



RELATIONSHIPS IN RESEARCH

Student Reflections from Bass Connections GANDHI

By Sophie Haet (Trinity) and Brittney Sullivan, MS, CPNP, PhD (c) (Nursing)

Sophie's Perspective

As an undergraduate, most research papers and projects that I have worked on have entailed Googling a topic and synthesizing other people's research into a paper. The conclusions I have drawn have never been completely new or supported by my own first hand research. GANDHI provided me with the opportunity to supplement my undergraduate classroom learning with hands on experience through collaboratively working on a research project from the ground up. Writing a research proposal, identifying stakeholders, reaching out to potential interviewees, interviewing, transcribing, coding and presenting novel findings, have been incredible learning experiences that have significantly enhanced my Duke education.

While my other undergraduate courses have facilitated my development of strong writing skills and the ability to synthesize and draw conclusions, GANDHI has helped me develop my communication skills, and respond with flexibility to unforeseen "hiccups," as they arise in real time. During my time working with GANDHI, I have developed the ability to respond maturely to bumps in the road, and effectively change the direction of a project. Communication has been a key theme for our project team. I had previously been unaware of the crucial role of strong relationships and networks in the research process. Throughout GANDHI it has become increasingly evident to me that maintaining strong relationships, with in-country partners, stakeholders, researchers and project team members, is vital. The large group dynamic of this project team, with members of varying backgrounds and experiences, has provided me with the opportunity to network and collaborate with subject matter experts and health care workers I might otherwise have been unable to access. One member of our team, a biomedical engineering graduate student, put the team in contact with Dr. Reichert, who shared with us his experience working with in Uganda. Another team member, completing a MBA at Fuqua, is working on a cardiovascular health system transitional care project at Duke Hospital with Dr. Bradi Granger (School of Nursing). As an advisor to GANDHI, Dr. Granger spoke and met with our team. This was a particularly meaningful experience, as it brought home the real world applications of the research we are conducting. Learning of the potential for research on transitional care models to positively impact Dr. Granger's patients at the Duke Hospital, highlighted the relevance and significance of the work we are doing in GANDHI. Connections within our project team, and between team members and their external networks, have facilitated the effective work of our research to date.

I believe working on real world problems are important components of a well-rounded education and necessary for academic and personal growth and development. Because of this research experience, I feel more prepared for my entrance into the workforce next fall. For both graduate and undergraduate students, Bass Connections and for us GANDHI provides an invaluable resource for developing research skills, as well as furthering existing research abilities. Students with varying levels of research experience, have the opportunity to collaborate on research. Additionally, we continue to witness the significant and vital relationship between research and communication, both within and outside of the project team.

Brittney's perspective:

Our Bass Connections GANDHI Team, as well as the GANDHI-Child and Adolescent Health (GANDHI-CAH) project team, have created the opportunity for incredible research collaboration across

disciplines and education levels. As a doctoral candidate looking forward to my defense this spring, I reflect back on the multiple teams I have been a part of during my time at Duke. While the majority of my time is now focused on my dissertation and with my committee, it can get lonely doing dissertation research. Nothing about participating in GANDHI, however, is isolating or done alone.

Last year when we realized our group for GANDHI was made up of incredibly talented, albeit busy, students. The team agreed to meet weekly at 7am on Mondays. Scheduling conflicts included medical school rotations, physical therapy clinical hours, undergraduate wet labs, competing work schedules, a broad array of extracurricular activities, and personal commitments including conference attendance and travel. Lightly put - this was a busy group of 21 individuals! Yet, the common denominator was that each person was so motivated and committed to the work that we chose to meet collectively before sunrise and before Duke buses were even operating. We carpooled and called to wake each other as the days got shorter but even with a call-in option, if we were in town we participated in person. The early morning meeting time was also convenient for our international partners in other time zones who would connect with us via WebEx or Skype to discuss their research and how they became involved with GANDHI.

Facilitating collaboration for a research network across continents had its challenges. Beyond navigating time zones, we could not always depend on easy communication. For example, our first call with an Argentinian partner had multiple interruptions from unstable internet connections and multiple callbacks. Despite the much-appreciated technical help from Duke Global Health Institute IT support (thank you Lee Walls!), a 50-minute call consisted of about fifteen minutes of productive conversation. Email is more reliable but it also is not as prominent in other societies as our own for establishing relationships. In addition to the introductions our country partners made for us to others, we became skilled in connecting with others however we could—Facebook, LinkedIn, and even Twitter.

Flexibility and establishing relationships were key ingredients to this team's productivity. We had a wide range of research skills and experiences across our diverse group and we had to learn more about each other to appropriately pace progress toward each goal. Our different skill sets naturally lent to opportunities for peer mentoring as we came together to develop research protocols, interview guides, and work (mostly in Google Docs!). These interactions highlighted the importance of developing relationships and getting to know one another and our external collaborators before starting each project. Dr. Janet Bettger assigned us ten 'networking activities' over ten weeks to improve our confidence in reaching out and connecting with others. We practiced our professional 3-sentence "elevator" introduction when Dr. Michel Landry joined our class. We had Dr. Karrie Stewart join us to discuss and role play stakeholder interviews both in person and via phone. We had large and small group dinners (usually potluck) hosted at classmates' houses. Through these seemingly small interactions we gained trust and respect for each other's perspectives, and got to know each other on a more personal level. Collectively, this shaped the work we were able to do as a group and the skills we will bring to teams in the future.

Sophie Haet is a senior in Duke University's Trinity College of Arts and Sciences.

Brittney Sullivan is a PhD candidate in the School of Nursing and doctoral certificate student through the Duke Global Health Institute.

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