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Program: *Oregon State University*

Placement: *The Congressional Hispanic Leadership Institute (CHLI)*

Journal Entry – Week 2 - June 8-10

Monday-----

Last week I attended training and orientation with CHCI and now I am one day removed from the start of my internship.

“Did I feel prepared?”

In short, I believe that it helped me better understand the professional setting but I wouldn't know for sure until I started.

Although CHCI held Orientation the week before, we would still have to attend programming sessions. All interns are to participate in the sessions that will be held throughout the internship on Mondays and Wednesdays. The sessions are virtual classes that will be taught by George Washington University Professor, Dr. Nancy Augustine. According to the GW Website:

“Dr. Augustine's teaching and research are informed by more than 25 years of experience in various aspects of local government policy formation, research, implementation, and evaluation, including more than ten years of experience as an urban planner at the local government level.”

Dr. Augustine is well respected among CHCI staff and alumni, for the safe environment that she cultivates in her classroom to her teaching style.

To be honest, I didn't think I would be taking any classes in the summer. I was ready to step away from school and focus on doing my best at my internship, but I welcome the opportunity to learn about the role the government plays among the Hispanic community and what issues the Hispanic community faces, and how that has an impact on our government and community. Before class began, we were assigned a reading assignment. The reading was background information for the simulation that we would be conducting in class. It would be a Committee Meeting, House Judiciary Committee Hearing to be specific. The topic was Drunk Driving Prevention. There would be 5 different special interest groups or lobbyists that would be either for or against the proposed legislation which requires first-time drunk driving offenders to install a device that tests drivers and shuts down the car if it detects alcohol on the driver's breath. These devices are known as ignition interlocks.

I won't be going more into detail about the simulation out of respect for future interns and for CHCI, but I will talk about how I felt throughout the session. I hate drunk drivers. I hate how they put not only themselves at risk by getting behind the wheel, but others. Driving already is not a task that should be taken lightly, although at times it can feel like second nature. When under the influence of any drugs, it can impair your ability to drive. I remember being a kid, going to parties where alcohol was present. It was a bit ironic for me to see adults get in their cars after they spent the night drinking, while at school we were taught to never drink or drive. I guess you could say that this is where I started to realize that adults weren't perfect, which meant that the world wasn't either. I could be killed without any fault of my own because someone decided they could do no wrong. You don't get in the car and think you will kill someone, "it won't be me, it couldn't be." That is one of the deadliest lies that you can tell yourself, "it won't be me." I understand why people would want to add ignition interlocks into cars, I can already think of a few people that would need it. But I don't think that this is the best solution to drunk driving. This is the realization that many of my peers came to as well. Although I understand that excessive measures are appropriately needed in some situations, in this case, I think it not only a breach of privacy, but ignition interlocks can fail or be tricked, and only prevents drunk driving after someone drives under the influence and that is if they were caught.

It's the start of a new week and the start of finals week as well. My anxiety and stress levels are increasing with the start of my internship on top of the work I need to complete for my classes. I have a Physics final group project that I need to help complete, there are some retake quizzes for some classes that I am considering and a Calculus final that I have on Wednesday morning. The thing that really ticked me off was that I had a teacher that was still assigning homework.

I am easily stressed out, so finding ways to relieve stress and calm down are really important for me. I enjoy hanging out with friends and family. Throughout the school year, having my sister as a housemate was really good for my mental health. She was someone that I knew that I could trust for most things. I specifically remember one morning of winter term. I was stressing out a lot for my upcoming finals and I wasn't sleeping well throughout the week. Mentally, I was very weak and vulnerable. I had spent a couple of weeks at my apartment by myself before that morning, and this week my sister had finally returned from home. I wanted to go home the weeks before but I had a good amount of work to do that forced me to stay. That morning, I had woken up from a terrible nightmare where I had lost both of my parents. I'm not one to read into my dreams but I knew exactly what this dream was trying to tell me, I needed to see my family. That morning, I got out of bed and walked into my sister's room, and began to tell her of my dream. Out of nowhere, I began to cry. I had reached a place mentally that I had never been before. I'm normally not an emotional person, which made it that much more apparent that something was wrong. I was alone for too long, physically and mentally. I went home that weekend and did nothing but spend time with my family. It took me a couple of days to feel normal again. My lesson for anyone reading this, don't spend too much time alone. Spend time with the people that you can be yourself around, and find people that you know that you can open up to.

