

Ashley Comstock

CSU Honors Enrichment Award: Pre-Health Alternative Spring Break

I used the Honors Enrichment award to help fund my participation in an Alternative Spring Break trip focused on rural health and medicine. Participating in this trip was an amazing and transformative experience, and I am grateful for the opportunity. During the week-long trip, I and 11 other pre-health students traveled to Alamosa, Colorado, where we learned about different aspects of medicine and health care in a rural community.

As most know, there is a general shortage of healthcare providers. This problem is especially prevalent in rural communities, where they have limited access to health services, due to various factors including distance and lack of specialists, among other things. Therefore, this trip, composed solely of pre-health students, sought to explore the different aspects of rural medicine and learned how vital it is to have an increase in healthcare providers in rural and underserved areas.

During our first full day in Alamosa, we volunteered with La Puente- a nonprofit organization



Chopping wood for La Puente

dedicated to serving both the homeless community and those in need in the San Luis Valley. They provide various services, including a shelter, food bank, family services, and a wood service. The wood service is what our day of volunteering focused on—chopping and delivering wood to families and individuals so that they could

heat their homes and stay warm. We also visited the shelter and kitchen and met several

individuals that La Puente serves. It was eye-opening to hear their stories and hear about their lives and what they have had to overcome.

On day three, we visited Memorial Hospital in Colorado Springs to learn about forensic nursing, in addition to visiting Peak Vista to learn about their approach to community health. Day four involved us visiting several non-profits and community businesses in Alamosa, including the Food Bank, a local co-op bookstore, and a food/farming organization.

Our second, fifth, and sixth days in Alamosa involved shadowing at the San Luis Valley Health/Hospital. Each student on the trip shadowed a specific specialty; I shadowed primarily physical therapy, but also cardiology and chiropractic. During our days at the hospital, we were able to ask the healthcare providers many questions about their field, along with what it is like working in a rural setting. Everyone at



Our group during our last day of shadowing at the San Luis Valley Hospital.

the hospital was incredibly welcoming towards us, and it was a fantastic and educational experience. It has definitely persuaded me to potentially work in a rural setting after graduation from Physical Therapy school.

I am extremely grateful to have been a participant on this amazing trip. This trip exceeded all of my expectations, and truly opened my eyes and allowed me to gain a new perspective of healthcare. Because of this trip, I sincerely hope to work in a rural setting one day, and to help fill the void of healthcare providers in underserved areas. A special thank you to the Honors Program for helping to finance this life-changing trip. I returned from spring break with even

more passion to work towards my goals, and to one-day work in an underserved area and/or with an underserved population, because of this trip.