

Center for Rural Strategies Scholar Reviews (available on Robertson Connect)

Charlie Zong (Duke '22)

Rural Strategies is an open-ended internship with highly experienced mentors, where your interests will help guide which projects you work on. There are significant opportunities to gain experience with journalism and writing, policy analysis, marketing, technology, data analysis, and other areas. The organization runs a digital newspaper, the Daily Yonder, convenes annual leadership conferences called Rural Assemblies, and is launching a national rural news platform. I wrote articles for the Daily Yonder and helped analyze and present data from a Daily Yonder reader survey. Additionally, I took a trip to DC with a local non-profit to cover a coal miner healthcare demonstration (more on that below!).

Merrit Jones (UNC '21) (No comments provided)

Rose Farah (Duke '20)

I spent the summer working for the Center for Rural Strategies in Whitesburg, Kentucky. The organization is a nonprofit that focuses on rural development through a variety of media and communications campaigns. My work included conducting interviews and publishing an article for The Daily Yonder, the organization's digital newspaper; building the organization a new website from scratch; organizing board and foundation meetings; and working on a variety of research projects and grant proposals.

I valued the opportunity to learn about rural development in a post-coal economy and to gain a deeper understanding of the role of journalism and storytelling in that development. I also valued the opportunity to surround myself with a variety of new perspectives, through both the Whitesburg community and my fellow scholars. Finally, I valued the opportunity to live in an environment that is naturally less stimulating than Duke or New York City (where I live), which allowed me to achieve several personal goals.

Vishnu Ramanchandran (UNC '19)

Worked with Facebook on bringing high-speed Internet to Whitesburg, created a data visualization tutorial, and wrote articles about digital literacy.

After an initial meeting with Dee and Teresa, I felt lost, and many people do. But, reach out to Vicki and older scholars, but most of all, look for a need that you can fill. Propose projects that will challenge you. You will come out of the summer with much better direction.

Claire Boyd (UNC '18)

I really loved working for Center for Rural Strategies with Dee and Teresa! It was such a relaxed work atmosphere and I learned a lot about rural policy issues and just the grassroots organizing scene that Whitesburg has to offer.

CRS does a great job of giving you options of what to work on -- whether that's writing for the Daily Yonder, working for Whitney regarding the Rural Assembly, or creating a job for yourself that you think would help the organization. One component of the this type of work environment is that you have a lot of freedom, but it's important that you set goals and expectations for yourself if you want to make the most out of the experience.

Nadine Goldberg (Duke '16)

The Center for Rural Strategies is a nonprofit organization that works to improve the social and economic conditions of rural communities through innovative media and communications. Rural Strategies's specific activities vary depending on the project at hand. For the first half of this summer, the focus was on the National Rural Assembly, which was a convening in Bethesda, MD of over 200 individuals representing organizations that share the Center's passion for strengthening Rural America. I had the opportunity to attend the conference as a staff member, and also participate in a Public Narrative workshop for young professionals that preceded the event. Following the Assembly, Rural Strategies shifted its attention toward fundraising for future projects.

My responsibilities/tasks included:

- Writing articles for the Center for Rural Strategies's online daily news site, the Daily Yonder
- Planning and implementing the Center's social media efforts during the National Rural Assembly
- Creating a report with recommendations for increasing the effectiveness of the Center's social media efforts

My internship at the Center for Rural Strategies was extremely self-directed. From day one, the staff asked me what I wanted to work on and offered suggestions, rather than assigning tasks. To make the most of a summer at Rural Strategies, make sure to take time prior to your arrival to think about what you would like to get out of your internship and how you can best contribute to the organization. We were a little upset at first that we did not have a car because we had heard older scholars talk about all of the amazing trips they had taken during their summers in Whitesburg. I realized quickly, however, that what would make my summer great was not the places I visited, but the people I befriended. Whenever you can, take the opportunity to get to know the people in the Whitesburg community; they have so much to teach you!

