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My name is Katie-Lynne Burbage, and I am a double major in Environmental Health and Health Education & Promotion at East Carolina University in Greenville, NC. I first learned about the USPHS and Environmental Health from an Intro to Environmental Health class. Interest was sparked, and I made Environmental Health my second major. Later I was encouraged to apply for the Commissioned Corps Officer Student Training & Extern Program (COSTEP). After completing all the necessary paperwork I was selected for a position in Fairbanks, Alaska.

My duty assignment with Indian Health Service was at Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) in Fairbanks. Fairbanks is located in interior Alaska and serves as a hub for the surrounding villages and communities. TCC is the traditional tribal consortium of the 42 villages of interior Alaska. TCC provides a variety of health services to these villages, including the Office of Environmental Health (OEH).

OEH works with tribal communities and takes direction from villages based on village-specific needs. OEH assists villages with landfills, water treatment, waste management and hazardous materials disposal. OEH conducts rabies vaccination clinics, sanitary surveys of water treatment systems, health clinic surveys, and surveys of head start facilities.



OEH also provides direction with compliance issues and planning. Additionally, OEH offers community education on topics including food safety, sanitation, and infectious disease prevention.

TCC's coverage area is 235,000 square miles; my work as a COSTEP took me all over the interior. I observed first-hand the unique circumstances that make environmental health in rural Alaska so challenging. This position was an excellent way to gain relevant training while observing differences in culture. I felt this experience was a good mix of my two educational backgrounds.



I would recommend a COSTEP for anyone interested in Environmental Health or the PHS. Though environmental health issues are different in Alaska, this experience does expose you to a wide range of applications. The folks I worked with were highly competent and constructive. They also provided me with a lot of information about the PHS. However, if you are truly interested in becoming a Commissioned Corps Officer you should research as much as possible

on your own. I learned a little every day, and will continue to learn more I'm sure. I would tell potential candidates to not get dissuaded by the amount of paperwork. Keep an open mind and you will learn a lot and enjoy yourself, as I did.