

FEATURED STUDENT OF THE MONTH

January Experience at the Gates Foundation

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My winter break highlight has been job shadowing at the Gates Foundation for around two weeks (1/4/11 – 1/19/11). This "January Experience" outside campus made me think more about soft skills which were not explicitly taught on campus.

I worked on a small project when I was visiting the Gates Foundation, preparing a backgrounder on public financing for health in Nigeria. First of all, I am convinced that what I have learned through concentrating on Health Systems is closely along the line of what practitioners search for in global health. However, reports relating to program implementation are quite distinctive from academic papers. For example, the first page of report is of importance to attract your boss's attention for further communication to the rest of the report. Furthermore, an interdisciplinary perspective helps more than a single angle to capture the challenges and opportunities even for a technical question such as how money flows inside three tier governments in Nigeria. Works by economists, political scientists, and anthropologists provided me with a vivid picture of the health financing system in Nigeria. Thinking broadly helps to sharply identify the key point in diagnosing prominent problems.

Meanwhile, I was moved by the commitment and dedication of professionals in global health to improve living standards in the developing world. It seems that all of them at one time or another had been attacked by international bugs and had extensive field experience in developing countries. When the Carter Center as a grantee of the Gates Foundation presented the project on Guinea worm eradication in Africa, the senior program officer shed tears while watching the documentary. I am sure she was deeply involved in the project, intellectually and emotionally. Furthermore, I felt the passions of mid-career professionals when they were sharing about opportunity maps on the job market and making a road map to reach the destination, even though no direct value was apparent for them from their interaction with me. These one-on-one interactions with seasoned professionals meant a lot to me, a student in the middle of a doctoral program. During conversations over lunch or at coffee time, I was impressed by how engaging and light-hearted they were during their daily work. Surprisingly, at least to me, a sense of humor was listed as a strong requirement for employment. Maybe as people who laugh are contagious with their positive outlook, having a sense of humor is a big plus from the employer's perspective.

