

Internship Reflection Journal

Week 1 (Aug 29-Sept 2)

Internship Search, Application, and First Impressions

This semester, I am interning for Trans Lifeline (TL) as a privacy research assistant working on a project on the effects of the 988 mental health crisis line. Since the 988 mental health line debuted, we want to understand how it is directly affecting BIPOC and trans people, through a series of interviews and a lit review. My three goals include: 1) gain an in-depth understanding of the research process in practice on a larger scale, 2) explore the nonprofit research space and see if it is something I can do post grad, and 3) improve my research skills through the different applications this project offers me.

I was lucky enough to have this internship recommended to me by Dr. Palmer. I was brought on as a research assistant with a few other AU students. I had a group call with everybody on the team to learn names, expectations, rules, and onboarding. I expected to be a part of a team reporting directly to Palmer, but I was pleasantly surprised to find out I got to pick what teams I want to work with. I am currently working with every team at TL. I still work with Dr. Palmer, so I know I have support if needed. I mainly focus on the Geolocation and Privacy team

where I collect data on Terms of Service/Privacy Policies of suicide hotlines, secondary sources, and media to ascertain the effectiveness of the 988 crisis line. I am also working on the hotline data team and survey and interview teams writing questions for our survey and doing general research assistance.

I am fitting in incredibly well at TL. The job is entirely remote, so socialization is easier. Every meeting we answer an icebreaker question. I've gotten two check-up emails from my boss, Yana, and they just ask me how I am doing and if my work is interesting to me. Working fully remote is weird for me as I have never done it before for a job. In addition to not having a typical interview process, I felt as if I was plunged right in. It adds both elements of stress and of peace. I am afraid of messing up, but I also know people want to be there to support me. The hierarchy of Trans Lifeline is very horizontal. People ask for my opinions and what my capacity is. It is incredibly refreshing and exciting so far. I am an intern, but also a true member of the team. It does not seem to feel like my friends who work on the Hill or in-person even. It's truly a specific research team that is trying to find the best people for the job we're trying to do.

Week 2 – Sept. 6-9

Mission, Vision, Initial Observations

Trans Lifeline's mission, according to their website, is "Trans Lifeline connects trans people to the community support and resources we need to survive and thrive." Their vision is "Trans Lifeline connects trans people to the community support and resources we need to survive and thrive." As a nonbinary queer person who is passionate about advocacy, it feels like I am working for an organization cares about me as a person. I only assist the advocacy organization, so I am curious in exploring the rest of the organization's teams and activities. I spent a lot of time on their website finding out the main goals and work of this organization.

There was one weird dynamic that has arisen. Yesterday, a member of the Geolocation and Privacy team was asked to leave. I have no idea why. I assume it had something to do with deadlines being late, as a coworker had mentioned several times they were waiting on a deliverable but they kept missing meetings. It only took about two days to delegate and reorganize the work. Everything is moving along well, but I am confused as to where it came from. It reiterated the importance of communication.

Week 3 – Sept. 12-16

Office Dynamics & Communication

All communication exists on Slack or WhatsApp for the teams and groups. I can access all threads even for teams I am not a part of. There are shared Google Drives that I can refer to for any questions before I have to ask. All policies are set by Yana and Nemu, the director and co-director, but I meet with them on a biweekly basis, so we can reassess at any time. My responsibilities vary day-to-day, but we have a painfully detailed task tracker with explanations and words that is planned during each biweekly meeting. I ask a lot more questions than my counterparts, but they are very helpful. My team checks work before submission. There is no formal process, which is kind of crazy to me. We all just give a verbal or written okay. We are all given opportunities to check things over. I know there will be a much more formal process closer to publication.

I am loving being a part of this research team for this project. I believe I will make many long lasting connections. We bring in a lot of field experts for discussion and assistance with our work. It is very cool that we know that we are passionate but can admit that we are not all-knowing. I am excited to work in more nonprofit spaces and see if this is something that I can continue to do. As of now, I am incredibly grateful for TL. I make sure to always have my camera on and consistently check all my apps for communications and updates.

