

TAYLOR BLAIS, 2019 Recipient of the President's Grant for International Community Development for a three month stay in Fiji.

I spent three months in Fiji in Summer 2019 doing an internship at a feminist grassroots organization called the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM). Their vision is "For Women of Fiji to be free from all forms of discrimination, have equal access to opportunities and live in a healthy environment where the principles of feminism, democracy, good governance, multi-culturalism and human rights prevail." (<http://fwrn.org.fj/15-all-category/about-us-purpose/constitution/78-constitution>). I've always wanted to work for an organization internationally that works with young women and girls. I learned more about sustainability in the international field at FWRM, where I worked as an intern for a communications officer, doing social media posting, transcribing, interviews, making infographics, etc. During my stay in Fiji I worked on three main projects.

The GIRLS (Grow, Inspire, Relate, Lead, Succeed) Program:

This program was built to combat the double discrimination that the girls face. It introduces girls to human rights education, gender, and feminism, using sports that are traditionally male dominated in Fiji such as soccer and rugby, as well as arts such as photography, writing and theatre.

Fiji Budget Analysis:

When the new Federal Budget of Fiji was released on June 7th, 2019, I prepared spreadsheets, infographics and analysis of the impact of cuts on girls and women. My findings were presented at the Annual Planning Retreat of FWRM and my infographic was the Top Media tweet on our page for the month of June.

Pacific Connections: A three-day workshop on Community Filmmaking for Gender Equality in the Pacific:

This workshop included filmmakers from Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Samoa, academics from New Zealand, Australia and Scotland, and large international development corporations such as UNWomen, the EU, and the British High Commissioner. The goal was to share information on projects, find commonalities, and seek funding for new projects.

IMPACT OF MY TRIP:

Learning about art's impact on social justice was as huge lesson for me, helping me to realize that there are many kinds of activism used around the world. I also learned so much about how to be a feminist during my time in Fiji. I even changed my major to Women and Gender Studies when I returned, because I saw the work that I could do by looking at the world through a gendered lens, and how feminism is global and needed everywhere. Many women around the world face similar struggles, but it's the context of the struggles that changes from place to place. I also learned how corporations such as the UN function compared to a grassroots organization such as FWRM. My experience was not perfect by any means, but I came back with a much greater perspective of the world, and more secure goals for my future studies and career.