FOCAGIFO (Friends of Canon Gideon Foundation) Internship Report

The organization I interned for is called FOCAGIFO (Friends of Canon Gideon Foundation). The organization was essentially founded to save the life of Gideon Byamugisha and consisted of his friends who raised money to provide him with medicine. The organization succeeded in that goal, and Gideon dedicated his time to giving back to FOCAGIFO. In following this objective, he established the Hope Institute many years later to educate at risk populations in vocational skills, thus allowing them to become either entrepreneurs or have good employment opportunities. The Hope Institute currently offers vocational courses in six departments: Motor Vehicle Mechanics, Fashion and Design, Carpentry and Joinery, Electrical Installation, Beauty and Cosmetology, and Catering and Hotel Management. Upon completion of the various courses, all students are given start up kits such as tool boxes, sewing machines, and salon equipment to help them get started in creating their own businesses. The Institute has thus far graduated over 1300 youths since 2007 and many are now employed or own their own businesses.

My responsibilities throughout the summer included addressing issues such as “poverty, youth unemployment, socially sanctioned violence, HIV infections, AIDS related stigma and discrimination and AIDS related deaths” and relaying proposed policies and ideas to a “global online community.” The tasks and projects I undertook while being there contributed greatly to addressing and fulfilling these responsibilities. The entire first week consisted of reading hundreds of pages of material and policies regarding HIV/ AIDS, attempted solutions at
addressing problems, who were the most at risk populations, etc. This material helped me greatly to understand the situation in Uganda. After gaining the knowledge through reading, I was able to apply the knowledge at a meeting in which over twenty NGO’s attended to discuss the problems they were facing in addressing the HIV/AIDs issue in their various districts. Many of the problems listed in the reading appeared and even more that weren’t. Some districts had no access to testing machines or adequate storage for blood samples. Members of the Ugandan AIDs commission were present in order to ensure the problems were taken to the national level to be addressed. These tasks took up the first two weeks of the internship. In expanding this portion of the internship, every week I taught a group of 20 to 30 students about HIV/AIDs and the various ways to prevent the virus. The classes were very engaging and consisted of fun activities such as races, so the students didn’t feel bored while learning. Teaching lasted throughout the entire internship. Besides teaching, the next few weeks were focused mostly on the online portion of the internship. In this aspect, I was able to contribute greatly. I successfully established online donations to the organization. Before, the organization did not have an online banking system, so donations were limited to in person/ mail. People can now donate from all over the world to the organization, as long as they have a debit/credit card. I also succeeded in establishing a fundraiser, so the organization can take advantage of the new online system to fund various things that the school may need. An example could be textbooks, or something along those lines. While I was there, the website of FOCAGIFO was also restored, so I was able to heavily edit the website and make new sections. (focagifo.net) I added the donation tab to the website and the “Their Stories” section. Their Stories was another project I
undertook and it focuses on video interviews of students, graduates, and staff to explain their life stories and how FOCAGIFO has impacted and improved their lives. Many of the students were orphans or had lost one of their parents. Their stories were very touching and I wanted to share them with the world. In order to do this, I also started the FOCAGIFO YouTube channel. I was able to get 5 students, 6 graduates, and 2 staff members while I was there. The staff members at the organization will continue this channel now. One of my tasks was to establish an online blog called the Choose Hope Campaign. This blog consists of a news section to continuously update people on the activities going on around the organization. It can be found at www.chooseshopecampaign.wordpress.com

This internship contributed to my career goal of becoming a diplomat because I was able to establish relations at the local level with numerous organizations and I now have an understanding of the issues they deem important. I believe this is a crucial aspect of our international approach, because we’d know the various problems each district is facing and if we’re addressing those issues, they’d be more accepting of our assistance. I believe I have made a big difference here, and my commitment to becoming a diplomat has become stronger. I am extremely grateful for this opportunity and all of the people I was able to meet and help.