

At the beginning of summer, I knew that I wanted to work on a project related to biology, chemistry, or psychology because those topics have always interested me. I found my mentor through UConn's staff website and emailed her after reading about her work on contingency management and other behavioral research. I thought that her research was interesting and impactful, especially since it focused on improving people's quality of life.

Throughout the year, my mentor and I met every Tuesday on zoom to discuss how I should progress. Before starting the data analysis, I spent a lot of time reading the literature to better understand the topic. I was kind of glad that my topic was easy to understand and straightforward. I also helped choose which questionnaires and variables would be used in the secondary data analysis. One challenge was that our original hypothesis was different from the actual results. At first, this was disappointing because it differed from so many other articles that I read, but I learned that unexpected results are important in research. I also struggled sometimes with the software used for the data analysis because it could be difficult to use, for example, if you forget or don't select something, it skews all the results. Another challenge was finding enough articles about people with HIV who also experience chronic pain and mental health issues. Managing my time was difficult at times. Early on in the school year, I procrastinated and waited until the last minute to complete some assignments and work. Over time, I got better with planning ahead, but I would still find myself procrastinating.

This experience helped me improve my communication skills and taught me what it's like working with a professional/researcher. I learned how important it is to be respectful, prepared, and considerate of other people's time. I also became more comfortable asking questions when I didn't understand something instead of staying quiet.

Presenting at the STEMposium was one of the best parts of the ARM program in my opinion. Before the event, I was nervous that I wouldn't know how to answer questions, but once I started presenting, I felt confident talking and elaborating about my work and contributions. One of the most memorable conversations was when someone came up to my poster and shared that they had an autoimmune disorder. They told me that they were glad research like this was being done because it could help many people in the future, and it really reminded me that research can have a real impact on others.

Looking back, I think I could've taken the program more seriously at the beginning and prepared better for assignments and presentations. If I could do ARM again, I would stay more organized and pay closer attention during meetings with my mentor. Overall, this experience helped me become more confident with public speaking and gave me a better understanding of what research is like. My advice for future ARM students would be to manage their time well and choose a mentor whose research truly interests them, not just the first person who says yes.