

EPISODE 1 Practicum Pod Transcription

Indira D'Souza 0:11

Okay, so hello, everyone. Welcome to Episode One of the Global Disease Biology Practicum Pods. In this podcast series, we're going to be talking practicum projects with current and former GDB students. All students in the major are required to complete a practicum project before graduation. This product project involves students finding a faculty member mentor, conducting research under the mentors guidance, and turning the research experiences into a publishable scientific manuscript. Tune in to Practicum Pods to learn more about research, mentors, and the GDB practicum experience.

This week, we have Radhika on the show. Radhika is a current student, and their practicum topic is "Assessing the Impact of Acculturation on Attitudes and Behaviors Towards Domestic Violence in Arab Refugees". So hi Radhika, how are you doing? It's great to have you on the pod today.

Radhika 1:15

Hi, I'm good. How are you?

Indira D'Souza 1:18

Good, good. Yeah, easing into the quarter here. So can you tell us a little more about what the topic your practicum project was on? So why does this topic interest you, just tell us a little more about it.

Radhika 1:32

So I think, I think I should start by talking about, like a little bit about myself. So I'm Indian, I grew up in United Arab Emirates, for 11 years of my life, I lived in Abu Dhabi, which is the capital, and then I moved to Dubai, which is probably a place that a lot of people, you know, identify with in this region, they know the Middle East through the, through the lens of Dubai. And so that's where I did all my schooling, you know, as part of my education. I learned Arabic, I constantly, in many different ways, was engaging with the culture in the region. And so that was just at the very surface level, you know, one of the things that made me interested in doing something around this topic, but

more specifically about my interest in doing something like this, I'm very interested in journalism. And so along with some friends, you know, in my freshman year, towards the end, I think it was literally a week before finals, we had a meeting, and we wanted to come up with a platform that was focusing on Middle Eastern North African and South Asian communities, you know, essentially changing the narrative that these communities were boxed into. And, you know, we talked politics, we talk without health

we talked culture, performance, music, and so on. And then I worked, you know, in that publication, and still part of it, for two solid years before narrowing down on my practicum project. And so for a lot of people, you know, it's always like, well, that's something separate that's a student organization, that's journalism, what does that really have to do with their practicum, which is essentially supposed to be a research experience, you know, and I'll be super honest, I tried all sorts of labs, you know, I remember I went to get involved with a cow gestation project. In my freshman year, I thought I was super interested in that. Then I remember going into another lab to learn something around

neurobiology, it was interesting, you know, absolutely, the mind, Center for mind and brain. I was really interested in their work. I also looked at the UC Davis Medical Center. So I was doing all of these different things.

And I thought I was really interested in them, you know, cuz one quarter, you take a class, I was taking class in genetics, I was like, yeah, this is great. I love genetics, I want to do my practicum in genetics. And so I was doing all of those things. But I wasn't really thinking about myself and what I was interested in. But subconsciously, I was still doing this. I was involved with this journalism, that form, right. And then in my third year, in the beginning, somewhere in fall, I started working on a feature piece for the platform. And I was looking at refugees from India, from the 1984 Sikh genocide that happened. So I was talking to doctors, I was talking to filmmakers, I was talking to community members, authors, you know, all different kinds of people trying to gather and piece by piece put the narrative together on PTSD in the community,

Indira D'Souza 4:46
Interesting.

Radhika 4:48
Yeah, on PTSD, multiple depression disorder, and also sort of the socio political climate in which this particular internally displaced population was living in India and then A subsequent outshoot or offspring of that population, which I was interacting with through a student run clinic on campus. Bakshi, which is the Bhagat Puran Singh Health Initiative. So I was trying to work with all of these nighters all at once, how to interact with patients in that sense. I was doing scribing, but I wasn't doing it to be a scribe, I wasn't doing it, to learn the medical behind it or in the medical medical concepts. I was trying to put piece by piece, some narrative in my head of what were the socio cultural factors that might have influenced how people were feeling about their own identity, about their socialization. And just like mental health, you know, on a day to day basis, their sense of belonging. And so I had all of those questions. And then I finished this

