

EPISODE 2 Practicum Pods Transcript:

Hoang-Vi Vu 0:11

Hello, everyone, welcome to Episode Two of the global disease biology practicum pods. In this podcast series we will be talking practical projects with current and former gdb students. All students in the major are required to complete a practicum project before graduation. This project involves students finding a faculty mentor conducting research under the mentors guidance, and turning their research experiences into a publishable scientific manuscripts tuning to practical parts to learn more about research mentors, and the gdb practicum experience. Hi, everyone, welcome to the pod. I am one of your host gdb peer advisor hv. Today I'm joined on the show by the lovely Laurel. LAUREL is currently a fourth year gdb major, and her practicum title is nutrition disclosure completeness on online grocery websites. Hi, Laurel, how are you today? And it's so great to have you on the pod.

Laurel 1:25

Thanks for having me hv. I'm happy to be here. Before we get started, can you tell me a little bit more about yourself in your experiences and how it led you to your practicum project? Yeah, so like he said, My project is about nutrition disclosures on online grocery websites. This topic was interesting, because when we first started the project back in winter, quarter 2019, online grocery shopping was still like a relatively new service. And not a lot of stores had it yet. So we were kind of just going into it thinking it'd be like a broad sweep, just to see what what's out there, we didn't really have like an intention, at first going into it. And what started to get interesting was, we were noticing how prevalent like health and nutrition and sustainability claims were the like the stores and some of the products were making. And we wanted to compare that with how the actual nutrition information was presented like the nutrition facts label, and the ingredient lists like just the basic things you see on all food products. If that was still as accessible online. Overall, I think food is a means of like social mobility, because it promotes health and definitely affects one's ability to participate in like the rest of life. And online grocery, like I said, was just kind of a new, a new thing, it's been kind of presented as a potential solution to like food deserts because of the idea of where you could deliver groceries to a different place than where the shop actually is. Which is where my interest of the built environment kind of feeds into how it ties into public health and where that kind of feeds into this project.

Hoang-Vi Vu 3:34

Wow, that's really awesome. And it's also related to like COVID and the pandemic right now. Have you like, done and switch your research around because of it?

Laurel 3:46

Yeah, that's a good question. Um, we definitely have kind of shifted. What will be I'm writing my summary right now. And so I've definitely shifted into talking a lot more about how much more popular the service has gotten, because it's grown so much because of COVID. And people are so many more people are using it. So it's definitely, I feel like gotten a little more permanent switch from just being kind of what's out there to like, oh, here's what is good. And here's what it's like not so good about the nutrition availability on these websites.

Hoang-Vi Vu 4:28

That's really awesome. That's really interesting to hear. So how did you find your practicum mentor?

Laurel 4:35

So I basically looked through so many different UC Davis websites in different departments like plant pathology, nutrition community. Well, I wasn't really sure what I was looking for yet, because I had just I was a sophomore at the time, I had just switched into gdb from a different biology major But I ended up finding the Human Ecology website and looking through there at those professors, and kind of looking at publications I saw and would read the abstracts and see if anything was popping out. And so that's kind of how I found my current practicum. mentor, I liked some of the articles she had done. Her UC Davis website said that she was accepting applications for her lab. So that made me feel a lot more comfortable just emailing. And so I did that. And then was forwarded to the lab manager for the group. I did email some other professors. Yeah, that's kind of the way I went about it, a cold email and talks about, you know, how I'm interested in what they're doing, and would like to learn more, and if they're available if they could meet with me. And so I met with a few other professors before landing in this lab, it was just kind of like a normal type of job application where you put like your resume and maybe like a cover letter, but I only had to interview once for the position with this lab. And I heard back in like a week.

Hoang-Vi Vu 6:12

Nice. Yeah. So what is your like relationship with your mentor? Do you meet with them, like, on a regular basis, weekly basis, or is there a PI that's also involved in your research project.

Laurel 6:29

So my, my mentor and my PI are one in the same. We don't have any, like grad students in the lab. So it's a lot more of a direct line between the undergraduate researchers and the professor, slash pi slash mentor. She is pretty at the beginning of this project. And yeah, at the beginning of this project, I would say she was more hands on, we would meet at least once a week for this project alone, in addition to the normal lab meeting. And so we did a lot of like code development of the beginning of the project. And she knew my progress weekly on data collection. And then when I was making my poster for the URC, she definitely helped a lot with that giving me feedback. And then now that I'm in the writing phase, I would say it's more hands off, just compared to a previous, like hands on this. But overall, I would say she's pretty, pretty hands on and pretty friendly and cumbersome.

