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Jr. COSTEP Summer 2010
**Bowling Green State University/
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IHS OEH Shawnee Field Office
Shawnee, Oklahoma



The Public Health Service and Indian Health Service (IHS), Oklahoma Area provided an outstanding internship opportunity for Summer 2010. I am a recent Bowling Green State University graduate having earned a BS in Biology and BS in Environmental Health and will be pursuing an MS Environmental Science degree starting Fall 2010 at Miami University. I first heard about the Jr. COSTEP program from a BGSU alum, Danielle Mills, who is currently a Commissioned Corps officer working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention(CDC). Danielle's recruitment speech peaked my interest, and prompted me to find out more at the program website. The possibility of traveling for an internship got me very excited about applying for this opportunity. I was pleasantly surprised a few months after submitting my application, when Environmental Health Officer Farrel Smith called me expressing his interest in my resume and a possible placement at the Office of Environmental Health (OEH) Shawnee Field Office in Shawnee, Oklahoma.

After a 1,000 mile trip from Ohio to Oklahoma, Mr. Farrel Smith and I began the summer with extensive orientation sessions. We discussed the general internal workings of government agencies as well as IHS-specific protocol and processes. It was during this time, that I began to grasp the purpose and importance of IHS, understanding that our goal is to provide non-regulatory, technical assistance to the tribes we serve. The tribes served by the Shawnee Service Unit include the Kickapoo Tribe, Sac and Fox Tribe, Iowa Tribe, and the Citizen Potawatomi Tribe. Together, Farrel and I put together a detailed workplan encompassing the entire two month internship duration.

Farrel wanted me to experience as many different Environmental Health surveys as we could fit in the small time frame. He wanted me to have the opportunity to use my foundation knowledge gained in coursework and apply it to practical surveying exercises. Survey types completed this summer included, Food Service, Pools, Casinos, Liquid Waste Disposal Systems, Pow Wow Grounds, Juvenile Detention Facility, and Institutional Environmental Health Surveys. When performing the various surveys, we referenced the state or federal documents stating the codes and regulations that must be followed by state-run facilities. We use these documents in OEH IHS as technical guidelines. For instance, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) 2005 Food Code was used for all of our Food Service Surveys to identify violations and provide recommendations to eliminate problems.



Each survey differed from others based on the service provided and the public health risks associated with the facility, but the surveying protocol remained the same for all surveys. Every survey begins by meeting with the manager or person in charge and going through an introductory interview. The interview is used to test the knowledge of the manager relating to many administrative responsibilities as well as key components of state and federal codes and regulations. Following the interview, we move into the walk-through portion going through the facility with the manager or person in charge identifying and providing recommendations for violations and expressing praise for areas that are in

compliance. After the walk-through, we sit down with the manager or person in charge, and go through the violations noted and recommendations provided. During this time we mention that there will be a written report sent to the facility stating all violations and recommendations discussed during the survey. Following the completion of the survey, we return to the office and use the Web Based Environmental Health Reporting System (WebEHRS) to create the written report.



In addition to the many surveys we completed this summer, Farrel and I had the opportunity to attend a large training program and conference in Oklahoma City as well as provide Food Handler Training to the tribes. The training we attended covered topics related to retail special food processes such as reduced oxygen packaging, smoking and curing, live molluscan shellfish tanks, sprouted seeds, and the use of food additives. The Inter-Tribal Environmental Council (ITEC) conference was an event hosting speakers from various tribal and U.S. government agencies. We had the opportunity to sit in on several interesting presentations covering topics such as stormwater management, stream gauging, superfund and brownfield sites, Cherokee Nation culturally protected species management and heirloom seed bank, pesticide management and several other breakout sessions. Both the training and conference provided exceptional presentations covering very interesting and up-to-date

environmental and public health topics; they were well worth the time. We also provided food handler training to tribal food service facilities upon their request. We covered topics covered in the FDA 2005 Food Code pertaining to safe preparation and handling of food products to reduce the risk of a foodborne illness or food poisoning outbreak.

Work was not the only interesting aspect of my summer JRCOSTEP. My internship opportunity in Oklahoma provided me a first-time adventure several states from home living on my own. I have grown as an individual, and have become a better person as a result of this experience. I did not know anyone when I arrived in Oklahoma City, and spent the first few weekends exploring the area sites alone, something I would have never dreamed of doing before this opportunity. This independent summer gave me the opportunity to find enjoyment in doing things on my own. After a couple of weeks, I made friends with other interns and commissioned corps officers working in the state. I was able to enjoy the many museums, night life in Bricktown, floating the Illinois River, southern cuisine and hospitality, fishing and swimming, the beautiful parks scattered across the state and so much more. I also appreciate the exposure I received to the Native American culture. I am so thankful to all the individuals this summer, IHS employees as well as tribal workers, for sharing their stories and information on their tribal traditions with me.

I would recommend this program to any student looking for an absolutely outstanding and worthwhile internship opportunity. I do not have any complaints or regrets about my summer with IHS. The practical experience I gained as a supplement to my degrees is invaluable and I had the greatest pleasure and honor of working with some incredibly intelligent and caring people. I will never forget my JRCOSTEP summer experience, and I thank the Public Health Service and Indian Health Service for providing me with this amazing opportunity.

