Honors Enrichment Award Reflection- Madison Gardner (Spring 2018)

Participating in alternative spring break was an incredibly transformative experience that I feel greatly enhanced my education thus far at Colorado State University. During the trip we focused on issues of food justice, agricultural sustainability, and the interconnection of food with social issues such as homelessness in the Portland area. All aspects of the trip connected with my areas of study here at CSU: ecosystem science and sustainability, environmental affairs, and economics, giving me a more holistic view of the ecological and social issues surrounding food.

We worked with multiple small organic farms and farming-community collaborations on the trip including: Veganville, Able Farms, Greeley Forest Garden, and Outgrowing Hunger. Working with these farms and community organizations allowed me to better understand the ecological, social, and economic components of sustainable small-scale farming. At each of these various organizations and locations I was able to interact with community members, perform manual farm labor such as weeding and harvesting, and ask questions to further my knowledge on community agriculture. Collaborating with these organizations broadened my knowledge on agriculture and community systems and gave me a stronger background on food production that then contributed to my overall learning during the experience.

In addition to agricultural-centered organizations, we partnered with some organizations that worked directly with the homeless population in the city of Portland. These organizations included: JOIN (an emersion program), St. Andre Bessette Food Pantry, Dignity Village and Food Not Bombs. At these organizations I was able to talk one on one with homeless individuals in Portland to hear their perspectives, see what kind of food is available for homeless individuals in the city, and tour what kind of housing options and rehabilitation communities there are for people experiencing homelessness in the Portland area. Visiting and engaging with these organizations gave me a greater appreciation for the social issues associated with food and housing and gave me a new perspective on the social, agricultural and economic nexus.

One of the main focuses of the trip was food sustainability. We sought out vegan restaurants, locally produced foods, and small businesses. Doing so allowed me to get a better look into the ways in which food decisions can impact local and global sustainability efforts. I am very interested in this topic and am planning on writing my honors thesis on the social and ecological impacts of switching to a fully plant-based diet so getting this first hand experience really inspired me to start my thesis and gave me some great background knowledge on the subject.

Not only did this experience enhance my core curriculum education at CSU, but it also helped aid in the planning and narrowing of my honors thesis, and allowed me to meet some incredible new women. I feel as though I got a great deal out of the trip and I hope to do another alternative spring break through the SLICE office next year as well.
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Below are some photos from the trip:

(At Veganville farm)
(Laying down burlap at Greeley Forest Garden)
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(Digging water retention trenches at Greeley Forest Garden)
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(With former houseless individuals who have gotten back on their feet at JOIN emersion program)
(Shoveling mulch at an Outgrowing Hunger low-income community garden)
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(Serving a home-cooked vegan meal to people in need at Food Not Bombs)