

**Works at:**

Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD)

Position Title:

Policy Fellow

learn about the diverse projects I will be involved in and one of the most important projects I will be working on is informing the policy division staff on the impact of Head Start education staff qualifications on child outcomes. My main role will be to examine past research on this topic and converse with Regional Program Managers to learn about how education staff qualifications are impacting the quality of Head Start. Doing this work is necessary in case of a reauthorization of the Head Start Act that could shift the current teacher qualifications which requires 50% of teachers to have a bachelor's degree.

What Graduate School Did You Attend and What Was Your Research Focus?

I attended The Pennsylvania State University. While at Penn State, I pursued my PhD in the department of Human Development and Family Studies. My research broadly focused on how cultural, familial, and individual level factors promoted Latinx adolescents' academic outcomes. As I moved through grad school, my research interests stayed the same, but I became more interested in using my research to inform policies, programs, and practices to promote Latinx youth's long-term academic attainment and well-being.

What Organization Are You Working With Now?

I completed my PhD summer 2020 and now I am serving as an AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of the Sciences)/ SRCD (Society for Research in Child Development) Federal Executive Branch Policy Fellow. For the fellowship, I am placed in the Office of Head within the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

What Do You Do As A SRCD Policy Fellow?

I am currently a month into my fellowship, and I want to preface that the goal of this fellowship is to learn how science and policy intersect to inform policies and programs in the federal government. I am starting to

How Long Is Your Policy Fellow Position?

My fellowship position is for 1 to 2 years.

What Was The Process Of Being Selected As A SRCD Policy Fellow?

The process of being selected as a fellow involved submitting a personal statement, CV, and three letters of rec in early January. After I submitted those materials, I was invited to do an in-person interview at the SRCD office with the selection committee, as well as quick, short interviews with the potential offices looking to place a fellow. After the in-person interview, I was informed that I was finalist for the fellowship. Once, I knew of my finalist status, I participated in individual phone interviews with all the placement offices and then I waited a few weeks to be offered my official placement.

What Do You Hope To Do In The Future?

Prior to the fellowship, for two summers I interned at different offices within the U.S. Department of Education and I fell in love with federal service. After the fellowship, I plan to secure federal employment whether it be within the Administration for Children and Families or making my way back to the U.S. Department of Education.

What Was Your Favorite Part Of Your Graduate Schoolwork And Your Current Policy Fellow Position?

My favorite part of grad school was the community I was able to build, especially at a predominately white institution. I know the focus of the question is on schoolwork, but I think schoolwork is going to be similar across institutions and what sticks out to me in my memories of grad school is my community. I am a first-generation Latina, who grew up in Arizona most of her life. Moving to Penn State was no easy task, but I knew I had to get the best training to serve my community one day. In the process, I was able to build my community of other woman of color with who I got to share all my hardships and successes with; without them I do not think grad school would have been the same.

So far, the favorite part of my fellowship is knowing that the work that I am doing will have an impact on the Head Start programs which serve so many children around the country, particularly Latinx children; but also, the warm and brilliant people I get to work with during my fellowship.

In What Ways Did Your FSHD Classes, Internships, And/Or Research Experiences Prepare You For Graduate School And Your Current Position?

My FSHD RAship with Dr. Curran and extracurriculars were the experiences that helped me prepare for graduate school. I think being connected with other students and working with faculty on research projects helped me learn what grad school would be like. These experiences gave me the necessary foundational research skills; whereas connecting with my peers through clubs and coursework gave me the confidence that I needed to pursue a PhD. Prior to college, I had no idea what a PhD was and having these experiences taught what a PhD was, and I gained a vision that I could also get a PhD to best serve my community one day. I am sure if you went back and asked my fellow FSHD grads in the 2015 class, they would all tell you that they are not surprised I went on and got my PhD. I also like to tell upcoming students that it's not the actual coursework and internships that give you clarity of your next steps, but the skills you gain from these experiences and the relationships you build. These are

the aspects that you will always remember and will continue to serve you as move through positions.

Any Tips You Would Share With Students Interested In Pursuing Similar Paths To You?

The best tip I could give anyone is to follow your heart. If pursuing a particular career or degree seems right to you, then do it. The "how to do" something is going to vary person to person and the only thing you can truly be sure about is the vision you have for future self and career. You also do not have to have everything figured out right now. I remembered in my years as an FSHD major I shifted my plans a lot about what I wanted to do post BS, but when I stopped trying to figure out a specific track I wanted to pursue and focused on my broader "dream vision" of the life I wanted for myself everything started to fall into place.

A second tip I have for you all is that if you are not sure if you even want to pursue graduate school post BS then take your time. I have seen plenty of people work for a few years and then their "dream vision" becomes clearer after they have had time to actually be in the field. In my case, everything fell into place, so I went straight into a PhD program. In my graduate program, I did have to do more digging to figure out what I wanted to do post PhD and even now I am going myself the space to figure what kind of position I want after my fellowship.

A third tip I have for you all is do informational interviews with graduate students or people in the careers you want to pursue. You can learn so much about the position, about someone new, and expand your network while you are at it. Never be afraid to reach out to connect with someone because you would be surprised at the amount of people willing to connect with you and share their experiences. I have had plenty people reach out to me over Twitter (complete strangers) and I am always more than happy to connect if you want to reach to me.

Finally, remember there is room for all of us to be successful. We all have unique talents and gifts to share with the world. Your only competition is yourself. Surround yourself with people who lift you up and help push forward in your vision for yourself and career.