My time at the Center for Opinion Research has been an integral part of my experience at Franklin and Marshall College. Indeed, doing research at the Center has proven to be both a tremendously interesting and educative part of my education at F&M. Before interning, I worked as a phone interviewer at the Center, which was a great experience allowing me to better understand the process of data collection for telephone surveys. This was a great introduction to the Center’s work, and a great preparation before interning as a research assistant over the summer. As I started working with Professor Yost as a research assistant, I came to truly enjoy quantitative research and learn a number of skills which helped me in my job itself, but also in many other aspects of my academic life at F&M.

As an intern at the Center for Opinion Research, my experience has been both extremely challenging and enriching. Working on the same projects with another intern, Connor Burns ’13, taught me the challenges but huge benefits of working with others. As we had to find efficient ways to both advance on the same project, I learned to plan my work carefully while constantly communicating my progress with another employee.

Professor Yost always assigned us educational projects which he believed would introduce us interns to various aspects of quantitative research but also be a valuable contribution for the Center. This was very challenging at times, as we often had to learn the required skills while working on the project. For example, one of our biggest projects during the summer of 2012 was to create a dynamic reporting system on Microsoft Excel in order to display the results of a patient survey for a large health care company. We thus had to learn how to create an interface capable of being easily updated every month where the user could select to display the results by specific departments, months, and survey questions. This particular project not only taught me how to use more advanced commands of Microsoft Excel, but also to brainstorm with Connor and find solutions to the many obstacles we faced, all the while self-teaching ourselves how to use the tools necessary to attain our objective.

Even while giving us the time and flexibility to find our own ways to perform the tasks he assigned us, Professor Yost always involved Connor and I on projects we knew still greatly benefited the Center for Opinion Research. This combination of an educative but also very useful experience was extremely motivating. A few weeks ago, I managed the analysis and reporting from beginning to end of an employee survey of Schreiber Pediatric Rehabilitation Center to assist them in identifying specific employee issues in the context of their strategic planning. This was a very rewarding experience, as I had to enter the results of the survey in SPSS and analyze the results using this software. After my analysis, I personally presented the findings to the board of the company. I felt very proud to be entrusted with an entire project from start to finish, and having the opportunity to present the findings myself was yet another new and valuable experience for me.

In addition to being a wonderful learning experience that required me to utilize the knowledge I accumulated through my academic life at Franklin and Marshall and integrate it into a professional context, I gained many new skills during my time at the Center. As a result, I have come to realize my growing interest in quantitative analysis. In conjunction with my teaching assistantship for the Sociological Research Methods class, my internship at the Center introduced me to the value and benefits of quantitative data, the usefulness of such analyses, and, last but not least, how unexpectedly fun and interesting it is! As I prepare myself to become a graduate student in Princeton’s Sociology PhD program, I am now seriously considering a focus in
demography and quantitative methods, something that still surprises me as I have always considered myself to be more qualitatively focused.

Indeed, through my work at the Center I tremendously improved my research skills, and learned to identify and properly use online databases from a variety of fields. For my first big project, a community health needs assessment for the counties of York and Adams, Pennsylvania, I accessed health databases containing information about health statistics for the county, state and country on a variety of indicators. I then imported this data in order to write a report of the main health-related strengths and concerns of the two counties. For another project, I collected data from statistician Nate Silver’s predictions about the 2012 presidential election, and compared them to the official results from the Secretary of State website for each state. Being able to use statistical databases is a great skill that I have integrated into my academic research for classes as well as my independent study project.

I also greatly improved my computer skills, as I further learned to use Microsoft Excel, and SPSS. As previously mentioned, I learned to create a dynamic interface on Excel showing the results of the Well Span patient survey, and analyzed the results of the pediatric rehabilitation center employee survey using SPSS, before presenting them to the company. This knowledge of both Excel and SPSS has proven to be extremely useful in other aspects of my life at F&M, notably in the context of my work as the teaching assistant of Research Methods and my independent study project.

Finally, my work at the Center not only taught me to research data and analyze it, I also learned how to clearly and efficiently present quantitative findings in a report or even orally. For the community health assessment of York and Adams counties, I co-wrote a 37-page report presenting the performance of the two counties on a number of health indicators compared to state and previous data. I also had the opportunity to assist at the two health Summits at which Professor Yost presented the research. For another project, I wrote a 7-page literature review summarizing existing research about quality rankings of hospitals and their effect on consumer behavior. These experiences taught me how to clearly present my points both in writing and orally, a skill that has proven to be extremely useful in my class and will continue to be during my time in graduate school.

My time at the Center for Opinion Research has been an integral part of my experience at Franklin and Marshall College. Being a research assistant in this context truly allowed me to use what I learned in the classroom in a professional setting. The intersection of academic knowledge and more practical work exposed me to the ways in which research can be used to visibly impact particular aspects of a community. In learning how to research, analyze, interpret and summarize data, I developed a new interest in quantitative research which I will indubitably further explore during my time in graduate school. Furthermore, working with another intern provided me with the experience of team work as well as its challenges. In conclusion, the educational but also professional experience of working at the Center for Opinion research has indisputably enriched my time at Franklin and Marshall College, and will positively affect the way I do research for years to come.

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