

In mid-June, Mike Saunders took me on a tour of Boston University's Medical Campus. Boston summers are quiet. The pandemic made this summer even quieter. You could hear a pin drop in the buildings on BU's Charles River Campus. In retrospect, it was eerie, but after two semesters of LFA, we all had gotten used to the stillness.

Which is why the Medical Campus kind of freaked me out. It was busy. When we walked into the Instructional Building, I saw throngs of students, professors, researchers, the works. It felt like looking back into my freshman year, which was the last time I had seen an academic building with people inside.

Mike, the multimedia director at the School of Public Health's Communications office, wasn't fazed. The medical campus never really shut down in the wake of COVID, he explained. In fact, the campus almost never closes, even when the rest of BU does, such as on a snow day. There's a hospital to run. Medical students always need to report for their clinical rotations; researchers need to be in their labs. Public health and medicine involve people and patients—they're fields that need to happen "on the ground." The medical campus includes the largest safety-net hospital and trauma center in New England, a biosafety level 4 laboratory, and the South End neighborhood of Boston. You get the sense that you're in the so-called "real world" as you stand there and watch ambulances rush by.

The internship took inspiration from the campus. It also felt like something from the "real world." There was no hand holding; it was nerve-racking at times, and it felt great. This is how it worked: Mike would send me a researcher's name or the link to a new journal article, along with some variation of: "write something!" I'd interview the person and read the scholarship. A week later, I'd email him back with a one-thousand-or-so-word article. The process was in my hands. I had to familiarize myself with the subject matter, schedule interviews with people, come up with questions, figure out what I was actually going to write about, decide how to frame the article, and so on. The whole thing was very open-ended. As it needed to be: any other setup would have been too artificial.

To be sure, Mike and the rest of the SPH team were well-involved. He gave me great edits on all my pieces. I'd meet with him every few weeks to check-in. It might not sound intuitive, but the latitude and distance Mike gave me made me feel *more* connected to the SPH team. I didn't want to feel coddled. I wanted to do work. I take it as a sign of real respect when people are willing to let you flounder for a bit as you find your bearings. It shows they believe that you're independently capable of the task at hand.

There are so many good things to say about the SPH internship. I won't write a laundry list, but I'll sum up the details: the work was refreshingly real, it was challenging, it was fascinating, it was invigorating. I got paid to interview exciting people and write about emerging public health scholarship. There's not much more I can ask of a summer.