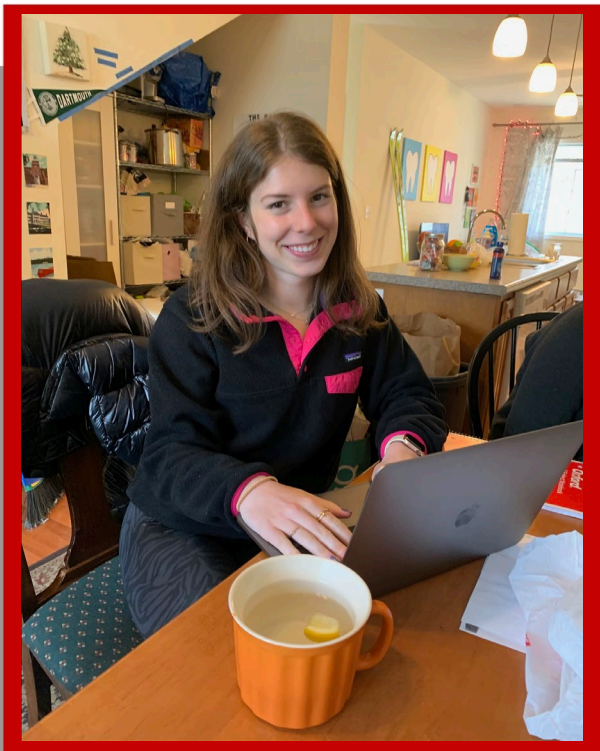


# Class of 1964 Internship Fund INTERN PROFILE



## Alison Dickstein '22 National Institute of Health's Office of Autism Research Coordination (NIH/OARC)

Alison Dickstein '22 grew up in Seattle and graduated from Mercer Island High School. At Dartmouth, Alison is a chemistry major with a neuroscience minor and a Spanish minor. On campus, she is a research assistant in Professor Duchaine's Social Perception Lab in the Neuroscience department. She is a first-responder with Dartmouth EMS and a volunteer for ASPIRE, spending time with kids that have autism. Alison is also a member of Sheba Dance Troupe. She has spent several summers working at the University of Washington's Autism Center, implementing a behavioral treatment program for kids with ASD and ADHD. She also volunteers at Seattle Children's Stanley Stamm Camp, an overnight camp for medically fragile children. After graduation, Alison plans to pursue a career in medicine, working to help children with neurodevelopmental disabilities.

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### **Executive Summary from Alison's final report:**

During the winter term of 2021, I was a science policy analyst intern with the Office of Autism Research Coordination (OARC) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). OARC communicates information about the latest research on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to Congress, other government agencies, and to the public. The OARC's publications and reports include scientific research on the causes and treatments for ASD as well as outcomes and social services reports to help improve the quality of life for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The OARC also manages the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC), which is a federal advisory committee

mandated by Congress to coordinate ASD-related activities across the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

While interning, I was involved in a variety of policy analysis projects. I worked on the 2019 Portfolio Analysis Report, which summarizes all federally funded ASD research from 2019 and categorizes these into overarching questions as stated by the NIH Strategic Plan for Autism Research. I also spearheaded the 2020 Summary of Advances, which is a publication that provides plain language summaries of the top advances in ASD research in 2020, and are chosen by members of the IACC. I also conducted research and presented on the relevance of Severe Autism and Down Syndrome in the 2019 and 2018 ASD research landscape, using existing literature to quantify the inclusion of these subgroups. Finally, I worked with the Communications team on programming for Autism Awareness Month, including a comprehensive resources guide for COVID-19 and ASD, a virtual question and answer session with CDC representatives, and a comedy event with Asperger's Are Us, a comedy troupe of people on the spectrum. Through this work, I have learned about how public policy impacts the lives of people with ASD and been at the forefront of ASD research. I hope to become a physician, working to help people with Autism Spectrum Disorder, and look forward to continuing this work in this future.

I enjoyed many aspects of my internship. One positive part of my internship was the amazing team at the NIH. The team had such interesting experiences working in academia, the private sector, and even medical settings, yet they all decided to end up working for the NIH. I enjoyed hearing about each team member's career path and how they chose science policy work. I also learned about the process of pursuing a PhD or other graduate programs. This was especially helpful as I had been weighing pursuing a PhD, medical school, or even a combined program. Another notable experience was helping to write the Presidential Address for Autism Awareness Month. This speech is read by the President on International Autism Awareness Day to declare continued support of the ASD community. This was a positive experience because it helped contextualize the work of the OARC within the larger frame of the United States government. It was great to learn about the new presidential administration and how President Biden's goals for helping people with ASD align with OARC's mission. Another positive aspect of my internship was attending a variety of conferences, webinars, and research presentations. For example, I enjoyed attending a book talk by the anthropologist Roy Grinker, who studies how ASD is perceived in other countries. These events were a great way to deepen my understanding of both Autism Spectrum Disorder and neuroscience in general.