

Elizabeth James GNBCC Internship

Since this was my first year being apart of the GNBCC internship, I didn't exactly know how my summer would be, but I enjoyed every moment of it. I applied to this research internship because I was very interested in learning more about the harmful chemicals in our environment that can lead to diseases such as breast cancer. It was also important to me to learn about the preventative measures we can take against breast cancer, especially living in a place where the rates for this cancer are really high. Another reason for applying was because I find research to be fascinating and I wanted to take part in an actual study. Because of COVID-19, we had to move to zoom meetings, but that did not affect our learning and I enjoyed the experience very much!

Dr. Laura Vandenberg was our professor throughout this internship and she is a great teacher. In the beginning, we learned the basics about the human body, cell mutations, different risk factors, pollution, and the environment. With this, we were able to get an understanding of what parts of the body can be affected by a certain chemical and how the environment plays a big role in this. After this, we moved on to Dr. Vandenberg's research that she has done, specifically involving mice and exposure to chemicals. She showed us how certain parts of the body (mammary glands) can be affected, the behavioral changes that occur, and how it can affect their offspring. I found that learning about this was eye opening because mice have a lot in common with humans and we are also exposed to these different chemicals on a daily basis.

Towards the second half of this internship, we started to focus more on creating a PowerPoint, infographics, and animations to help inform others on how they might be affected by different chemicals now and later on in life. Each of us got to pick a chemical to research more about and create the infographic/animation on. I chose butyl benzyl phthalate, a chemical that's found in a majority of plastics around us. To help us, we got to see the work of Dr. Vandenberg's undergrad students and how they went about creating their work. They were extremely helpful and had so many great ideas. By creating my PowerPoint, infographic, and animation, I was able to learn so much about BBP. I learned how much we can be exposed to and how it can affect our body in the long run. Through my research about BBP, I was able to pinpoint who my audience was and I based my infographic and animation off of this.

Overall, I loved every part of my internship and all of the information I was able to learn in this period of time. Although we had to make some changes due to

our current situation, I enjoyed the entire experience. I'm so grateful to have given the opportunity to be apart of this research internship with Dr. Vandenberg and hopefully our work will be able to inform and change the lives of others.