

POLI 4390 Final Report
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During my placement at South House, the Sexual and Gender Resource Centre on campus, I gained a great deal of valuable experience that I will be able to apply to future opportunities. South House is a student-funded, volunteer-driven organization. Its mission and mandate read, “South House recognizes that you cannot work for a society free of sexism and patriarchy without also working for a society free of all forms of oppression. Therefore, the South House supports women and all people dealing with oppression on the basis of sexuality and gender (South House Sexual and Gender Resource Centre, 2020)”. As an organization, South House believes in working together to create a society that is safe for all genders. South House plans many events including book clubs, anti-oppression workshops, free meeting space, and educational programs (South House Sexual and Gender Resource Centre, 2020). As a placement student, I worked on planning and running several events, including STBBI testing, various meeting groups, and educational pop up tables. I also acted as support for my supervisor in whatever help they needed.

The expectations of me as a placement student changed throughout the course of my placement and my main responsibilities subsequently evolved. At first, it seemed as though I would be helping with the planned events and daily functioning of the centre but my responsibilities ended up being primarily just solo projects. My placement partner and I did communicate to our supervisor that we were interested in helping with anything they needed as we wanted to learn about the day to day functioning of an NGO. As a result, they did ask us to put up posters, build props and attend a few meetings with them.

The amount of freedom we were given to pursue solo projects is relevant to many organizations so it did demonstrate to us what a typical position at an NGO could entail.

Although the amount of freedom we had at the centre did prove to be challenging in terms of actual execution, it also had some benefits. These benefits included the ability to be creative and plan initiatives that we felt very passionate about. I will later discuss the challenges I had with the loose structure of the placement and how I would have appreciated more hands-on support in terms of the projects.

Due to the tedious nature of planning and coordinating events, my first two months at the centre almost exclusively involved brainstorming and planning. Due to the circumstances surrounding COVID-19 many of the events I had planned were cancelled. This was obviously very unfortunate but the experience I gained through planning these events and communicating with individuals and organizations in the community was very helpful and I am sure will prove to be directly applicable in my future endeavors.

The primary event I was planning was an STBBI pop-up event, which would provide an inclusive and judgment-free environment in which anyone could be tested for STI's. The initial motivation for this event was that Dalhousie University only facilitates swab STI testing which does not test for every STI. There were numerous roadblocks in the process of planning this event as I had to contact many people and change the actual structure of the event a few times on the advice of experts in the community. Unfortunately with the cancelling of the semester, the event did not happen. This being said, I hope to be involved in a similar project in the future as it is an initiative I am very passionate about.

The other events I was in the midst of planning included a movie night at the centre and an exam self-care night. My supervisor liked these ideas and we were hoping to host the events in early to mid-April. Once again these events, unfortunately, did not happen.

Events I was able to follow through with at the centre included hosting multiple educational pop-up tables (at Glitter Bean cafe and on Dal campus). At the pop up tables, we had informational pamphlets, zines, at cost menstrual products, free pads, and free condoms. These tables were a way to get involved in the community and to be seen on campus. I think it is very important for organizations like South House to further advertise themselves and establish a presence on campus as the centre offers so many important services and resources that students and community members might be unaware of. If the semester had not been cut short I would have loved to plan more pop up tables and established a stronger presence on campus.

What I enjoyed about my placement and specifically the organization I worked for was its inclusive nature. At a Sexual and Gender resource centre it is imperative that everyone who accesses the centre feels welcome and that they can leave with tools and support specific to their needs. Working in such a positive and inclusive environment made it all the more enjoyable.

Something else I really enjoyed about my placement was the freedom I had to explore different avenues of research. While planning events and choosing topics to discuss, I conducted a lot of research into several areas that interest me. I was able to greatly expand my knowledge of sexual health and topics of gender. Through the research I conducted, I was able to continue planning the events I was hoping to run from a place of knowledge. While planning the STBBI testing event I was originally hoping to hold it somewhere on Dal campus but after I spoke to someone from the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia and researched further the importance of anonymity, I decided that my original idea of venue was not going to be able to accommodate the level of anonymity that was required to create a safe and inclusive environment. This is something I would not have necessarily realized before my placement and previous to my

interactions with certain literature and specific organizations. Additionally, while I was planning a movie night I did some research into independent queer films. While trying to choose a film appropriate for the movie night I wanted to plan I watched many different films. This was a fun way to learn and interact with films and topics I had not previously been exposed to. It was the flexibility of this placement that allowed me to conduct this kind of research.

Furthermore, this placement offered me tons of experience in the way of self-regulation and accountability. As the placement was very loosely structured, most hours were completed off-site with check-ins at the centre every week. Completing and keeping track of my hours required me to hone my self-regulation skills as I could not fall behind on my hours. Due to the independent nature of the placement and to my supervisor's minimal involvement it was imperative to stay organized and on top of all the projects I was planning.

This placement and the projects I was working on forced me to reach out to many different people in the community, especially while trying to plan the pop-up STBBI event. My liaison with relevant individuals and organizations in the Halifax community offered me experience in pitching events and ideas and receiving criticism and suggestions from others in a professional capacity.

All of the events I was planning required me to reach out to different members of the community. Sometimes this was very difficult and tedious because I had pretty limited knowledge on who to contact and it was only through contacting many people that I was pointed in the right direction. Although I have discussed how the loose structure of my placement offered me the freedom to explore projects that I was passionate about, it did feel like that with the lack of structure there was also a lack of support. I was allowed, even encouraged to pitch ideas to my

supervisor but besides mentioning a few contacts they did not offer much support. With all the projects I was working on it felt as though my supervisor might not have been very invested in their execution. This being said, whenever we pitched them a date or idea, they were very responsive and encouraging, this just did not translate into any practical support. Therefore, I believe that my only complaint would be if a placement is going to have such a loose structure and be separate from the day to day functioning of the centre, then there might need to be more support from the supervisor in order to make the projects and goals realistic, especially when it is a short placement in a totally new environment. I did not have a knowledge base on who to contact and what the best organizations to reach out to were. I wish my supervisor would have made this information more available as this would have saved me a lot of time. Once I asked them they offered me some names but it was difficult to know what the right questions to ask them were and who I needed to contact.

The majority of the work I did at my placement was administrative. What makes this somewhat upsetting is the fact that all of the administrative work was leading up to some exciting events that did not end up happening. I have to admit this was very disappointing. This being said, I did learn a lot at this placement and would like to highlight two major takeaways. Firstly, the importance of assertive and productive communication with supervisors and how vital it is to communicate your interests, abilities, and needs. Secondly, I developed sharper self-regulation skills that will benefit me both in school and future opportunities. Although there are some areas I believe could have been better facilitated, I did enjoy my time at South House and have a lot of respect for my supervisor and the work they do.

References

South House Sexual and Gender Resource Centre. (2020). Retrieved from <http://southhousehalifax.ca/>