

Kate Clouse - South Africa

Summer Internship: Durban , South Africa

This summer, I worked for three months at the Reproductive Health Research Unit (RHRU) in Durban , South Africa . RHRU is an official research entity of the University of the Witwatersrand 's Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, and maintains offices at Chris Hani Baragawanath Hospital in Johannesburg (Soweto) and in central Durban . While involved in over 40 research and training programs, RHRU's mission is to be an internationally renowned academic institution respected for its contribution to the field of sexual and reproductive health and HIV, and bridging gaps between policy, research, and service delivery.

The prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS among women at antenatal clinics in KwaZulu-Natal , the province that contains Durban , was recorded at 36.5% in 2002, and over half of all deaths in the province are attributed to AIDS. In response to this problem, RHRU's major ongoing projects include the national female condom study. Since the launch of the female condom in 1995, South Africa , largely due to RHRU's efforts, has been at the forefront of the world's research into the acceptability of the female condom, as well as its distribution via the public sector. Other ongoing studies include testing for the re-use of the female condom to increase its cost effectiveness as well as testing couples' experiences with new prototypes of the female condom for future design improvements. Additional studies relate to RHRU's close relationship with loveLife, a national program aimed South African youth to reduce HIV infection, STIs, teen pregnancy and other high-risk behaviors.

Throughout my internship, my goal was to experience as many projects as possible and to gain exposure to varying concepts of reproductive health. I worked on the following ongoing projects:

- Edited and contributed significant writing to an analysis of hormonal contraception to be submitted to *Contraception*
- Created original paper on emergency contraception to be submitted for publication



Female Condoms

- Wrote summary report of two studies of commercial sex workers in Gauteng province to be submitted to funders

Having completed one year of my master's program, I was very happy to see how readily I could apply my newfound skills and knowledge to my everyday work at RHRU. My early understanding of family planning methods and epidemiological study designs was certainly strengthened – and lots of practical experience with biostatistics, putting to work what I learned in the classroom at Berkeley .

Simply living in South Africa was a life-altering learning experience. Since the country is struggling with such a devastating crisis, I learned a lot through my interactions with the large, vibrant community of public health workers and academics in Durban . I took every opportunity to join my RHRU colleagues on visits to rural clinics and I learned more about HIV/AIDS through my daily experiences than I ever could have in a textbook. As a coworker put it one day, “Everyone here is either infected or affected.”