Sustainability in Salt Lake City
Edited by Emily Pritchard

Kara Colovich, an Environmental Studies major with a minor in Climate Change Studies, interned with the Division of Sustainability within the Salt Lake City Mayor’s Office. Not only did Kara have the opportunity to apply concepts from her classroom to the field, she also had excellent networking opportunities during the internship. “The most rewarding parts of working for the City were all of the opportunities to connect with the other city departments and stakeholders within the city.”

What types of projects did you work on during your internship?

“While interning for the Division of Sustainability, I had many opportunities to be involved in a broad array of experiences. From attending high profile events with key city stakeholders to convening with local businesses to learn how to improve their carbon footprint, I attempted to be involved in everything I could. Along with attending city events, I was able to take responsibility for my own projects. I created a Sharepoint website for the Salt Lake City Fire Department’s Fire Chief’s Challenge which focuses on improving building energy efficiency throughout all 14 fire stations. It is a platform in which program administrators and employees can track progress, make suggestions, and receive feedback. I also contributed to the development of a city-wide community climate change program. This program would allow individuals, neighborhoods, community organizations, and other entities to engage in actions that lead to a less carbon intensive lifestyle.”

Why did you decide on this internship? Why Salt Lake City?

“I took on this internship with the City’s Division of Sustainability because after taking the class Sustainable Cities at UM I became inspired by how cities across the world are making progress on issues of sustainability. Salt Lake City seemed fitting because I had family connections, it was a bigger city but not too big, and while it is not renowned for being sustainable, the city is taking substantial measures to become a leader in this area. Being under the direction of a progressive mayor in a conservative state was also an interesting experience.”
How did you get connected with this opportunity?

“Honestly, I simply browsed the internet for internships with city governments around the Rocky Mountain west in cities where I had family. I wanted to spend more time with my family and the projects available with the Salt Lake City office fit what I wanted to do. It was a perfect fit. My suggestion is for students to use connections they have, such as family members, to explore different places.”

Did anything exciting or surprising happen during your time there?

“The week I arrived at the internship the city was to be hosting a grand kick-off event for the Environmental Protection Agency’s *Project Skyline Initiative* that the City and other large entities had signed onto. It was such an important event that Gina McCarthy, head of the EPA and my personal superhero, came to welcome the city into the program. While I did not get the chance to personally meet McCarthy, the fact that I got to be in the same vicinity as my idol was good enough for me.”

How has your participation in this experience impacted your life as a student and as a person in general?

“Through my experience I was able to take an area of interest in the classroom and put it into practice. I brought up discussion topics we had had in class to people who work in the field to hear their perspective therein gaining a more holistic view to prevalent issues. Internships and volunteering are great ways to find what interests you (or doesn’t interest you) and you become connected with opportunities otherwise unavailable.”

Were there any challenges with doing an internship in a different state?

“Most of the interns were from the universities and colleges in Salt Lake City so they had different school schedules than UM which made our starting dates different. Those students in Salt Lake went through an in-person interview which would have been a good experience and received orientation which I was not able to attend.”

What advice would you give other students considering opportunities like this?

“I would especially advice Environmental Studies students to think outside the box when considering internship or employment opportunities. Keep up to date with trends in the workforce to discover new job opportunities.”

Did this experience open any doors to other opportunities? Did it impact your career goals?

“Yes! I discovered that I want to learn more about the communication of climate change and planning for sustainability on a neighborhood scale. Through my research for the City I found a conference in Washington D.C. this September that focuses on doing just that. It will be an opportunity to network and learn from other cities, planners, businesses, etc. in this field.”

“The internship reinforced by career goals in the sense that I know that I want to work with cities/towns on issues of sustainability but maybe not necessarily within a city government (at least for now). My current path is to look deeper into sustainable development which integrates social, environmental, and economic aspects into urban design.”

Describe your internship experience in one sentence.

“This internship was a great way to see how my interests in the classroom can be applied in the real world and helped me identify skills I need to be competitive in the workforce.”