



Pallavi Podapati

Pallavi has always been drawn to service work; as an indication of her commitment to service in high school, she founded the Students Against Human Rights Violations and Community Matters clubs, through which students could talk about and organize service opportunities to address local issues. Pallavi graduates as a major in Health and Societies with a concentration in Environment and Health. At Penn she served as a co-chair of the Civic House Associates Coalition (CHAC), the Producer of Penn Monologues, the co-chair of the University Life Committee within Penn Traditions, and the finance chair of Abuse and Sexual Assault Prevention (ASAP). After graduation she plans on pursuing work in the policy world and is especially interested in working on policy concerning gender equality, and the intersection of environmental issues and socioeconomic inequality.

CAPSTONE PROJECT

“Invisible Coalfields and Politics of Knowledge: The Struggle to Ensure the Health and Safety of Coal Miners”

Faculty Advisor: Dr. David Barnes, School of Arts and Sciences,
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Throughout history, enormous and tragic mining accidents have frequently captured the news media’s attention. Admittedly, in recent times, these accidents have decreased in number and scale. However, occupational safety and health of miners remains a matter of concern—mine disasters are often, still, the result of negligence and the long-term health consequences (pneumoconiosis) for career miners are especially debilitating. The need for changes in policy became more evident following the 2009 Upper Big Branch Mine disaster in West Virginia. An analysis of historical events surrounding mine health and safety issues resulted in the following conclusion: while social actors such as union members, biomedical professionals, and coal company executives influenced the creation of legislation, larger structural forces are at play. The first is the “invisibility” of coal miners, mining, and conditions in Appalachian coal mining communities. The second are the “politics of knowledge”: how can we truly be certain of cause and effect between the work of miners and their health trajectories? Over the course of history, these two elements have, at times, worked against each other and, at other times, worked together in dictating how our society has approached the health and safety of miners.