

“#OnlyatGW” is a phrase that is more often used ironically than seriously. In coming to pursue my Master’s in Public Health at GWU, I made it my mission to take advantage of as many opportunities as possible. Thus, when the application for the CareerQuest trip to San Francisco popped up in my inbox, I knew I had to give it a shot. After a couple rounds of selection, an interview, and a few weeks of waiting, I was selected to join this exclusive and qualified cohort.

As we prepared to depart, I began to wonder if the trip would actually benefit me. The list of companies we were visiting, like Facebook, Gap, and USBank, ostensibly did not align with my experiences or my degree in public health. Only the Chan-Zuckerberg Initiative and Genentech appeared to be viable options. All the same, I was still grateful to be selected and looked forward to my first trip to the West Coast.

The staff from GW Career Services planned almost every detail perfectly. As participants, all we had to do was make sure to wake up on time, grab breakfast, and gather for our daily briefing before being ferried off to our first site of the day. Our first, and one of my favorite sites was Airbnb. We were able to tour their beautiful headquarters in South Market and received an incredibly thorough presentation from a GW alumna. It was a slight shock to see the stark difference in work environments. Compared to the East Coast, the West Coast offices are generally more laidback, free, and more collaborative. Just from the Airbnb office, I was astounded with the amount of energy and people walking around. It seems like the perfect place to work.

The rest of the sites for the week varied in terms of content and space. We toured smaller firms, like Kiva and Milliman, to billion-dollar industries, like Gap Inc. and Facebook. Facebook’s campus was by far my favorite; every possible amenity is free for all their employees, from 9 different food spots to a barbershop! Our last visit to the Chan-Zuckerberg Initiative proved to be the most productive in terms of my future career. As a public health professional, I hope to help increase the wealth and health of the population without having to sacrifice my personal life or salary expectations. As a nonprofit with a corporate budget, CZI sits in the perfect sweet spot. I was so glad to see the amount of youthful energy, collaboration, and productive spaces in their office. Additionally, all of our tour guides were extremely nice and helpful, and I cannot wait to connect with them in the future. Hopefully, I will be able to utilize this CQ experience to land a job there!

Overall, the CareerQuest experience morphed into something much greater than I originally expected. At first, I was underwhelmed by the chosen companies and did not think I would benefit. However, the program opened my eyes in a different light. First, it exposed me to the culture of the West Coast. San Francisco is a beautiful city, and I can totally see myself moving and working there in the new future. I now believe that I am much more suited for the West Coast corporate vibe than the East Coast. Secondly, CQ taught me that I should not focus too heavily on careers that my degree dictates. All of the skills that I am gaining are extremely transferable, and I should not limit myself to just one industry. Through this experience, I was able to witness how my skills could play out in different sectors. This was also reaffirmed through my interactions with the numerous alumni, that I met at the networking event, who shifted careers. Overall, I am so grateful for this experience and the effect it has had on guiding my future personal and professional experience. This #OnlyatGW experience is not ironic in any sense, and I highly encourage everyone to apply and participate!