feature piece. And I was like, yeah, this is this is something I'm actually passionate about, you know, and then I think it was only in my third year that I took a step back. And I began to reflect on things that actually mattered to myself, I know this answer is getting really long. But I know that reflection piece is really important, because I was in doing that when I was applying, you know, to the cow gestation lab, or the Center for mind and brain. I wasn't really trying to see what matters most to me. And then I realized that, first of all narrowing down which marginalized community I wanted to work with, and how I wanted to use my training in science and my training in GDB. Overall, to fill in some gaps in care, whatever that might look like, for different populations, but at least I had narrowed it down that it had something to do, you know, in the psychiatry, and healing space. So yeah, that's, that's how I ended up realizing that that was the arena I was interested in. And then I took the GDB 187 course where we started emailing professors to kind of, you know, to see if they had research opportunities. And I had heard about my practical mentor, my practical mentor was Dr. Patrick Koga. And he had done a project, actually, it was more of an open space, a collaborative open space with sociocultural anthropologists. So he himself is a medical doctor and psychiatrist, but he had this big space, it was a conference, they got funded, I think this was in 2018. And so I had seen a flyer and gone in, you know, when we were all back in person, I had gone in to learn a little bit more than I hadn't thought much of the experience at that time. Because again, I wasn't in tune with what I truly cared about, right. But I remembered him and I was like, maybe I should send him an email. And so I did that. And he was the second person I had reached out to. And so I just ended up getting the position with him. So, long winded answer but, you know.

Indira D'Souza 8:02

That's super cool. And you kind of touched on the next question, which is how you found your practicum mentor. So I think it's super interesting, how many different paths you took, before you actually did some self reflection, and really thought seriously about what you're interested in. But that's great. That's, that's kind of why we have the practicum project we , we want you to do that kind of self reflection. So next, let's get into the actual research. So I'm wondering, what type of research did you actually engage in? So what did your day to day research while you were completing your practicum project look like? Was it virtual or in person? Observational or experimental? Kind of what is typical research look like for you?

Radhika 8:46

Okay, so um, I will like to say that I was supposed to stop my mind, though, you know, majority of my research just when we all went into lockdown. And so most of my

conversations and interactions, everything was limited to Zoom. Even, you know, all of the primary data work that we were doing, but maybe I should explain the project a little bit before I go into what kind of data was collecting and so on. Yeah, so I spent a little bit of January. So when I was already in GDB 187, just because I had gotten into the research team, I started familiarizing myself with a lot of different concepts that I wasn't too familiar with. I feel like I knew a little bit about it. You know, if you're like in that field of thinking about politics, and all of these topics all the time, you kind of know things, but like, obviously, when you go into research environment, you need to really, really know how they impact the exact community you're looking at working with. And so I started doing that, I started trying to learn more about this broad umbrella term of Arab refugees and seeing what were the waves of migration really for these different communities to come and, you know, I realized that there will be waves where people from Yemen and Syria were coming in because of the wars happening. On other times, there were people coming in from Iran, there were people coming in from all of these different places for different reasons. And each of those reasons, impacted their mental health individually in so many different ways. And then all of the answers that we were getting for domestic violence, and also the construction of a society, and how then they were impacting, you know, the survivors and their access to any sort of legal or community care, all of these answers changed based on, you know, the background of where these people were coming from, and what their societies looked like. And so I spent a lot of the time when I could probably have started my in person research earlier, because there was no COVID at that time, but obviously, we didn't know. So I spent a lot of that time just doing this reading and trying to really understand the social fabric right and then acknowledge, that's when I started the bulk of like, my literature review. And then on the side, I was supposed to be a secondary observer for a lot of the interviews that were happening, all of our interviews were shifted to Zoom and FaceTime. And, you know, looking back now, at some of the data we collected, I think we were kind of restricted for sure, you know, in the kinds of people we were reaching, right, because back in the refugee clinics, if we were meeting people and conducting all of these interviews, and trying to understand, okay, why, you know, why do you inflict domestic violence behaviors on your partner? Or why is this an attitude and so on? Those answers can look very different in person, you know, there's body language that goes into this. There's a lot of silent cues, you know, we need to be observing how comfortable or restless someone is, we need to make them feel at ease. And I think, I mean, this has improved slightly, you know, over the past few months, but back then this whole virtual environment was so new. Yeah. Exactly. And personally, for me, I think it, you know, acts as like,

as a variable in some of the answers, we, you know, ended up working with. But anyhow, what I was trying to say is it restricted us to people who have access to internet

who have, you know, Wi Fi, and who can set up these calls online. And then the good thing still about being this research team was we had the translators and all of that. My conversational Arabic is quite poor. Because when I was here, in school, we used to have people from all different dialects teaching us because I went to an Indian School. And so when it comes to reading and writing, I'm able to do that, which was a skill that I use for translating our forms and responses. But I'm not that good at speaking, admittedly. And so we had a trained psychotherapist, who was doing all of these interviews. And another interesting thing that, you know, came up a lot for us in the research, which was something that I, you know, I didn't necessarily think about before going into this experience was, sometimes people would say, "Yes, I believe that, you know, a domestic violence behavior is something that I should be inflicting, for example, if my partner does not make me good food, I agree that, you know, six out of eight times I should be hitting them". But then they would say things like, "Yeah, but I don't really do it". And then for, you know, us within our team to have conversations on that does not like, you know, where is the gap coming in between an attitude and a behavior. And sometimes, you know, we feel like maybe people are lying to us. But, of course, the virtual environment is putting some of those barriers, people are scared about privacy, people are scared about being recorded in ways that, you know, comes up with their identity and so on. It's very different when you're just filling a form, and it has no names attached and so on.

