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Where to start. This has been a very busy summer for me. I first heard about the Public Health Service through Dr. Dale Stephenson, who mentioned that some students in our program have done their internships with the PHS in the past. He mentioned that the JRCOSTEP program was not for everyone but thought it would be a good experience for me since I had prior military service experience. Since I needed to complete an internship before I graduated, I thought that the JRCOSTEP program would be a good opportunity to get out of Boise for a little while and see what else was out there.



The application process was a little more difficult than I had predicted and was the only part of my whole experience that I was not very happy with. Once everything fell into place, I was ready to go and work with the Indian Health Service at the Western Arizona District Office in Tempe, Arizona. Because I left about a month after I was initially supposed to arrive in Arizona, I missed a lot of opportunities for field experience. Luckily for me, my preceptor, CMDR Rob Morones had more than enough activities planned for my two month stay.

When I arrived, Rob and I sat down to go over my summer work plan. I was excited to see that there were a variety of activities and projects lined up that would allow me to put some of my classroom knowledge into practice. Rob asked me if there were any particular areas that I wanted experience on, but I couldn't think of any because the work plan he made covered so much already. Working with Rob was great and everyone in the WADO office was very welcoming which made it a really fantastic and pleasant work experience for me. I will miss working and interacting with them on a daily basis.

After learning about the mission of the Indian Health Service and the tribal communities the WADO office served, it was time to get to work. On my second day, I was already out in the field conducting food surveys in a casino in Camp Verde which is home to the Yavapai-Apache Nation. CMDR Vince Garcia and LTJG John Hansen did not hesitate to show me the food survey process and encouraged me to ask questions and to establish a good relationship with the members of the tribe. Various areas of the Cliff Castle Casino, including restaurants, bars and a child care center were surveyed and I got to learn how to write a food survey report. It was a very informative experience because not only did I learn what to look for during the survey of an establishment, I also became very familiar with the 2005 FDA Food Code. I really enjoyed going out in the field to do the surveys because it gave me an opportunity to interact with the various Native American tribes and to see a culture that I had never been exposed to.

Aside from conducting many food surveys with John, we also did a pool survey of the Harrah's Casino swimming pool which is part of the Ak-Chin Indian Community. The facility survey was conducted in order to evaluate any environmental health and safety conditions that might have been present. I was able to get a lot of field experience with John and I learned that as an Environmental Health Officer, his role was to assist the tribes in any way possible. From food handler's training to rabies clinics, his job was very versatile which made him a good source of information for me since I had so many questions.

While out in the field on an overnight trip to Ft. Yuma to visit the Quechan and Cocopah Indian Tribes, I became familiar with obtaining sewage samples for testing. It was not as bad as I thought it would be, but I was glad that I only had to do it once. The temperature was too high and the smell too strong at the Cocopah East sewage lagoons. However, it was a good learning experience and I was able to see a sewage lagoon system in operation as an economical way to treat wastewater for the Cocopah Indian Reservation. Another activity I did while on the Ft. Yuma was mosquito trapping for West Nile Virus testing at the Quechan Indian Reservation. This was very important because many cases of West Nile were reported in the area. Quechan is an agricultural community with many irrigation canals and is located next to the Colorado River.



All of my experience did not come just from field work; I had two main projects to work on for the summer. My first main project was an injury profile for the Ft. McDowell Yavapai Nation Community. The object was to assess the climate of the community through questionnaires asking them why they thought the community had so many injuries. That information, coupled with statistical information from Hospital, EMS, and Fire data records, was examined in order to determine why Ft. McDowell had such a high incidence of injuries and what we could do to prevent them or reduce the occurrences. I spent many weeks looking at the Excel data to gather information about the types of injuries, the causes and what age groups they were affecting. The injury profile, which was presented to the Ft. McDowell Yavapai Nation Tribal Council, helped identify the types and causes of injuries occurring on the reservation and was a valuable tool in raising community awareness of injury prevention.

My second project was to take the Food Handler's Training for certification as a food handler and translate it into Spanish. The training is given by the Environmental Health Officers to the tribes to ensure that all of the employees in the restaurants on the reservations know the proper procedures for handling food to decrease the transmission of food-borne illness. This project was particularly fun for me because it gave me the opportunity to do something that I've never done before by using my Spanish speaking skills. I had not realized that so many members of the kitchen staff in the restaurants on the reservations were non-English speaking. This of course made it difficult to ensure proper training of those employees due to the language barrier and justified the need for a Spanish version of the training. By translating the English version of the training and the exam into Spanish versions that matched them exactly, the Spanish speaking

employees could follow along with the information that was presented in English and take the certification exam at the same time as the rest of the class.

Overall, the whole experience was a very positive one for me. It made me realize that I retained a lot more information from my classes than I thought. It allowed me to take that information and put it to use in real world applications. In my short time here I got to do food and pool surveys, food handler's training, mosquito trapping, sewage sampling, respirator mask fit-testing and travel to different reservations throughout Arizona, including a trip to the Grand Canyon. I also got to do some epidemiological work on the injury profile and put my Spanish skills to good use. Working with the IHS opened my eyes to the Native American culture and way of life, which is something that I would not have seen otherwise. The mission of the IHS Environmental Health Officers is a very diverse and important one and I am glad that I was a part of this organization for the summer.

I have gained a lot of experience and will always value my time there in the WADO office. All of the people in the office made this a really memorable experience and I would highly recommend a JRCOSTEP to any students looking to get some valuable on the job training. I don't think that any other internship would allow students to take part in so many different types of environmental health projects in such a short period of time. It was definitely a good way to spend my summer.

