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# WDPH Summer Internship Report

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# WDPH Summer Internship Report

## **Abstract**

The Mosakowski Institute is working with the Worcester Division of Public Health (DPH) in an effort that merges classroom skills and real world experience to improve the health of the Greater Worcester community. During the summer of 2015, thirteen Clark students interned with the DPH working on five projects that advanced goals of the Community Health Improvement Plans in the areas of healthy eating and active living; substance abuse and mental health; health equity and health disparities; violence prevention, and more. More information about the summer 2015 internship projects can be found in the report.

## **Keywords**

Health, Worcester Division of Public Health, Internships

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# Clark University 2015 Worcester Academic Health Department Summer Internship Programs Report



Photo by Dany Pelletier

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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The Worcester Academic Health Department	3
2015 Intern Projects: Overview	4
Community Health Assessment	4
Safe Routes to School	5
Youth Connect	6
Recreation Worcester	7
Healthy Markets	8
Internship Impact	8
Looking Forward	10

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# The Worcester Academic Health Department

Clark University's Mosakowski Institute for Public Enterprise and the Worcester Division of Public Health (DPH) are merging classroom skills and technical support with real world experience for students in the field of public health in a unique partnership known as the Worcester Academic Health Department (WAHD). The WAHD seeks to engage students and the community in the processes of research and project implementation to improve community health. This summer, the WAHD placed thirteen Clark University students, ranging from undergraduates through Ph.D. students, in internships at the Worcester DPH.

The WAHD model meets the needs of the Worcester DPH, currently a small organization serving a very large population, by providing support from students to reach critical project goals more efficiently. The Worcester DPH is the lead agency of the Central Massachusetts Public Health Alliance, serving the towns of Grafton, Holden, Leicester, Millbury, Shrewsbury, and West Boylston and the City of Worcester. Their work is guided by the Greater Worcester Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), a firm commitment to improving health in the region through specific, prioritized measurable outcomes. The CHIP was created in 2013 in partnership with UMass Memorial Medical Center- another WAHD partner, and Common Pathways, as well as over 90 other community partners. The five principal domains of the CHIP are: 1) Health Eating and Active Living, 2) Behavioral Health, 3) Primary Care and Wellness, 4) Violence and Injury Prevention, and 5) Health Equity and Health Disparities. Yet, meeting each of the goals prioritized in the above domains by the CHIP would be nearly impossible without additional outside support. Therefore, each of the DPH projects taken on by the Clark interns works to meet goals within one or more CHIP domains, helping the DPH work toward their goals for the region.

The WAHD model aligns with Clark University's Liberal Education and Effective Practice (LEEP) learning model by allowing students to amplify their liberal arts education with practical experience. By partnering with professionals on DPH projects the Clark students are improving their technical skills, professional development, and job training. The LEEP learning model encourages students to knock down the walls of the classroom and experience their education in the community.



Above: student interns with Mosakowski Institute Director Jim Gomes, Distinguished Professor John G. O'Brien, and Research Associate Joe Krahe. Photo by Dany Pelletier.



Still in its early stages, the WAHD is continuing to grow and take shape, but the projects of the summer of 2015 are evidence of the potential of this partnership to strengthen the education of students, the capacity of the Worcester DPH, and the health of the community.

## 2015 Intern Projects: Overview

The Clark University interns each focused on ongoing DPH project for the summer. Each project had at least two Clark interns assigned to it as well as a staff person from the DPH. This project structure fostered an environment of collaboration and problem solving within the project teams that successfully advanced their work throughout the summer. The projects, all situated within the division's Office of Community Health or the Youth Opportunities Office, included: the Community Health Assessment, Safe Routes to School, Youth Connect, Recreation Worcester, and Healthy Markets.

Overall, the Clark interns worked to survey the built environment, implement and evaluate an environmental intervention to prevent prescription drug use, survey the community on all aspects of health, implement a summer recreation program in Worcester parks, and work to eliminate food deserts and increase food justice in the region. Collectively, the interns logged **2,354 hours** working on their projects this summer.

### Community Health Assessment



Figure 1: MAPP Framework, Photo Credit: NACCHO 2014

The Community Health Assessment (CHA) is a participatory, collaborative approach to assessing the health needs and strengths of the Central Massachusetts Regional Public Health Alliance. In 2012, the DPH, as the lead agency, and UMass Memorial Medical Center conducted the first comprehensive health assessment of the region, examining a range of health behaviors, outcomes, issues, and strengths. The findings were used in priority setting for the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP).