Week 4 – Sept. 19-23

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) Dynamics

I am learning more about my coworkers, and it feels like we are friendly and able to discuss things readily. Since the previously mentioned co worker was fired, we have adjusted very nicely. I do not feel scared of my boss. I have been corrected constructively during large group discussions when I have made a mistake. For example, my research deliverable was slightly off scope and my boss explained to me why and then I was able to ask for tips from my teammates to make it better. We even wrote a document informing us how we can use our research for outside publications, if we wish to create our own work as a result.

Trans Lifeline is a trans led and BIPOC centered space. Diversity and equity is the goal of the organization. Their dream is to get the proper resources to any trans person who needs them. I feel incredibly grateful and included within these spaces. We are given lots of space to air our feelings about research suicide hotlines, why our work is important, and how to fight burnout. I am incredibly grateful. An improvement could be that I have not attended any DEI training. Possibly more training on proper engagement with these populations for interns

could be a cool opportunity.

Week 5 - Sept. 26-30

OPEN

I am really grateful for the opportunity to be given such a leadership role within this team. I am battling my imposter syndrome though. I feel like this comes up a lot as a female looking, not straight person in DC. DC seems very cutthroat sometimes. Intense. Here I am, working on a team of all queer, trans, and BIPOC people and I still feel intimidated. It is definitely less so than in the past when I am in a space that feels less safe, but I have just been thinking about how the way I look, dress, and identify affect the way I work.

I was unaware how much my identities influence my leadership style until recently. Being raised Christian and female, servant leadership is the golden standard. Growing up realizing I was queer and not quite a girl, had made me very open minded and desiring to connect with people. I wanted to meet people who cared about me and were like me. I wanted to transform the hate I had seen perpetrated against humans who were different like me. I want to make meaning from life to make sense of all of the craziness in the world. I see this every day at Trans Lifeline.

Week 6 – Oct. 3-7

Networking

I believe that I have improved my connections by forming a casual or personal relationship with everyone on my team. I am planning to connect with team members on LinkedIn towards the end of my time with them. I also make sure that my higher ups know that I am graduating soon and am open to work. During meetings, I keep my camera on and make sure to remember things about my coworkers. It is an informal place, so I am definitely thinking about coworkers to set up 1:1's, but I haven't made that initial reach out yet.

My LinkedIn is up to date. I am working on making my Leadership profile prettier as a whole. I am redoing the whole reflections section and really delving into making my profile personal. It is not up to date yet, but it's in progress behind the scenes. I really have neglected my portfolio, and I want to remedy that prior to graduation. Overall, I am on my way to making the most of this networking opportunity. Almost there.

Week 7 – Oct. 10-13

Goals & Inner Journey

My three goals were as follows: 1) gain an in-depth understanding of the research process in practice on a larger scale, 2) explore the nonprofit research space and see if it is something I can do post grad, and 3) improve my research skills through the different applications this project offers me. I would say that all my goals are in progress. I am seeing the IRB process, the lit review process, and survey building process. I get to how money moves things. We start surveying next month. I talk to all my coworkers about the work they do within the private versus public sector. I am incredibly attracted to the nonprofit/public service realm and am strongly considering post grad jobs or degrees. My research skills are challenged every day. I have to critically think about how my words will be read from every direction. I am learning how to ask the right questions, find the right sources, and make sense of the numbers. I believe I set adequate expectations for myself. I need to continue to build a schedule that is productive and consistent. The virtual workspace is amazing but also challenging. That is the only thing not working. Everything else is great.

I believe that I act as an adaptive leader most of the time. I am a part of every committee. I take on tasks that fall through the cracks. I try to miss as few meetings as possible. I want to be a sponge within this position, so I try to be as

adaptive as possible. I have learned that I am much more capable and reliable than I thought. I have learned that I deserve to be confident in my work. I am feeling more empowered to find jobs after this one. This whole journey has taught me to believe in myself.

I would recommend Trans Lifeline to anyone who is passionate and skilled within the area. I feel supported and impassioned. I am truly grateful for this opportunity. I am learning a lot. I would recommend it and am grateful for it because the environment is positive, the pay is good, the leadership is caring, and the work is important. Overall, it's a great halfway point.