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Julia Rubin  
*Roger Williams University*

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A Summer with National Center for Transgender Equality

Graduating Senior Phoebe Thaler spent this past summer working to support the rights of those most vulnerable in our community.

Thaler with one of the Legal Interns at the “Families Belong Together” march.

October 5, 2018 | Julia Rubin

BRISTOL, R.I. – Phoebe Thaler ’19 spent her summer running around D.C.— from her office to protests, to rallies, to Capitol Hill. As an intern at National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE), no two days were the same. “The Supreme Court would hand out a decision or something would be happening on The Hill or the president would do something,” Thaler says, “and they’d just be like, ‘interns, get in an Uber—we’ll pay for it.”

In addition to attending pivotal events in the capital, Thaler learned about the innerworkings of a nonprofit organization, was invited to all staff meetings, and worked on several important long-term projects from different departments.

Thaler describes one of her largest projects, which focused on the Healthcare Rights Law, a provision in the Affordable Care Act that protects all different marginalized groups from discrimination in health care. She created a list of trans-inclusive health care providers across the country, helped organize a “Protect Trans Health” rally, and produced educational materials on the topic.

Additionally, she worked in NCTE’s ID Documents center, which provides individuals with information on how to change their name and genders on federal documents. She helped prepare a publication filled with helpful tips to make the process more accessible. She also did outreach to improve NCTE’s connections with allies and advocates in the U.S. territories in order to learn about their policies and work on bills affecting their populations.

At RWU, Thaler majors in Political Science and American Studies, with minors in Gender and Sexuality Studies, and Anthropology + Sociology. She is interested in the ways that feminist, queer, and race studies intersect with politics, policy, and culture.

On campus, she serves as Assistant Director of Programs and Leadership for the P.E.A.C.E program, a social justice peer mentoring program. She is also Executive Secretary for the Sexuality and Gender Alliance, a campus wide LGBTQ+ organization that runs multiple programs throughout the year, such as Coming Out Week, Pride Week, Trans Week of Remembrance, and Drag Queen Bingo.
Thaler has taken interdisciplinary classes on her interwoven interests and has had plenty of hands-on leadership experience on campus. Last summer, she interned at Senator Tammy Baldwin’s office on Capitol Hill. After having in-class, on-campus, and political internship experiences, she wanted to view the issues she cares about through a nonprofit lens.

She came across the National Center for Transgender Equality as a major social justice organization working for trans policy, advocacy, and public education for trans folks so she applied. Working in this space was profoundly impactful, both personally and professionally.

“I haven’t yet figured out the words to describe what it is to work in a place full of people like you, but it was just amazing to be in that space, to be focusing on work, but knowing you’re going to have support from everyone around you,” Thaler says.

A sense of safety, belonging and support allowed Thaler and her colleagues to advocate for some of the most pressing policies of our time, all through a framework of trans equality.

“We worked on so many different issues—healthcare, education, immigration, criminal justice, sex work, state policy, documents,” Thaler says. “On top of that, we worked to make sure the most vulnerable in our community were also covered in what we talked about, by intersecting issues with race and class.”

Along with being personally, professionally, and socially impactful, Thaler’s experience at NCTE helped her clarify her career goals.

“Thinking about the last two summers in D.C.,” she says, “I decided I definitely want to do human rights policy work, particularly around trans issues and then secondarily around queer issues, women’s issues, issues for folks of color, and I do want to be in D.C., and I’ve also decided I do want to work in the nonprofit side at least to start off.”

Hands-on experience helps students find work that aligns with their passions after college, says Assistant Director of the Center for Career and Professional Development Alexandra Finney. It also helps students narrow down their interests.

“Phoebe has an advantage, from her real-world experience, in the fact that she knows how different professionals, offices, and industries work. She has a higher level of personal insight into what she likes and does not like about her chosen field, because of her exposure to the workplace,” Finney says.

Thaler notes that her experience with NCTE helped her develop countless workplace skills, such as networking, maintaining a calendar, sending professional emails, and taking meeting notes.

“You make so many connections and gain all these real-world skills that really supplement what we do in school,” she says. “I would recommend for folks to get any internship experience they can.”

Looking for an internship? RWU’s Center for Career & Professional Development can help.