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My summer internship experience with the Public Health Service, through the Junior Commissioned Officer Student Training and Extern Program, provided me with more than just the required grade for my university in order to graduate. It also gave me the knowledge and experience that I feel is necessary to confidently and successfully pursue a career as an Environmental Health Professional. Not only did I get to travel to an area that I had only seen in my dreams, but I left feeling confident that I truly made an impact to the communities in which I worked.



Working with the Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC), which is part of the Alaska Native tribal health system, really opened my eyes to a world different than my home in western North Carolina. Most of the communities that I worked with throughout my summer in southeast Alaska are far from my area of expertise, and each location proved to be a unique and challenging experience. During our community visits, I found that one of my primary struggles was learning how to gain the trust and respect of individual tribal members with whom we dealt. Each community that we worked in was different, and it was up to us to identify these differences and act accordingly during our stay.

Not only did I get more than enough professional experience, but I also was introduced to a land that has been a long term goal of mine to see for quite some time. I am glad to say that I feel that I will be taking a little part of Alaska back with me, and I will leave my heart in return. This trip alone has lead me to the conclusion that Alaska is somewhere that I would love to live once I



have finished school. I have had many experiences that helped lead me to this decision, some of which I would have never dreamt of them happening to me. I have soared through the sheer ridgelines like an eagle with my life in the hands of a few crazy bush pilots, I have climbed to the top of some of the most technical mountains that I have ever seen just to get above the clouds to see nothing but the heavens, and I have come between a bear sow and cubs and I am still here to tell the tale. Not only has this trip been an educational experience for me, but it has also proved to be a very emotional and spiritual one as well.

Working in Southeast Alaska as part of the Junior Commissioned Student Training and Extern Program really opened my eyes to a world that I had once only dreamt about. This internship introduced me to many new cultures and beliefs

through the local native tribes while providing me with the necessary knowledge and professional experience needed to confidently leave my university as an Environmental Health Professional. Working for the Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium challenged me, as an Environmental Health Officer, by always taking me just beyond my level of training and knowledge and pushing me to learn experientially. My training throughout the summer concluded in a learning experience that could not have been attained anywhere else. The memories and friends that I gained while I was here are some that I will cherish for the rest of my life.