



Katharine Tull

Eli J. Segal Citizen Leader Program

Brandeis Segal Fellows Summer Internship Report

Did you know what you needed to know? What did you learn that you wish you had known before you started? Basically, what did you find out when you got to your site that you felt you should have (and could have) known in advance?

I knew what I needed to know to start the internship. There were no surprises regarding my work environment and the people I would be working with. This may largely be due to the fact that I worked for the Massachusetts Health Policy Forum during the last academic year. Also, my past professional experience helped me to identify the types of questions to ask ahead of time so I was well prepared for what I would be doing and the setting.

What did you learn about leadership? About yourself? About making change? About anything else that you found educational especially as any of these questions can apply not only to your personal experience but how it may apply to a larger community?

I learned leadership can take many forms. A leader may be the official, designated leader or an advocate and mentor. Different situations and goals require different styles of leadership. Someone responsible for activities internal to an organization might have different skills and strengths than one who is the public face of an organization, and both can be effective for achieving different objectives. Delegation is crucial to a leader's success, both for accomplishing a large number of goals and for giving people ownership of their projects, the organization and its mission.

The experience helped refine my career goals and whether they involve academic policy research, hands on policy making, advocacy, management, or a blend of these. Knowing that my career will evolve, seeing the different dimensions of policy work has been valuable.

The coaching component was an excellent complement to the internship. The match with my coach was very good. She challenged me by asking challenging questions, giving me valuable exercises that forced me to consider my goals, and by gently pointing out that obstacles I perceive may not actually be problems. She helped me to see how much I could accomplish and to see my goals and past achievements in context. Having already started my professional career and working for some time before graduate school, the coaching added a new dimension to my internship experience by giving me someone to bounce ideas off of and examine how to put this experience and my graduate studies into the perspective of longer term career planning.

In terms of change, this internship helped me to see the impact of policy research and analysis on actual social policy. At the Childhood Obesity Forum, the Massachusetts Commissioner of Public Health announced that he would lead a commission to propose a statewide plan for integrating childhood obesity prevention and control efforts throughout the Commonwealth. This was a significant outcome and demonstrated to me how rigorous policy analysis and convening appropriate parties can have a direct impact on policy. Together with my work evaluating the use of mandates to expand health insurance, the success of the forum helped me to understand the many ways policy analysis and research influence the policy process, have an effect on decision makers and implementers, and contribute to meaningful policy and social change.

What program improvements would you recommend? Anything at all – pay? Program selection process? Anything.

The program was well organized and I really appreciate the personal interest of the Segal family and the board members. The meeting in May helped ignited my enthusiasm for the summer internship within the framework of social change and citizen leadership. I think the fall meeting will allow me reflect on my accomplishments from that vantage point.

What did you accomplish at the internship site this summer? This could be where you provide some of the narrative of what you actually did and what you actually accomplished this summer!

The mission of the Massachusetts Health Policy Forum (MHPF) is to convene forums and present high quality policy research to legislators, stakeholders and the public. Working for MHPF during the summer of 2008, I observed and participated in the execution of this mission. The MHPF held two forums during the summer, one on Childhood Obesity and one on the German healthcare system. I was primarily involved in preparing for the Childhood Obesity Forum's media strategy, which included press advisories as well as an opinion/editorial calling attention to childhood obesity. I wrote the op/ed, which was picked up by the Boston Globe under the names of the chairman of our Board of Directors and Representative Peter Koutoujian.

Following the Childhood Obesity Forum, I focused on developing a paper, with MHPF Executive Director Michael Doonan, on using individual mandates for health insurance coverage expansion. With the Massachusetts health reform experiment being watched by other states and national reformers, we wanted to examine how a mandate compares to voluntary insurance expansions and consider the components necessary for making an individual mandate effective. We have evaluated data on voluntary expansion efforts in other states, which involved interviewing State Children's Health Insurance Program buy in program directors to understand how effective such expansions have been. Based on the evidence, we are drawing conclusions about voluntary insurance enrollment relative to mandated coverage in terms of the potential to achieve near universal insurance coverage. We are also reviewing decisions made by Massachusetts policymakers concerning affordability standards and what constitutes adequate insurance coverage. This will suggest how a mandate can be implemented as fairly and effectively as possible for low income populations. The paper is nearing final revisions and we expect to have a completed manuscript early in fall 2008.