Hoang-Vi Vu 7:39

What type of research Did you engage in with it? virtual or in person? And also, if so, like, what does a typical research shift or day look like for you?

Laurel 7:53

Yeah, so the kind of research I do is, I guess you'd call it behavioral public health research with a policy spin. It was in person before the pandemic, but always kind of had the option to be virtual, because it is just computer work. And a lot of our stuff we can do virtually. And so a typical shift would look like either data collection, or an encoding that data that I was looking at, and or analyzing the data in our statistical program. And then a lot of writing, I would say, that's kind of where I feel like a bulk of time is spent because we like to do lots of lots of drafts. And so I definitely budget a lot of time for this practicum I'm budgeting myself a lot of time because I know there'll be multiple drafts to be looked over and really specify what we want to say. Yeah, we this is really awesome.

Hoang-Vi Vu 9:03

Are you a nutrition minor? Are you like, interested in nutrition at all, like career path wise?

Laurel 9:12

So I'm not a nutrition minor at all, actually, which is kind of funny. Um, but I do I do think nutrition is interesting. I definitely have just a personal passion for it. And the other thing that kind of drew me to the lab was the pulse and all policies is like, I think such a cool idea and definitely a potential career path in the future for me, so learning about policy on from the recent health policy from the research and has been really cool. And I do get to apply the nutrition stuff outside of the lab with I also work at health education and promotion. So we talked about nutrition over there, too. So it's kind of cool incorporating all of it together. That's really awesome to see like you bridging that between your like what you do at work and then like your practicum project. Yeah, I like how it's gotten to be very interdisciplinary, which is what gdb is all about.

Hoang-Vi Vu 10:18

So yeah, exactly. gdb is very interdisciplinary. And what experiences and skills have you learned that you could utilize in the future that are like, probably useful for like your intended career path from your practicum project?

Laurel 10:37

I would say, the experience with statistics, which is like, it's kind of like our it's a statistical program, but state is used a bit more in public health stuff. And so learning how to knowing my way around that I think will be really useful. And any other research, or even just, you know, kind of like computing, stuff will be helpful. And then really, the communication, knowing how to communicate my findings, I would say my guys pretty invested in having good, clear and concise scientific communication for both the like, public as well as other scientists. And so I've definitely written in different for different audiences and different formats. And I think that writing experience has really helped in even just in my classes, really knowing how to use my written voice. That's really awesome to hear. And, like so far, what has been like your favorite part of the gdb practicum experience, I would say, just getting to have that, that push and support from gdb to go and do research. And I love how broad it can be. And it's really just about, you know, getting some hands on experience. And in the end, having something that, you know, culminates everything you've done over however long you were researching. I just think that's a really cool concept that I'll have, you know, a potentially publishable manuscript to, like, walk away with after graduating.

Hoang-Vi Vu 12:31

That's awesome. I remember at the beginning of the podcast, you said that you switch your major into gdb? Is was there like a certain reason?

Laurel 12:47

Yeah, I switch. So I switched from cell biology. And I would initiated my switch into something else, I wasn't really sure what it would be yet, was just realizing that it was gonna, it was looking very biotech, heavy centric. And I knew that's not what I wanted to do. So I looked around at global disease as well as human development. But I, I stuck with gdb, because I loved how flexible the restricted electives were, and how you could really, you know, create what you wanted to emphasize them. And especially because, like I said, I wasn't really sure yet what I wanted. So it was nice to have that kind of wiggle room. But once I got into the gdb classes, I like public health didn't really occur to me as a thing before coming to Davis. So just being exposed to that really lit me up. And like, basically told me, my brain, my heart fill my brain then, like gdb is, is the place and the research experience is kind of like a extra little push extra little incentive.

Hoang-Vi Vu 14:05

And before we end, do you have like, one piece of advice for any of the incoming gdb students or gdb students who are still figuring out what their practicum researches? Do you have any like words of wisdom,

Laurel 14:24

I think it's all about time, in both ways, how you, you don't like try not to stress you have time to figure it out. gdb advising as well as most professors really do want to help you out. So use that support, use the support where you find it, and it'll all sorted itself out.

Hoang-Vi Vu 14:50

that's really great advice and so true, especially right now. When there's like so much going on in the world, like our students are probably going to be so excited to hear about these projects, and learn more about like different approaches into research, especially at UC Davis, I can't wait to like read more about your practicum project they found super cool. Thank you once again Laurel.

You can visit gdb.ucdavis.edu to access the rest of the podcasts in the series, or find us on YouTube and Spotify. If you like listening to practicum pods and have suggestions for future topics for the pod, please let the gdb advising staff know at gdbdashadvisor@ucdavis.edu. Thank you everyone and have a great week.