The 2015 CHA, led by the WDPH, UMass Memorial, and Fallon Health, builds upon the 2012 report, updating existing benchmarks and incorporating new information. The CHA utilizes the Mobilizing Action through Planning Partnerships (MAPP)

framework (see Figure 1) as a guide to community health improvement planning through 4 key assessments: 1) Community Themes and Strengths, 2) Local Public Health System, 3) Community Health Status, and 4) Forces of Change.

The Clark interns working on the CHA were critical in the collection and presentation of data for this extensive process. The interns attended community events throughout the region, as well as libraries, senior centers, farmers markets and fairs. They collected CHA surveys from individuals that work, live, and play in Worcester. They also integrated creative aspects to their data collection, using a sticky note activity to capture information from event goers without requiring their time to complete the more extensive survey. The CHA interns were essential in creating maps and data presentations that otherwise would have been contracted out.

## Meet the CHA Interns:

 <p><b>Jennifer Duong</b> Masters of Science in Geographical Information Science for Development and the Environment Hometown: Houston, Texas Interests: community health, public health, and traveling</p>	 <p><b>Alexander Guitar</b> Major/ Minor: Psychology/Political Science Hometown: Lyme, CT Year: Senior Interests: Music, Running</p>
 <p><b>Tess Lewin- Jacus</b> Major: Biology, Concentration: Public Health Hometown: Lynbrook, NY Interests: Music, all things science, outdoors (camping, hiking), graphic design, The Clark Keys A Capella, Big Brothers Big Sisters</p>	 <p><b>Michael Preko Nkum</b> Masters of Science in Geographical Information Science for Development and the Environment Hometown: Assin Foso, Central Region, Ghana Residency: Durham, NC Interests: Listening to good music, watching musical videos and soccer</p>

## Safe Routes to School


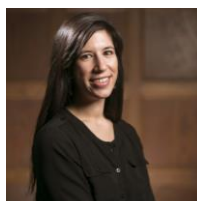
Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a national program operating in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The program, which has been operating in many states since 1997 and was expanded nationally by federal legislation in July of 2005, seeks to improve safety on walking and bicycling routes for children and their families between their homes and schools.

In Worcester, SRTS works not only to improve the safety of these routes, but also, by improving the walkability of local neighborhoods, the program helps reduce barriers to physical activity, a goal of CHIP Domain 1: Healthy Eating and Active Living.



The Clark interns completed walk audits of 6 schools in the city, filling over 500 audit forms, and creating catchment maps using GIS technology. Their work will be used moving forward in the continuation of this project to make city streets and sidewalks more pedestrian and cyclist friendly.

## Meet the SRTS Interns:

 <p><b>Giovana Ortiz</b> Major: International Development and Social Change, Public Health Concentration Hometown: Atlanta, Georgia Interests: Thrift Store volunteering, All Kinds Of Girls (AKOG), Timothy Global Health</p>	 <p><b>Cathleen Torres Parisian</b> Master's of Science in GIS for Development and Environment Hometown: Minneapolis, MN Interests: Mapping, environmental justice, remote sensing, youth engagement, bicycling</p>
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## Youth Connect



Dream Mobile- Created by girls age 11-15 at Youth Connect as part of the "I'm About This Life" Craft Group,

This summer internship involved the implementation and evaluation of a positive social norms campaign at the City's free evening summer recreation program for youth age 11-15, Youth Connect. The social norms campaign, known as "I'm About This Life," aims to break stereotypes and promote positive thinking, mental health, and sound decision making among teens.

The campaign was created by Worcester's Healthy Options for Prevention and Education (HOPE) Coalition, a youth-adult partnership coalition created to reduce youth violence and substance use and to promote adolescent mental health in Worcester. Dr. Laurie Ross has been the director of HOPE Coalition since its founding in 2000, and is also the Associate Director for Clark's International Development, Community and Environment, and an Associate Professor of Community Development and Planning.

This is the second year that HOPE Coalition has implemented the "I'm About This Life" campaign at the summer program, Youth Connect. HOPE Coalition's peer leaders worked closely the DPH interns to create a cohesive plan for implementing the campaign. The campaign itself is funded by a federal grant, Partnerships for Success II, through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, which aims to reduce underage drinking and prescription drug misuse among young people.

