Esteban Gast with AmeriCorps VISTA in Lincoln, NE Summer 2012

As an AmeriCorps VISTA intern, I am part of the National AmeriCorps Program. This summer, I applied and was accepted to the Lincoln, Nebraska program and worked in the Lincoln Public Schools Youth Development Team. This group of people grew out of a Federal Grant to help at-risk students and help advance the District’s goal of “Cultural Proficiency.”

In the district, almost 50% of students receive free/reduced lunch so the work of the Youth Development Team is both necessary and urgent. In my role, I worked with students who fall into our demographic (minority, low-income, homeless and juvenile delinquents) during the 6 week summer school. I sat in classrooms and assisted the teachers. I pulled students out of class to prepare one-on-one for a speech, a test, or a project. Every morning I walked around the school and called home if students were not in class. As the Summer VISTAs, we developed programs to recognize students who were excelling, and also sponsored “TNT Tutoring” a tutoring program on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

After this 6 week school experience, we started working in the District Office. Here, we focused more on policy issues. We dealt with big picture ideas like parent engagement, transition programs, and also things like how to run summer school better for next year. In fact, the Summer VISTAs have interviewed almost 70 different people (including students, staff, teachers, administrators, Federal Programs staff and the Superintendent) and gave a presentation on what changes can be made to Summer School next year based on all the responses.

My time at University of Illinois prepared me for this internship. It has been my many interactions with professors, advisers and administration that prepared me to have the positive interactions I did with the Superintendent, the Head of Federal Programs, the Adviser from Washington and other people in power. It has been the work ethic I developed at Illinois that has allowed me to excel at this internship. The University of Illinois has allowed me to grow and has pushed me to complete the (what seems like unimaginable) work during the school year, and now in a professional setting I am able to find success. I have three more semesters left at the University (I’m enrolled in a Master’s Program at the University) and can already say that attending the University has taught me so much more than sociological frameworks. It has instilled in me a work ethic, an appetite for success and a desire to stand out in any field.

Esteban is a rising Senior at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where he is studying Sociology. He is a part of the Civic Leadership Program, where he will receive a Masters of Political Science in May 2014.

Do you have internship opportunities for Sociology undergraduates?

Sociology students possess several skills your organization may be looking for in an intern: written and oral communication skills, computer/technical skills, leadership, teamwork, global competency, diversity awareness, and research/statistics. If your business or organization has potential internship opportunities, please let us know. If you cannot attend our Internship Fair, we can promote your opportunity on our website. Please email: soc-advising@illinois.edu with your opportunity or any questions you may have about the program.