

IAP Externships: Introduction to the Field of Energy Program Evaluation

Guest blogger: Dr. Jacqueline Berger '89, President of APPRISE

Extern: Kimberly Li '12

“Welcome to APPRISE!”, we said to Kimberly Li '12 when she walked into our office in Princeton, New Jersey on a cold January morning. We had been looking forward to introducing Kimberly to our staff and engaging her in various aspects of our evaluation research. Little did we know how much of an impact Kimberly would have in our office in such a short time.

APPRISE is a nonprofit research institute dedicated to collecting and analyzing data and information to assess and improve public programs. Our current research includes work for federal and state governments, agencies, utility companies, and nonprofit organizations. During the course of Kimberly's month of work at APPRISE, she participated in five very different projects and learned about the role of program evaluation in the field of energy efficiency.

On her first day of work at APPRISE, Kimberly assisted with the launch of a survey for a large state government agency. The survey addressed the impact of energy efficiency programs on workforce development. In addition to participating in the briefing of the phone center interviewers, Kimberly was responsible for monitoring the telephone surveys to ensure that the surveys were conducted in accordance with the research protocols. This work allowed Kimberly to observe some of the challenges that arise when designing and implementing efficient and effective telephone surveys.

Kimberly also had the opportunity to assist with the design and preparation of a research report on another survey project. This survey also focused on workforce development, but for a national energy efficiency program that serves low-income households. Kimberly was given the survey instrument and survey data to review and tasked with designing preliminary tables for the report. While preparing these tables, Kimberly was able to review the survey data, think about the importance of different results, and design tables that would most effectively present the findings. This experience allowed her to understand some of the analytical issues that we face in our research.

Another project that Kimberly was involved with was a lighting and home electronics field training with APPRISE staff. The training involved an information session to discuss different types of home and commercial lighting fixtures, as well as a mock audit of an actual home. The results of this training will be used to determine future training methods, as well as the protocol for home audit visits.

While we were very excited to introduce Kimberly to the field of program evaluation and survey research, we were also pleased to learn of the technical skills that she brought with her. One such skill was her knowledge of website design and development. We asked Kimberly to review the APPRISE website and to make suggestions as to how to make it more aesthetically pleasing. Kimberly was very forward thinking and made suggestions to not only improve the look of the website but to improve the ease of navigation on the individual web pages. During the month that Kimberly was working with us, she was able to design and implement a large number of improvements for the APPRISE website.

The final project that Kimberly was involved in at APPRISE drew upon her Architecture background. We asked Kimberly to help us review options for workplace dividers. Kimberly looked at our needs and worked with vendors to provide costs and specifications for various options. She organized the information for APPRISE managers to help them evaluate the costs and benefits of the different approaches.

Kimberly was involved in all of the above projects in the span of four short weeks, and she did it all with a smile on her face. It was a wonderful and rewarding experience for APPRISE, and Kimberly reports that it was for her as well.

