Understanding Health Promotion Partnerships between Communities and Faith-Based Organizations  
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This summer I began data collection for my senior Health and Societies thesis—an analysis of health promotion in faith communities. These health promotion programs arise for faith-related reasons (e.g. a moral obligation to take care of the body) and practical considerations (e.g. the proximity of churches to populations with high levels of chronic disease). In my thesis, I am exploring which factors influence program development in the faith community, particularly formal or informal partnerships with health organizations. The project involves thirty minute interviews with the health program coordinators to learn what their programs involve and why. After completing the interviews this fall, I will use a software called NVivo that organizes interview transcriptions to analyze the bigger themes in the data. These themes will form the basis for thesis chapters, which I am situating with an analysis of related scholarly literature.

Through this research experience I have been able to synthesize my theoretical literature review with the development of practical research skills. For example, I am learning to use NVivo software, the standard program to conduct qualitative research. I also am developing my interviewing skills—including phone interviews, which enable more confidentiality and convenience for participants. Even though I have worked as a research assistant in several community-based projects, I have learned how to combine the skills from those experiences in my independent project.

As I finish my senior thesis, I am increasingly interested in pursuing graduate work in public health. This project has allowed me to apply the two research methods courses I have taken as part of the Health and Societies program. These classes included theoretical concepts like the development of research questions but also practical concepts like survey creation. Through my thesis project, I am able to apply both kinds of knowledge and finally manage a research project from start to finish. I am grateful to have this experience as an undergrad and look forward to creating the end product this fall—a fifty page honors thesis.