"I'm About This Life" was implemented at Youth Connect in four distinct ways: 1) "I'm About This Life" Groups with trained mental health counselors and HOPE Coalition peer leaders, 2) peer leader pep rallies, 3) "I'm About This Life" weekly craft night, and 4) "I'm About This Life" basketball curriculum. The multifaceted approach to "I'm About This Life" increased the exposure of the campaign to the young people at Youth Connect and allowed them to connect to the campaign based on their interests.

The DPH interns worked closely with the peer leaders from HOPE Coalition in the implementation of the weekly pep rallies, attended the weekly "I'm About This Life" groups, and designed and implemented the craft and basketball curriculums to include topics such as goal setting, stress management, and mental health.



Above, HOPE Coalition members and DPH Interns wearing "I'm About This Life" shirts.



## Meet the Youth Connect Interns:

 <p><b>Samantha Arsenault</b></p> <p>Master's in Community Development and Planning</p> <p>Hometown: West Hartford, CT</p> <p>Interests: Health equity and social justice, lacrosse, running, reading crime novels, and water sports</p>	 <p><b>Anthony Manzello</b></p> <p>Major: Business Management</p> <p>Hometown: Shrewsbury, MA</p> <p>Interests: Basketball, community service, Taylor Swift</p>	 <p><b>Kelsey Renner</b></p> <p>Master's in Community Development and Planning</p> <p>Hometown: Waldorf, MD</p> <p>Interests: Youth work and program evaluation, travelling, cooking, and running</p>
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## Recreation Worcester



Recreation Worcester is a free summer program for youth ages 7-13, including five weeks of free, supervised, drop-in recreation programs at eleven city parks and one week of swim instruction. Recreation Worcester, a new program that grew out of the Wheels to Water program, aims to get neighborhood residents into the city parks and to increase their physical activity and recreation.

The program is implemented by the Youth Opportunities Office, a part of the DPH office of Community Health, in conjunction with the City of Worcester Department of Parks and Recreation. The DPH interns working on the Recreation Worcester program were involved in both the planning and implementation of the program. Their time was spent canvassing parks, creating curriculum, tracking program retention, and entering registration information on the program's 1,400 participants.

## Meet the Recreation Worcester Interns:

 <p><b>Mark Crisafulli</b></p> <p>Major: Psychology</p> <p>Hometown: Wayland, MA</p> <p>Interests: Varsity Swim Team</p>	 <p><b>Haley Gilmore</b></p> <p>Major: Psychology, Education Minor</p> <p>Hometown: Lebanon, NH</p> <p>Interests: Nutrition, Physical Activity, Health, Women's well-being, and Travel</p>
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## Healthy Markets


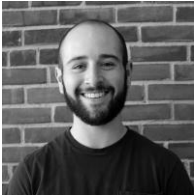
Healthy Market interns worked to promote food justice and reduce food inequality throughout the region by supporting two ongoing projects, the Healthy Corner Store Initiative (a part of the statewide Mass in Motion campaign) and the Healthy Aging Food Access project. Both projects seek to change the environments people live in to make it easier to access fresh and local fruits and vegetables. The DPH interns encouraged senior housing developments and small corner stores to source produce from local farms when in season and from a local distributor in the winter and spring. The interns created relationships with the community and enrolled community members in the Healthy Markets program.



In addition to the above initiatives, the Healthy Markets interns attended weekly farmers markets in the region. They surveyed community members about the markets and their quality as well as inquiring about future improvements.

According to **Zach Dyer, Chief of Community Health**, the Healthy Markets projects would not have happened this year without the interns from Clark.

### Meet the Healthy Market Interns:

 <p><b>Emily Glaubitz</b> B.A. Geography, M.A. Community Development and Planning Hometown: Rowley, MA Interests: Viola, ultimate frisbee, running, and biking</p>	 <p><b>Joel Simonson</b> Master's in Environmental Science &amp; Policy Hometown: Waterford, Connecticut Interests: Men's Varsity Tennis, Timmy Global Health, food systems, sustainability, community outreach</p>
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## Internship Impact

Community events staffed by Clark Interns:

- Big Dipper Festival
- Gun Buy Back
- Local Farmers Market
- Out to Lunch Concert Series
- National Night Out
- New Life Worship Center Family Health & Safety Fair
- Plumley Village Health Fair
- Asian Festival
- Convoy of Hope

The thirteen Clark students that interned with the WDPH spent a total of 2,354 hours working toward improving community health. Not only did the interns work toward their individual project goals, they spent time at a number of community events conducting outreach on behalf of the DPH. At community events the interns typically provided information on the DPH's community involvement and ongoing initiatives as well as educational materials and promotional items.

