

With the support of the Center on Civility and Democratic Engagement, I took the opportunity to spend my spring 2016 semester in Washington, D.C. through the UC Berkeley Washington Program. I spent the semester as a Health Policy Intern at the Alliance for Health Reform and pursued my passion for health policy and change in the health care system.

The Alliance for Health Reform is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that holds briefings on pressing health issues, like drug prices and Medicaid waivers. The goal of the organization is affordable, quality health care for all Americans through informing policymakers on health topics and policy implications. Interning with the Alliance has been the perfect gateway for me to gain valuable exposure into the intersection of health policy and politics: the best way to get policymakers to address health issues is to provide them expert, reliable information to understand the significance and implications of various health care issues. As a Health Policy Intern, I mainly conducted research to provide our health policy staff information to shape briefings and to provide the best resources for our briefing attendees better to understand the health issue. I gained intimate insight into the organization's mission to ensure that our policymakers get a good grasp of the implications of different health policies through reliable sources.

With the highly polarized political climate, it is important to have a voice that aims to engage policymakers beyond party lines. The increasing polarization of politics is inevitable, and this can be observed with the 114th Congress and the presidential campaign today. Research is showing that differences run deeper and more extensive than any other time in the last two decades and the division is greatest among those most politically active. Compromise appears to be a distant goal, but factual information is highly valued. It is important now more than ever to engage policymakers beyond party lines and to encourage discussion. This is where the Alliance comes in as a "honest broker" of health information.

I have a great amount of respect for the Alliance because the organization truly aims to be nonpartisan and provide balanced views. The Alliance's nonpartisan nature allows the policy community to trust the information and resources produced. I attended many Alliance briefings, with various topics from MACRA to Zika. All these issues are divisive and partisan, but the Alliance's nonpartisan reputation and the trust policymakers place in the Alliance meant that briefings were widely attended by the policy community regardless of political stance. Every panelist and resource that we provide in our briefings is carefully considered to ensure a balanced perspective. The goal is not to advocate a side, but to engage congressional members, congressional staff, administrative staff, and others in the policy community (including the media, which plays an important role in informing constituents) to come together and evaluate various proposed health reform strategies.

Coming from Berkeley, I had my own views of how health care should look like and what health care reform meant to me. Nonpartisan is not a word I would have used to describe myself. However, coming to D.C. has made me recognize the importance of nonpartisan organizations: politics is not as important as engaging a wide audience to understand what is at stake. Gaining the trust of your audience can make or break the information you provide, especially in the deeply divided Congress we have today. Getting both sides and different views to come together and engage in discussion can really only be done by meeting in a nonpartisan or centered sphere. Otherwise, you risk engaging only those who are already sympathetic to your cause and isolate those with opposing views when the actual goal is to come together to decide on important issues.

Through my experience with the Alliance as a Health Policy Intern, I learned about the intersection of health policy and politics, or more accurately, health policy and engagement. My experience has taught me to open myself up to other views to move policy forward: there is a lot to be done in engagement. Advocacy is important, but reaching a wide audience and helping them understand why it is important to take action on an issue is just as critical to the cause. Being with the Alliance in D.C. has strengthened my commitment to find solutions to pressing health issues but it has also fostered my interest to bring different views together across party lines.

I would like to thank the Center of Civility and Democratic Engagement once again for supporting me through this eye-opening journey and providing me the opportunity to be in the middle of so much change in our health care system. The opportunity to intern and learn in D.C. has been an amazing experience and I will carry what I have learned moving forward to create change in the health care system.