

A Summer with Boston University School of Public Health's Communications Team

In my first week with SPH's Marketing and Communications Department, the team sat down to discuss the impending SCOTUS decision on federal protection for abortion rights. At the time, no one could be certain when SCOTUS would deliver the decision or which way it would go, but the odds were grim. Senior Director Cara Willis began the meeting by posing the question: why is it important for the SPH community to hear from us when this decision comes out?

The MarCom department runs the school's website, social media, press outreach, and publications like SPH This Week and SPH This Year, serving as the voice of the school. Recognizing that reproductive justice is a public health issue and one that SPH community members care about, the team made an action plan ahead of the SCOTUS decision. Within a week, Roe v. Wade fell.

The MarCom team immediately gathered comments from students, alumni, faculty, and staff, and put together a deeply meaningful Special Issue of SPH This Week. The school community processed, grieved, raged, and encouraged one another through the reflections they shared. Communication channels like social media and SPH This Week became avenues for the school to emphasize how this decision will exacerbate health inequities and to reaffirm SPH's commitment to reproductive justice. It was an honor to witness the team's thoughtful and mission-driven approach to public health communication early on in my internship.

I worked under Mike Saunders and shadowed Mallory Bersi on the Editorial Team. They shared insights on how to interview, how to build a tight story, and which pitfalls of academic writing I should avoid to be a more effective journalist. Mike trusted me to dive right in, and my first assignment was an alumni profile of Shenaaz El-Halabi, who reports to Director-General Tedros at the World Health Organization. After interviewing her and putting together a draft, Mike worked with me through several versions until we had a piece that could do justice to her inspiring career.

Mike made an effort to learn about my interests in public health and encouraged me to explore article topics in those areas. I also got to contribute to communications planning from a student perspective, sharing feedback on existing channels and areas for improvement. As an SPH student myself, I appreciated the opportunity to get involved with the school behind the scenes and connect with faculty and staff across departments. I learned almost as much from doorway conversations and sitting in on meetings as I did from writing articles.

Through this internship experience, I have expanded my communications toolkit and look forward to applying these skills in other public health related settings.