Tuesday-----

My first day with CHLI, the Congressional Hispanic Leadership Institute. Although my supervisor is Mary Ann Gomez Orta, the person that I have been in communication with the last couple of days is her assistant, Nicole Marin. I woke up especially early this morning to be as prepared for the day. I was really excited to meet my coworker and start to work on projects. After my morning routine, which is similar every morning, I logged on to my computer and checked my email for information for the first day of orientation at CHLI. Nicole had sent out an email at 6 in the morning or 9 am EST with the Intern Welcome packet and the agenda for the day.

After Orientation:

The day wasn't too long with orientation only lasting 2 hours, but it was a dense 2 hours. Mary Ann, CHLI President, and CEO introduced herself to the interns today and went talked about CHLI and its role in government as a Non-Profit organization and explained what a Non-Profit organization is. Based on this interaction, I can already tell that Mary Ann is a very open person. She really takes time to get to know the employees and it's a completely different perspective of what I think a CEO does. She is really connected with her staff which creates an environment where the power structure isn't as prominent. As Mary Ann puts it, CHLI is like a family. After her introduction, we had breakout sessions to talk to the other interns. There are 5 interns with CHLI. It is really nice to see how we all bring our own unique skill sets to the group. After the introductions, we went over the Welcome Packet. The Welcome Packet was a bit oriented towards in-person interns but a lot of the information presented could easily be used virtually. I'm personally excited to see how I fit into the group, as I come in with a different background compared to the rest of the group. I am a mechanical engineering student, where some interns come in with communications or political science backgrounds. I can see how those backgrounds fit into the work environment, but I was having a hard time trying to pinpoint exactly what I could do. Luckily for me, we filled out a Google form to see what we are good at and what applications we are comfortable with.

Although I am really excited about the internship, I wonder how my schedule will look like being virtual and across the country from D.C. The three-hour difference is going to be an added interesting dynamic. I know for sure that there are going to be days that I will have to wake up early for a meeting or an event. Luckily for me, I have spent most of my life waking up early for work, at times, waking up before the Sun is up. That is one reason I am grateful for my time in fieldwork.

The first day of orientation had ended, but my day had just started. I spent the rest of the day finishing up homework and studying for the calculus final. I was ready for the school year to end. As I have stated before, virtual everything was not as I thought it would be. I was definitely

looking forward to in-person classes and meeting new people. I can only do so much virtually, and what made it worse is that a lot of my pastime activities were spent on the computer or on my phone. I needed to find an escape from all of it. I can only sleep so much, so I decided to pick up a puzzle from the store and started to work on that. That was probably the best decision I had ever made. I could spend hours just working on the puzzle. Although there were times where I became frustrated with the puzzle, I was happy that it was not over my classes.

Wednesday-----

Today was a very busy day. I started off my day with a Calculus Final. I am not going to lie, it is probably the worst way to start any day. When it comes to tests, I stress out a lot on them. I feel like I do a good job of hiding my stress from others, but on the inside, it's a different story. Throughout the year, I was able to find ways to lower my stress during an exam. I take a breath before starting any problem, skip problems that might take me longer than normal, and come back to them later in the exam, and most importantly, I tell myself that I am going to be fine, even if it feels like I won't.

My final ended up going a bit into my orientation time so I had emailed Nicole of my situation. She completely understood and I was very appreciative of her response. I finished my exam 10 minutes after the start of the orientation so right after I turned in my exam, I quickly changed into professional clothing and logged into the Zoom meeting. Like the day before, Nicole had emailed the agenda for the day to the interns.

We met with Christian Cubas, the finance manager of CHLI, and Mauricio Villacres, the Programs Manager of CHLI. I quickly noticed something interesting, the staff was very young. If I had to guess, most of the staff are in their mid-twenties. It was a happy surprise to see, and I think it's reflected in the work environment Mary Ann created. We then discussed the applications that CHLI uses for work and set up our work emails.

