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Environmental Studies, Class of 2020

The Environmental Voter Project (EVP) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing voter turnout in every election cycle. This, in turn, increases voter demand for progressive environmental policies from political candidates. In order to identify voters with a proclivity for supporting environmental advocacy, EVP cross references data from social media with public voting records. Once environmentalists with inconsistent voting records (i.e. infrequent voters) are found, EVP deploys a number of tactics to encourage each individual to turn out to the polls. Through using voter contact methods such as in-person canvassing, phone calls, text messages, and digital ads, EVP has seen an increase in voter turnout for each state in which the organization operates.

As a summer intern, my main job consisted of aiming to increase voter turnout in environmentalists. Interns canvassed people often, asking if they panned on voting in the upcoming Massachusetts primary and if they’d pledge to be an environmental voter—this type of contact has proven to increase voter turnout by as much as 7-8%. We also worked on projects several days per week, researching various environmental or political issues. Typically, I enjoyed these projects the most, as my supervisor trusted me with more important and intensive assignments as time progressed. When we were not canvassing or researching, our supervisors took great strides to give interns hands-on experience in the nonprofit sector. Each Thursday morning, they hosted a seminar on building professional skills. I learned how to organize data, make a strategic plan, identify good uses of polling, apply for a grant, and more.

My experience this past summer prepared me for future endeavors, both academic and professional. I am currently studying abroad in Queensland, Australia, where I live at a School for Field Studies station in the rainforest of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. Here, I take courses on rainforest natural resource management, tropical rainforest ecology, and the socio-economic values surrounding environmental issues. Recently, I began conducting research with my professor, collecting data on behaviors and attitudes towards climate change in the local community; later this semester, we hope to illuminate trends in these data and formulate methods with which to engage the public on climate change, particularly those who believe in its existence yet remain inactive. Though my internship at EVP focused more on the political side of environmentalism, I have been able to apply skills that I learned to manipulate data more efficiently and easily. This has streamlined our research process, allowing us to sift through mass amounts of variables while remaining focused on our larger goal. Furthermore, the professional skills I learned during EVP weekly seminars gave me the confidence to advocate for my interest in certain projects. Because of this, I was able to work directly with one of the leading scientists on tooth-billed bowerbirds in the area, assisting her in identifying and recording mating courts of this endemic bird.

Overall, I cannot overstate my gratitude for receiving this grant, nor the opportunities it has brought me. Working at EVP not only allowed me to contribute positively in a professional setting, but it reaffirmed my dedication to environmental activism. Every day, I was surrounded by intelligent, driven individuals who were committed to using their power as a force for good. I worked alongside adults who have dedicated their lives to advocating for the environment. I now have clearer vision for my future than ever before—though I’m unsure if I’ll end up at working with policy at the EPA, performing field research, or practicing as an environmental lawyer, I know without a doubt that I will spend the rest of my life trying to help the environment. Thank you, so much, for allowing me the possibility to professionally enter the environmental field this summer, and thank you for supporting my dream.