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Work experience is one of the top items employers are looking for in potential employees in the Twenty-First Century. Having a degree in a specific area, does not automatically make one a guru on a particular topic. Without work related experience, it is nearly impossible to find a job in ones desired career pathway. Only continued learning, hands-on experience and applying gained knowledge in a functioning work setting, can truly prepare one for the 'Real Working World'. During this summer, I was privileged to obtain an internship through the Public Health Service's Jr.COSTEP Program. I was stationed at Fort Yuma Office of Environmental Health and Engineering in Yuma, Arizona. Both the Quechan Indian Tribe and the Cocopah Indian Tribe were the locally served tribes. Sherman Indian High School in Riverside, California was also serviced by the Fort Yuma Service Unit. This was one of my best experiences to date.



Throughout the summer I learned very quickly that when working with the public you must always keep a positive attitude and an extremely flexible schedule. Time management was essential during my internship. The workload was something that I am very accustomed to. Although a timeline was developed with specific due dates for each of my tasks, I never felt pressured to rush and complete these tasks. I was given a lot of freedom on what tasks I worked on during the day, but the timeline didn't allow room for procrastination. I wanted all tasks to be completed in a timely manner and to the best of my abilities. All survey reports were to be submitted within thirty days of conducting the original survey. I found it easiest to complete reports the same afternoon or following morning. LT Michael Reed, Environmental Health Officer, served as my preceptor. He was always available to give me constructive criticism, or to direct me towards the information I needed to know to further understand a deficiency and suggest corrective actions for the deficiency.

I participated in several injury prevention activities, including elder water aerobics. I conducted a food handlers class for the local daycare facility, and created a training video for mosquito sampling and surveillance. I also produced a flyer outlining ways the community could protect itself from contracting West Nile virus, and an article that was published in the local Tribal newsletters. During a day trip to Parker, Arizona, I conducted several surveys with LT Sarah Snyder, Environmental Health Officer.

I was also able to get a taste of the engineering side of Environmental Health. Several days during the summer were spent searching for manholes, and assessing the conditions inside,

taking sewage samples from the Cocopah East Lagoon, and assessing water systems at several area RV parks and Casinos.

Many times during the course of my internship, I was forced to step outside of my comfort zone, and strike up conversation with complete strangers. In doing so I gained confidence and realized that many of my peers often were just as nervous as I was. When you take into consideration we are all human and usually have the same social fears it quickly eases your mind. Given this fact, I was better able to interact with my coworkers within the Indian Health Service.

This internship helped me grow not only professionally, but personally. I learned how to take myself out of a situation, assess it, and give a non-biased answer. Most importantly I now view asking questions as a necessity, not an option. Asking questions shows that you have a desire to fully understand what you are dealing with. Once reports were finished and distributed I felt a sense of accomplishment because I know the information I provided was helpful, and helped promote public health in those facilities.

Any questions I may have had were always met with a speedy response with not only a reasonable answer, but also with references where I could find more information on my question. This allowed me to trust those I worked with, and I knew they would always look out for my best interest. I wasn't 'babied' but also wasn't left out in the cold when I first came on board. The transition was very smooth. I was often guided in the direction where I could find useful information and apply it to any task that needed to be completed.

I would recommend applying for a Jr.COSTEP Internship to any of my classmates interested in gaining excellent professional experience, and who want to work with a wonderful group of people within the Public Health Service. In my future I would love to hold a position in this agency!