

Final Summer IHRP Internship Report

Submitted by Steven Hoffman on 19 September 2008

Working for the World Health Organization this past summer was extraordinary. My work was rewarding, challenging and inspiring, and proved to be one of the most valuable learning experiences of my life. The opportunity to engage in meaningful, hands-on work in an international context has brought new relevance to my academic studies. Already I am finding that this new perspective has permeated my legal studies.

My department at WHO is dedicated to tackling the global health workforce challenge. It is well-recognized that the current bottleneck for the provision of health services in many places is the severe scarcity of health professionals who are trained to deliver this care. Maximizing the contributions of each health worker is no doubt one way to help mitigate this challenge.

My contribution to this global effort has been to manage WHO's Global Programme on Interprofessional Education and Collaborative Practice which aims to promote effective teamwork among health professionals. Working together, health professionals from different disciplines can build upon each others' strengths and enhance the quality and cost-effectiveness of the care they provide. While WHO currently estimates a global shortage of 4.3 million health professionals, we hope that the hardships of this gap can be lessened by providing health professionals with the tools to collaborate more effectively with their peers.

Managing a global project in this area means that I have had to draw upon my knowledge of both international health and interprofessional collaboration issues to link experts and policymakers between these two distinct fields. Working as the programme's Project Manager, the specific tasks I

completed each day varied quite substantially: I coordinated logistics for the project team, prepared communications tools, managed a global survey, liaised with international partners and served as the project's primary contact person. I also helped write reports (including a major one that is to be published in November 2008), drafted guidelines, provided technical advice and articulated policy options for WHO's Member States. Integrating this project into the organization's core programming was a top priority to ensure the sustainability of this effort and maximize its long-term impact. Strategic planning also occupied a significant portion of my attention. Finally, my role as Project Manager took me to Brussels (European Union), London (Department of Health, England) and Stockholm (International Interprofessional Education Conference) to both advocate for teamwork in health care and promote WHO's efforts in this area. The conference in Stockholm was particularly exciting for me as I gave part of a keynote address that was attended by hundreds of educators, researchers and policymakers from around the world. Meeting with representatives from the Japanese International Cooperation Agency to pitch a multi-million dollar project on behalf of my supervisor (who was on sick leave at the time) was also thrilling.

The ability to devote my full attention to this project over a summer provided for several unique learning opportunities to further understand how international organizations operate and improve my communication, project management and advocacy skills. This experience will no doubt enhance my future legal studies by giving me a greater understanding of how international law is actually carried out in practice.

I am grateful to the International Human Rights Program whose support has allowed me to contribute to this important project and has facilitated this incredible experiential learning opportunity. It really was a terrific summer!