

"During my time as an intern with the Office of Diversity and Equity (ODE), I had the opportunity to participate in projects that promoted mental health awareness, stigma reduction, and cultural competency.

I assisted with Faces of Hope, a photo exhibit project whose goal was to reduce the stigma of mental illness in San Mateo County. The exhibit showcased 15 San Mateo County residents' photos and stories of hope while living with mental health and substance use challenges, and was displayed in eight public locations throughout the month of May.

Throughout the process of preparing for the exhibit, as I assisted with both participant and location outreach, I developed skills in project management and professional communication. I learned to be adaptable and to maintain focus on long-term goals. I also developed skills in various software programs relevant to the project. The most rewarding part of Faces of Hope was establishing new contacts at county clinics, city halls, and city libraries, and receiving positive feedback from the community.

Besides Faces of Hope, I assisted in the PRIDE initiative with a postcard project to enhance clinician competencies while working with individuals who identify as LGBT, and supported the San Mateo County PRIDE event at San Mateo Central Park. Through both experiences, I learned how to efficiently organize projects and community events.

I am grateful for my experiences at ODE, and I feel confident that these experiences have strengthened my abilities to engage more effectively and strategically in public health advocacy. In the fall, I will enroll in the Masters in Counseling Program at Cal State East Bay. I look forward to sharing ODE's mental health awareness and cultural competency programs with the Counseling department at CSUEB."

*-Catrina Gotuaco*