The purpose of my summer research was to assess the problem of obstetric violence in Brazil, while also evaluating current interventions and awareness movements. My main focus was on the Stork Network - the first, most funded, and most integrated intervention within Brazil. The concept of obstetric violence, or “dehumanized care” as it was often referred to as, has been both widely acknowledged and socially accepted throughout Brazil. It was assumed going into this project that the numbers of this problem and extent of the problem were both underreported and underestimated. It was also assumed that while the public health response was present, it was insignificant or struggling to make an impact. My purpose was to explore these assumptions, and current interventions in progress, to create a written document illustrating the size of this matter and the programs currently working to halt it. The last component of my research project involved me assisting the planning committee of the Fifth International Women’s Health Conference that was to be held in October 2015.

The main organization leading the humanization of healthcare movement is The Stork Network (Rede Cegonha) – the organization I was able to work with throughout the summer. The strength of this organization lays in the multifaceted approach it takes in regards to obstetric violence. The most unique component of this approach is the emphasis that is placed on public policy and governmental piece. This branch of the Stork Network sends representatives to speak at public forums, writes proposals of
change to medical schools, and works to recruit academics and professionals throughout the medical, obstetric, biological, academic, anthropological, and public health fields. There is also a direct link from the Stork Network to the Ministry of Health that works to systematically change issues impairing the humanization of childbirth and healthcare. It was impressive to see that this organization worked so extensively and diligently on a political level to make systemic change. It is common that public health interventions work solely on a community and/or individual level. This multifaceted approach greatly assisted the Stork Network’s success by allowing them to make widespread changes throughout the country in favor of humanized care. An example of the Stork Network’s political success would be the laws implemented in 2005 (but newly re-evaluated in 2014) that legally allow women to have a companion at their side during the birthing process.

The most powerful aspect of this countermovement is the combative social movement that has evolved in response to the atrocities and inhumane treatment being committed against women throughout the country. The social movement within Brazil was found to be the most extensive component of the intervention efforts for this issue. Social media was targeted through independent films, YouTube clips, Facebook pages, Instagram posts, and a presence on Twitter. While speaking with people throughout Brazil, most Brazilians had heard about obstetric violence, knew someone who experienced inhumane care, or had witnessed an awareness campaign on social media. The people of Brazil are keeping the fight alive through protests, parades, and marches throughout several cities such as: Rio de Janeiro, Brasilia, Belo Horizonte, and São Paulo. When asked, many academics involved in the humanization front said that it was
the push and strength of the social movement that was keeping the fight against obstetric violence alive and thriving.

It was evident that the efforts at the Universidade de Brasilia and the efforts of the Stork Network serve as a beacon of hope for academics and researchers worldwide who are pushing for a more humanized healthcare system. While in Brasilia I met academics from countries such as France, Mexico, Canada, and Portugal – all of which were in Brazil studying the interventions taking place to combat hyper-medicalization. Although well known and effective in their efforts, the Stork Network does not have many publications or a complete evaluation of their efforts. I am currently working on a publication that will illustrate the extent of the issue of obstetric violence, while also describing the success and limitations of the Stork Network.

The last component of this project was to assist with the planning of The Fifth International Women’s Health Conference. Unfortunately do to maintenance issues, the conference had to be postponed until July 2016. The outlining and organizing of the conference did go according to plan. We were able to organize a list of presenters, topics for presentation, and create a template for the actual conference week.

My summer in Brazil was an amazing experience that opened my eyes to both public health abroad and to the vividness that was Brazil. I would like to thank the Stone Center and the Tinker Foundation for allowing me to pursue this research – I know this opportunity allowed me to become both a better academic and a better entity within the global public health network.