While logging into my work email, I immediately thought back to high school and my teachers. I would always be at school early for Jazz band which was a class that was held before the first bell of school. I remember seeing my teachers logging in every morning to their computers and immediately opening up their emails. Microsoft Outlook, it was the same one that I was going to use during my time at CHLI. On one hand, it was a reminder that I was entering into adulthood. Growing up, it felt like I was older than I actually was. In high school, I thought I was already an adult. Even now, I am not fully an adult but it's definitely way more than I thought it would be. I have an apartment that I pay rent to, I have bills that I pay every month. This is like my first professional job, people will be counting on me to do my work, and if I don't, there will be actual consequences. I am happy that I am working at CHLI, it seems like it is going to be a great place to start my "professional" career even though I am only an intern. On the other hand, it is a reminder of all the things I have gone through. I remember the long summers spent working in the fields with my parents, having them lecture me every time my work began to be sloppy.

“Everything is going to work out in the end, just push through the day.”

“ Work hard now, so you can have an actual profession, become someone in life, unlike us.”

“ One day, fieldwork will be the last thing on your resume.”

Although those days are a fading memory, they will always be a part of my history. I’m on my way to where I want to be one day, but it’s good to acknowledge where you are and where you came from.

As stated before, I would have to attend programming sessions on Wednesdays. The last hour of CHLI Orientation overlapped the first hour of CHCI Programming so I had to let my CHCI Supervisor know ahead of time of my tardiness. Wednesday was a bit different compared to Monday. Monday was more like a virtual class, whereas Wednesday was more of a discussion. During the session, we had to fill out an identity wheel with what we identify as with subjects ranging from race, to sexual orientation. Then we broke out into breakout rooms and talked about our identity and what it means to each one of us. Filling out the wheel, I realized that I never really thought about my identity. These subjects looked very simple, but the reality is that these things are a part of who we are and what makes us unique. One question that stood in my mind was deciding which identifier we thought about the most or felt that represented us the best. A simple question but for me, it was a complicated answer. As I stated earlier, I never really thought about who I was, and that kind of bugged me. I am a male, but I don’t think about it often, I am catholic but I wouldn’t say it defined me best. When it came to choosing an option, I chose my ethnicity, hispanic/latino. Although one of my goals coming into the internship was to learn the skills I need to go back in my community and make a difference, I never really took into account what it meant to be Hispanic/Latino. It was just what I thought was me or another way of putting it, it was what people told me I was. It was an association by default, but I had little understanding of the depth of representation it had on me. The last question of the breakout room was which identifier we wanted to learn more about. Hispanic/ Latino is an obvious choice so for me, I decided to choose my religion/spirituality. Catholicism was always a part of my life. I was born in a catholic household, I was baptized in the catholic church, and went through the process of receiving my first communion and confirmation. The latter part was during my sophomore year of high school. I was very much connected with the church during high school but it was only a face level of understanding. I always had the right thing to say during Sunday school, but never a complete understanding of what it all meant. Going deeper than religion, there was the topic of spirituality. For me, I always wondered about life after death. It is a fear that many have, and it was a fear that followed me. I think it is a safe thing to wonder about, but at the same time, I wouldn't think about it too much.

Thursday

The final day of Orientation with CHLI. It was a short orientation which was basically a recap of the week. The highlight of the day was attending my first team meeting. All the interns and all of the staff come together to talk about our weekly accomplishments and ask for help on any project we are working on. The team meeting is also where Mary Ann goes over any CHLI updates and future events and projects. If I had to choose one word to describe the meeting and work environment it would be family. It is really an amazing group of people that I am excited to be a part of. The lucky part of being an intern and how CHLI runs is that we have the opportunity to work with all the staff members once on a project. I get to work on some financial projects with Christian Cubas, I get to help on future CHLI events with Mauricio Villacres, I get to work on some communication projects with Josh Silvia, and I get to work on collecting data about the board members with Nicole Marin.

It feels like it's going to be a very busy summer for me, but I have to remind myself to always ask for help and be on top of my assignments and check in with staff often.