Alex Bloedel (Duke '14)

The Center for Rural Strategies is a non-profit group that, through the use of innovative media tools, aims to change national policy and public discourse about rural issues and improve socioeconomic conditions in a diverse set of rural locales. One of CRS's primary media outlets is the Daily Yonder, a daily online newspaper focused on rural topics. For the past four years, CRS has organized the National Rural Assembly, a conference that brings together rural advocacy groups and aims to create a cohesive and inclusive rural policy agenda. Most of my work was for the Daily Yonder, covering diverse issues such as mountaintop removal, education and education reform, and rural broadband access. I also attended the National Rural Assembly, where Bill Bishop and I covered the conferences through both informational and thematic pieces. I also drafted some short policy letters to the Rural Assembly listserv and helped with preparation for the Assembly.

The most important thing to keep in mind is that your experience is entirely what you make of it. Rural Strategies offers a relaxed, informal work environment and a surprising amount of autonomy. Dee and Teresa are certainly there to help you in any way they can, but they won't hold your hand and direct you at every step, either. Almost everything that you do has to be self-motivated, so I would recommend this position especially -- and even exclusively -- to those who are eager to take charge and chart their own course.

I highly recommend that you familiarize yourself a bit with local history and issues before starting work; a great way to do this would be to peruse The Daily Yonder before arriving. If you're feeling ambitious, pick up a copy of Bill Bishop's book, The Great Sort. You'll learn a great deal as you go along, but some context for the stories you'll be working on will help save some time up front.

The highlight of the internship for me was going to the National Rural Assembly. It was a nice change of pace from Whitesburg life and was an enlightening peek into the full scope of what Rural Strategies is working toward. If the timing works out, I highly recommend that you ask Dee and Teresa to go with them.

Jeff Sinclair (UNC '15)

I wrote articles for the Daily Yonder, the online newspaper sponsored by the Center for Rural Strategies. The Center for Rural Strategies is a nonprofit focused on rural development and advocacy. The Daily Yonder is the online newspaper they sponsor that focuses on rural issues. My job mostly involved working for the Yonder, which was journalistic, but I did get involved in some policy work with Rural Strategies. Responsibilities:-Cover anything that the editors request; this was always fun and reasonable-Search out interesting article topics-Write articles--<http://www.dailyyonder.com/author/jefferson-sinclair-Engage> with the staff--discussions, socials, etc.-Optional: get involved with some policy work

Travis Crayton (UNC '13)

The Center for Rural Strategies seeks to improve the economic and social conditions of rural Americans through the utilization of modern media and communications tools. CRS also publishes the Daily Yonder, which is an online newspaper specializing in coverage of rural America, and works with other nonprofit organizations through the National Rural Assembly with the overall goal of forming a cohesive rural agenda to advocate for at the national level. Notes on my personal experience at CRS:- I started off writing for the Daily Yonder, essentially covering any story related to rural America of interest to me.- However, I moved on from journalism to more policy-oriented work with the National Rural Assembly, including:+ Drafting policy rationales for new issues under consideration by the Assembly+ Writing email communications to be sent to the Rural Assembly listserv and National Rural Youth Assembly listserv+ Organizing and synthesizing Rural Assembly participant information vital to the Race & Reconciliation project

The Center for Rural Strategies is an incredible work environment. It's a very laid-back office, and Dee and Teresa are incredible people more than willing to talk to you, answer your questions, help you out when you need them, and give you stimulating work that YOU want to work on.

If you're looking for a very hands-on, outdoors-oriented kind of summer, then CRS is not for you. It's a lot of time in the office, so if you want solid office experience in journalism or policy, then CRS is a PERFECT fit for you.

Also, please note that my job title is misleading. "Journalist and Documentarian" is NOT all encompassing for my work. Yes, I did some journalism, but when I talked with Teresa and Dee about doing more policy-oriented work, they were happy to oblige. If journalism is your thing, then trust me, you'll love Rural Strategies. If it's not, but you're interested in communications or policy, then you'll also love Rural Strategies. Dee and Teresa are both very flexible, and there are a lot of opportunities at CRS.