Indira D'Souza 14:08

Yeah.

Radhika 14:10

But then also the broader questions of, like, that's just something that you have to encounter in the research. And that's why you need to have broad data sets, and, you know, interviewing all kinds of people. One of the things we were trying to look at in this study was acculturation. So, depending on how long people had lived in the US, and people were coming in, I should say, from all sorts of backgrounds. You know, we had people who lived in multiple countries before they finally arrived to the US, people who had fled war, people who had lost family members involved. Like there were probably a couple of people only who did not have these experiences, these really traumatic experiences. And so you kind of have to give your, you know, the people you're working with the benefit of doubt and that was something that I learned, you know, through the process because when you're doing it from a research point of view, you have to be really objective about it. That was something I was coming in with as a student, I was like, "Well, if we know something is wrong, then we should be having conversations with them." And the psychotherapist that we were working with, just because of how practical background she agreed, but then that's not something we can do in research. And that,

again, helped me think about well, is research something I want to go into? You know? Maybe I can still do some writing based on fieldwork that I do. But maybe I want to stay more in the fieldwork sort of arena.

Indira D'Souza 15:40

Oh, I see. So because it's kind of removed from an intervention aspect. Yeah, you were kind of like, I don't like that. Oh, interesting.

Radhika 15:48

Exactly. That helped me learn a little bit about myself.

Indira D'Souza 15:51

Yeah, that's super cool. Okay, so our next question for the just general information about your practicum project. What was your relationship with your mentor? Like, I know, you mentioned that you had worked with him a little bit previously, before you sent an email in GDB 187. So I'm just wondering, like, how often did you meet with with them? Or did you work with a graduate student and a professor or I know, you mentioned psychotherapists. So if you want to talk about kind of the mentorship relationships that you had?

Radhika 16:23

Yes, um, I think we had a really, really close knit team. And I think that, you know, that comes with the fact that we were already meeting online, from when I was initiated into this project, like, right from February, January, that time, we had started with online meetings, you know, and there was a little bit of, I know, a little bit of conversational Arabic component to it. So that ended up working out, my mentor was not a native Arabic speaker, he learned Arabic as part of his research, and so on. But a lot of the graduate students and you know, other students we were working with, within this research project, they spoke conversational Arabic. And so that, like, that's just a quick cultural thing that, you

know, binds you in your research groups.

Indira D'Souza 17:11

Yes, language, for sure!

Radhika 17:12

Yeah, always and then I think we all ended up becoming friends, honestly, like, and then that mentorship was happening all along, like whether it was, you know, in writing a paper, "Oh, I can't find this one paper", when I was trying to do my literature review, I

remember searching for this paper on several different journals, and I couldn't, I couldn't get my hands on it. And I sent a quick email to some of the grad students, and then they couldn't find it, but they were like, here's all of this other data that you might be interested in looking at. And constantly just trying to keep them in the loop really helped, honestly, because I feel like as an undergrad sometimes, and I've done this, you know, in previous, like internships and so on, I just get really intimidated. And so I, even though I want to communicate and be really honest about, you know, if I'm having a difficulty somewhere, or if I need, you know, more insight, I just shy away in the end, but I think that was something like not doing that was something that really helped me build those relationships. At the same time, you know, in Spring Quarter, luckily, my, that graduate student was teaching a class on international health. And, you know, I ended up taking it because I had some room in my classes. So I just ended up taking it, it was really, really good class, you know, we did our project on hepatic dysfunction, and how that relates to COVID-19. And also, what is the racial components of like, who has access to care for these and you know, hospitalization data, who has to stay in the hospital for longer, what policy impacts can this have, and so on.

Indira D'Souza 18:55

Absolutely.

Radhika 18:55

So just taking my class, so then I know a lot of people do that. They end up taking a class with their practical mentors, and all of that. So that I think along the journey just helped me and then my graduate student that I was working with, and also, I was working with an assistant professor, who was working again, under I know, it's super complicated terms of hierarchies, but he was working under the main professor, the main PI, yeah. And he was doing some of the statistical part of, you know, working with this data. And he taught us in the end, how to work with the software and how to interpret all of this,

like macro level data.

