What do you do as an intern at this organization?
My responsibilities vary over the course of a week. For two days, I conduct interviews for Children’s HealthWatch in the Emergency Department (ED) at Boston Medical Center. I approach mothers of children under age 4 while they’re waiting, obtain consent, and ask them questions about their child’s health/development, their own health, insurance, housing, public benefits, food insecurity, and more. Interviews range from .5 to 2.5 hours, and I conduct them in English and Spanish. When it’s quiet in the ED, I assist with lit reviews for journal submissions and create outreach handouts in English/Spanish. The other three days, I work for the Grow Clinic, which treats children with Failure to Thrive. During clinic hours, I create art activities to keep the kids busy in the waiting room. Sometimes I shadow the clinic visits, and it’s been interesting seeing how the doctors, dieticians, and social workers work with patients and their families. I also go on home visits to bring food and check on living conditions.

How did you find your internship?
I found this through the Community Health internship database. There was no official application process. I emailed the director with my cover letter and resume, and then came in for an interview.

What do you enjoy most about your internship?
I enjoy the variety. The team is multidisciplinary, and this has been valuable in terms of figuring out my future career path. I’ve gotten a taste of clinical work, nutrition, biostatistics, policy, data collection, and social work. I have talked with a wide range of people about their career trajectories.

What do you find challenging?
The hardest part is hearing about the hardships people face and knowing that there’s not much I can do to help them. Despite the fact that every participant gets a $10 gift card, a list of community resources, etc., the other interviewers and I are not there to be social workers. It’s an intense experience to have a mother tell you that sometimes she doesn’t eat for a whole day so that she can make sure her baby has enough food. After hearing such personal stories, it can be hard to mentally zoom out and remember that each story will be boiled down to one data point, which will be analyzed with thousands of others and turned into a narrative of hunger and poverty that will hopefully be used to change public policies.

What advice would you offer to someone who wants to make the most of an internship like yours?
Be flexible and positive. Even if a task seems boring, having a positive attitude will make you happier about doing it and leave a positive impression on your supervisor. Have a plan, but be willing to change it when something comes up. Get to know as many different people as possible and ask them about what they do. Obtain experience with a low-income population by volunteering or otherwise. When you interview, have a specific reason why you care about the work rather than broad (I want to help people).

About the Organization
Boston Medical Center, Pediatric Growth and Development; Boston, MA
Grow Clinic for Children is an outpatient clinic at BMC that provides comprehensive specialty medical, nutritional, developmental and social services and dietary assistance to children with Failure To Thrive (FTT). Children’s HealthWatch is a nonpartisan network of pediatricians, public health researchers, and children’s health/policy experts who are committed to improving children’s health in America.