Beyond the impact of improving community exposure to projects and campaigns by attending community events, the interns also had huge impacts on each ongoing project.

The feedback by DPH staff was similar across project supervisors: the Clark interns were critical in making each of the five projects happen this summer. Without their support, the staffing capacity simply

would not have allowed for the planning, execution, and evaluation the projects to the same level.

**“We would not have been able to do the work we wanted to do, and did do, this summer without the support of the Clark interns on the Recreation Worcester program” – Raquel Castro Corazzini, Youth Opportunities Coordinator**

**“There is no way we could have done the work we did with Youth Connect without the Clark interns, they were absolutely essential and very responsive.” – Cassandra Andersen, Regional Behavioral Health Programs Coordinator**

**“I would say the highest impact that [the Clark interns] had was largely internal because we were able to collect so much more data, indirectly impacting the outcome. [The interns] also decided what the program (Recreation Worcester) would look like, the kind of activities staff would be doing across multiple sites, that’s a huge impact on the program.” – Bryan Diehl, Youth Opportunities Office**



DPH Interns at Community Harvest Project

**“Clark students for the most part have a pretty good social justice framework and the desire and willingness to learn more about this is definitely there.” – Zach Dyer, Chief of Community Health**

In addition to these benefits, Mr. Dyer highlighted the unique benefit of working with graduate students from Clark’s Masters in Science in GIS for Development and Environment program, stating that they approached problems with serious technical skills in an area outside of his own expertise. Overall, no two interns from Clark entered the DPH with the same resume of community involvement or set of technical skills, but each was able to contribute to the goals of the health department in unique ways.

Of course, the summer projects also impacted the Clark students, often pushing them beyond their comfort zone in both community engagement and skill building. This experience not only introduced them to the workings of the municipal government system, but also served as an avenue to connect with the City of Worcester in a way that can only occur once students step outside of the walls of the Clark classroom.

**“Over the course of ten weeks I have learned working in a Public Health Department is never monotonous. One day you’re attending a program’s opening, the next day you are working on a project’s task, and the**



Interns Giovana Ortiz Barrera, Emily Glaubitz, and Cathleen Torres-Parisian harvesting vegetables at Community Harvest Project .

**following days you’re invited to help with many other projects, tasks, and events. While it seems demanding, it was obvious it is all rewarding as well. It is nice seeing the fruits that come out of hard work and dedication from all the WDPH staff and interns.”**

**- Giovana Ortiz Barrera, Safe Routes to School Intern**

**“This internship has been an amazing experience for me. It has given me a better perspective of what future endeavors I want to become involved with and it has allowed me to connect on a higher level with the Worcester community.”**

**- Joel Simonson, Healthy Markets Intern**

**“Learning about youth gang involvement in the classroom, and hearing the way it impacts the life of a 12-year-old girl over arts and**

crafts at Youth Connect are totally separate phenomena. Experiences like this ground the theories encountered in academia in real life and force us as students to understand their implications. This may be more valuable than any textbook chapter as it motivates us to acquire the tools through our education that will actually be applicable in real life. This is what the internship experience does, bridges academia and reality, and in this case, Clark students and the people of Worcester."

– Samantha Arsenault, Youth Connect Intern

## Looking Forward

The summer of 2015 was pivotal to the budding partnership between Clark University and the Worcester Division of Public Health. Not only were the Clark interns able to help with the development and implementation of five public health projects critical in meeting the goals of the Community Health Improvement Plan, they also received valuable professional experience outside of the walls of the institution.

This partnership has the potential moving forward to benefit the DPH, generations of Clark students, and the health of the community of Worcester as a whole. After seeing summer internship projects planned, implemented, and evaluated and receiving positive feedback from Clark students and faculty, DPH staff, and community partners, the Mosakowski Institute is already planning for the continuation of the intern program in the summer of 2016 and increased partnerships with the WAHD throughout the year.

Placing students in professional internships with reputable organizations is an essential part of their university learning experience that aligns with Clark's Liberal Education and Effective Practice (LEEP) Learning Model. Students start their liberal education in the classroom at Clark and apply their learned skills through effective practice on public health projects. The partnership between Clark and the Worcester DPH exemplifies this model to provide a useful experience to even more students in an enriching and relevant field.



Interns Cathleen Torres-Parisian and Michael Preko Nkum harvesting vegetables at Community Harvest Project .