The following project proposal was created by a community partner of the Upstate Institute to describe the way they would like to engage with a Colgate student this summer. The research project proposed will be a full-time research project conducted by a Field School Fellow this summer. Below, the partner describes their organization and the research project, as well as a statement of benefit derived by the community for this project. The proposal also mentions logistical considerations and required skills for a student interested in doing this work.

For the Good, Utica, NY
https://www.uticaphoenix.net/for-the-good/

The black/white health gap remains a major challenge even as increasing numbers of Black Americans have improved to adequate health care services. Research has demonstrated that access to medical care has failed to have a significant impact on reducing racial health disparities. This finding led researchers to posit that these disparities may be a function of place\(^1\). That is, the prevalence of health disparities may be a function of where people live. Utica’s Black community is largely confined to inner-city neighborhoods that are food deserts. Could it be that where Utica’s Black community lives, as well as its racial make-up and social economic status, is a major contributor to its high obesity-associate morbidity and mortality rates? If place is a driver on health disparities, how can members of this long-neglected, disaffected population be assisted in reversing this trend that limits the quality, as well as the length of life of its members. For The Good proposes launching program for Black adolescents that attempts to answer this question. The program will be centered on using For The Good’s Community Gardens to demonstrate to Black youth that by cultivating the gardens, learning to prepare nutritious meals using the fresh produce they grow, they develop healthy lifestyles and become promoters of the health and well-being of their families and the community members. For young adolescents living in a disenfranchised and disaffected community becoming the fresh food champions of for their community holds the potential of being transformational by being empowering and saving lives.

**Will the cultivation of community gardens help local youth avoid becoming obese, or tackle the onset of obesity?** If early adolescents become community gardeners will they become advocates to healthy eating within their families and within their communities? If we follow these children over the course of a year will they be inclined to return to the community gardens for a second summer? What will their weight and health status be one year after the project’s start? Does participating in cultivating a community garden alter eating styles or food preferences? Will this educational program have a lasting effect? Does participating in cultivating a community garden alter eating patterns or food preferences?

It is one thing to tell kids that obesity leads to morbidity and mortality, it is quite another to provide them with the tools they need to keep themselves from becoming obese and developing chronic disease. We believe that this summer program will introduce Utica’s youth to the knowledge and effective tools that will assistance them in leading healthy lives. The youth who participate in this project will plan, plant, nurture, and harvest their crops in the community gardens. Our specialist in obesity and nutrition will conduct
seminars on health and nutrition. An app will be developed so that the youth track their intake of food and determine if there are any changes from their baseline measures of weight, height, blood pressure, and blood glucose level. Following the photovoice\textsuperscript{2} technique the youth create a documentary on the sources of food in their neighborhood, what, when, and where they eat as they spend their time in the gardens and participating in seminars on nutrition and health. When completed the youth will present their report to local leaders to inform of the risks they encounter in their daily lives and the benefits that result from community gardening and health education. There will be a follow-up session in the late spring of 2020 to discuss and evaluate if there are long term benefits to participating in the community garden and becoming informed about the health issues.

Community gardens have been successfully used to improve the health status of communities\textsuperscript{4} By increasing the young’s access to healthy foods is known to have a transformative effect on community health\textsuperscript{5} such transformations will have will be of economic benefit for the community as FTG works with it to break the cycle of generational poverty and the effects of institutional racism.

For The Good, a 501(c)(3) non-profit community development agency established in 2002, focuses on catalyzing and facilitating local efforts to break the multi-generational cycle of poverty by educating, informing, advocating change in the lives of residents of Utica’s historically poorest and most neglected neighborhoods. Over the years this community has lost all agency investment youth and community development. FTG Community Gardens provide fresh vegetables while serving as a vehicle for addressing matters of nutrition and health for residents of food deserts where chronic disease and early death is common. FTG’s Study Buddy Club breaks the generational cycle of academic failure of at-risk youth by offering a college campus-based program of tutoring, mentoring, and social and cultural enrichment while exposing the participants positive experiences as they build the academic and social skills needed to succeed. Over time, students become more confident, resilient, less defensive, and begin to dream of futures beyond their neighborhoods. FTG energizes and informs this community with its monthly paper, the Utica Phoenix, and the new Utica Phoenix Radio, Inc. By addressing the community’s is reanimating this underserved population. Our purpose is to provide an increasing range of targeted programs that promote community revitalization as individuals and families overcome the legacy of disenfranchisement, social exclusion, and despair endemic to Utica’s failing neighborhoods so that through their own efforts residents, both young and may transform themselves into dynamic, effective contributors to a healthy, equitable, productive, and inclusive city.

This project provides FTG with another avenue of approach to engage community members in a process whose central goal is to transform Utica’s poorest neighborhoods into vibrant and equitable communities.

The student’s participation would be $\frac{3}{4}$ time. The student would supervise the youth in the gardens and audit the seminars presented by Onama Collins, FNP-C, our obesity specialist. Remote work would include the evaluation of the data download from the participants
health logs and the photographs. Supervision of the student would be provided by Cassandra Harris-Lockwood the Director and CEO of FTG, Susan Braider, MPH, and Onama Collins, FNP-C FTG staff will be available to provide support and guidance to the student, to research and answer any questions that might come up, and to resolve any issues that might develop.

It would be helpful to have a photographer or graphic artist to advise the youth as they prepare the photovoice assessment of the nutritional status and needs of the community.

Working with the FTG team in Utica will provide a student who is interested in matters of health, equity, and social justice with a hands-on experience working with disadvantaged youth. It is shocking for those of us who come from more privileged backgrounds to observe the impact of entrenched racism and generational poverty. Working with the data under the supervision of Susan Braider and Onama Collins, FNP-C the student will learn to determine the effectiveness of the program that is embedded in the numbers the app collects. Creating the Photovoice documentary will inform the student of how youth see their community and, it is hoped, to catch a glimpse of what the community can become when its members are exposed to enabling programs such as working in the community gardens and enjoying the fruits of their labors.


