The Clean Air Coalition of WNY | www.cacwny.org

- Flora Cardoni (Peace and Justice Studies, Environmental Studies, 2016)
- Community Organizing Fellow; Full-time, 30 hours per week
- Unpaid but receiving Career Center Internship Grant

What do you do as an intern at this organization?
I did a mix of tasks, like making phone calls and stamping mailings, some organizing work, and a lot of writing, designing, and planning. My major project was researching and writing a memo on Green Buffers to mitigate air pollution and prevent illness on Buffalo’s West Side. I also carried out some air monitoring, helped facilitate a meeting on green buffers with community members, and produced letters/post cards to demonstrate support for the buffers. Another project I worked on was launching a campaign for a just transition of a local coal plant that would protect workers, residents, and the environment if/when the plant closes. This included a Just Transition conference, for which I did a lot of logistical work and other tasks. Other work included planning and carrying out a Combatting Climbing Change film series; designing post cards, fliers, and Facebook posts for various events; tweeting at organizations about campaigns; and creating informational one-pagers on several topics including PCBs, a local Brownfield, and cancer related to pollution.

How did you find your internship?
It was suggested by a family member who knew I was looking for an environmental justice internship.

What do you enjoy most about your internship?
The best part of my internship, by far, was knowing that every day I was contributing to the fight for environmental justice and agitating real change. This allowed me to go beyond just learning about issues and move toward doing something about them. Every time I talked to a resident who was fired up about pollution or to one of the inspiring organizers of Clean Air, I became more and more sure that this is the work I want to be doing, and I’m extremely grateful to have gotten a taste of it this summer.

What do you find challenging?
Challenging parts of my internship included getting blocked by City Hall while trying to enforce an ordinance blocking diesel trucks from residential streets, not being able to find info on financing green buffers despite scouring the internet, and the heart-sinking moment when I realized just how much power polluting industries and other money-driven entities have. While all of those things presented challenges, the most personally challenging thing I had to do, embarrassingly, was make phone calls. Getting handed a long list of strangers to call filled me with unmatched dread, and although I got more comfortable as time progressed, it was definitely not something I enjoyed.

What advice would you offer to someone who wants to make the most of an internship like yours?
Internships at justice-based non-profits are extremely rewarding, but such organizations are usually unable to pay interns. I would recommend securing your internship early (in February or March) to give you time to apply to the Internship Grant and other grants. For the internship itself, be prepared to do real work. This will include outreach like canvassing, phone calls, mailings, and social media, but also serious researching, writing, designing, and planning. You might get thrown into things you’ve never done before, but remain calm, ask questions, and there is no doubt that you’ll learn a lot.

About the Organization
The Clean Air Coalition of WNY; Buffalo, NY

The Clean Air Coalition builds power by developing grassroots leaders who organize their communities to run and win environmental justice and public health campaigns in Western New York.