Indira D'Souza 19:36

I'm just curious what what statistical software was it?

Radhika 19:39

So we used a little bit of SAS, and then we ended up doing trainings on SPSS as well.

Indira D'Souza 19:46

Okay. Okay. Cool.

Radhika 19:47

Yeah. Trying to understand the difference between the two basically, because some of us in the team were interested in you know, a little more social science versus a little more health aspect. So just getting that training and yeah, like People should ask them mentors for training and all sorts of things if you know, even if it's not directly related to their project, I mean, I got to talk to my mentors about grad school. And I think that was really valuable for me, I was able to get a letter of recommendation from them, just because I was able to build that relationship. But even before getting there, I mean, I remember I called my practicum mentor. And I was like Dr. Koga do not know, like what I want to do. Because I was at this standpoint, last summer where I was like, I'm interested in medical anthropology. But then I'm also interested in social and behavioral health. So and both of these like grad programs, were leading me to study the same thing. Like I've had the same proposed project, but I didn't know which was a better path. And Dr. Koga had experience in both of these areas, and he had some insight to offer. And you know, he was really kind to just jump on to a Zoom call. We spent a couple of hours talking about why, you know, I wanted to do either program, did I want a social science focus? Did I want a health focus that was more STEM oriented? Did I want to work with communities or study the communities themselves? You know, all of these questions about approach that he literally helped me walk through, he helped me pull out this whole list of grad schools and programs that I could apply to people he knew that, you know, I could look into, like, whose work I could look into. And so I think all of these things, and just being honest about how much I didn't know, was what helped me with relationships.

Indira D'Souza 21:41

Awesome. Oh, that's so cool to hear how he was able to work with you like that. That's great. So now we're gonna go into the the last section of our questions. I have three questions here. I'm just going to pick one. So I'm going to ask what was your favorite part of the GDB practicum experience? What What did you like the most?

Radhika 22:04

Um, I think my favorite part of this experience was working with people who, who were really invested in studying with communities and not studying communities, I think, was not from, yes, that was not something I saw a lot in, you know, different kinds of STEM spaces I was in, when I was doing maybe community work through RSOs. Or like I was in my social science, anthropology classes. This is interesting, because I'm taking an ethnographic research methods class right now. And we're talking vastly, you know, about what it means to engage in sort of Eurocentric ethnographic methods. And I'm so happy that when I look back at my GDB practicum experience, even the tool we

designed so our research team designed a tool to assess these attitudes and behaviors in communities once we had established the research gap, right. And the whole tool, it was 24 questions for attitudes, 26 for behaviors, this whole tool was really built in focus groups, you know, constantly back and forth.

Indira D'Souza 23:15

With people in the community.

Radhika 23:17

Absolutely. And it wasn't as community members who had power, you know, I think being cognizant of those power dynamics, it wasn't just, you know, Arab and Afghan doctors or Arab and Afghan lawyers, it was even actual people, you know, all the refugee clinic patients who used to come in the survey has been shown to them, and they've been brutally honest about it, they've given feedback. And then this team has taken feedback, and you know, worked on it to really create something that is representative of what people are feeling in the community. And I think this comes from just the nature of in which you know, Dr. Koga's team has built. He works closely with Dr. Sua Joseph, who runs the Arab Media Project. She does some really cool stuff. She has a media lab. And she's looking at social cultural anthropology representation of Arab women. You know, she has a bunch of projects through the UC Davis Arab region program. They even have partnerships with all of these Arab universities. And so they're really cognizant about, you know, maintaining the social fabric in that sense and going into a community not with the purpose of studying it or writing something about it, but studying with the people and doing things with the people.

Indira D'Souza 24:35

Thank you so much. Radhika go for chatting with us about your gdb practicum experience. Sounds like you had a really great experience with supportive, supportive team, and you really got to know them well. So that's really great. And I'm glad that you were able to self reflect on your interest and talk about grad school. So our students are so excited I know to hear about these projects and learn how to approach research in this large university setting. So for GDB students, you can visit gdb.ucdavis.edu to access the rest of the podcasts in this series and we're planning on having about one per month as of right now. You can also find us on YouTube and Spotify. If you like listening to Practicum Pods and have suggestions for future topics or kind of branches that we can explore of the university please let the GDB Advising Staff know. You can email us at gdb-advise@ucdavis.edu. So thank you, Radhika. Thank you, everyone, and have a great week.

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