This means someone who plans to work in this field should have good communication skills. Working at the front desk at The Basic Needs Center improved my communication skills. It allowed me to practice talking to others and learn proper communication tactics. This job also requires handling people, understanding their needs, and then creating a solution based on what the customer needs. Working at The Basic Needs Center helped me develop the skill of understanding people and what they needed. I gained a vital skill from working at The Basic Needs Center that will help me in the future when I am working. Another important skill that will help me with my future job is coming with creative solutions. The medical field has difficult problems that need creative and innovative solutions to solve. To do this, you need be able to think spontaneously. This is a skill that working at The Basic Needs Center gave me. By figuring out how to answer the visitors’ questions and solving their problems helped me learn how to think spontaneously in order to create an innovative solution. This is another important skill that working at The Basic Needs Center taught me that will help me in the future. Overall, working at The Basic Needs Center taught me some useful skills that will help me achieve my future career plans.

During this semester, I spent a few hours every week working at The Basic Needs Center. I have thoroughly enjoyed every moment that I spent helping out at The Basic Needs Center. Through this semester, I was able to grow some skills that I was not that great. These specific skills will allow me to grow into a stronger person and become a better candidate in the working field. This experience allowed me to learn many skills that will help me in the future. I also gained a small community that made adjusting to college life a lot easier. I also gained a new insight about life that will stick with me forever. In the end, working at The Basic Needs Center has given me many valuable skills and experiences that will help improve me for the future. Working here allowed me to grow into a much better person. Overall, the experience of The Basic Needs Center was deserving and allowed me to learn a lot of vital life skills.