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Jr. COSTEP Fall 2010
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I learned about the USPHS and the JrCOSTEP program through one of my professors in my first semester with the Environmental Health Science Department at Eastern Kentucky University. Right away I thought it sounded like the kind of work with which I wanted to be involved. So I was very excited when I was initially selected for a summer JrCOSTEP position at the Eastern Arizona District Office in Pinetop, Arizona. However, due to unusual circumstances this past summer I didn't get to serve in Pinetop as planned. When I was offered the opportunity to do a fall COSTEP with the Institutional Environmental Health Program at the Phoenix Area Office, I was grateful to be getting a full 120 day COSTEP. I was also excited to be getting exposure to the institutional component of DEHS.



I could not have asked for a better combination of training and hands-on participation than I received under the tutelage of Institutional Environmental Health Officers CDR Dave Cramer and CDR Ricardo Murga. This internship was no milk run! I wasn't filing anyone else's papers or making anyone's coffee. I was able to jump right in and start learning some skills on my second day at the office. My preceptor, Dave, took me out to the Phoenix Indian Medical Center to do some radiation testing on their X-ray equipment. From there it was an action packed semester; I was able to travel nearly every week and received a lot of exposure to many of the types of tasks involved in public health. I spent time with both the Eastern and Western District Offices and throughout both districts I found myself warmly welcomed and encouraged to learn about working on the reservations they serve. Overall, I received a well-balanced combination of instruction and hands-on participation. I found myself drawing on a lot of my classroom learning for this job: Food Safety, Industrial Hygiene, Water and Air quality, Solid Waste, Vectors and Infection Control, Program Planning, OSHA standards, to name a few.



I traveled to some great places in the Phoenix Area. I was able to visit Supai village at the bottom of the Grand Canyon and stay at Hualapai Ranch when we surveyed the food facilities at the Sky Walk at Grand Canyon West. I learned how to conduct food safety, Head Start, senior nutrition center and other facility surveys and to write reports. I did several dog bite investigations and a rabies clinic in Kaibab and learned about West Nile surveillance in Yuma. In my free time I was able to visit Mexico and go camping in the Grand Canyon. Also, one of the engineers from Phoenix Area Office took me out in his boat to Saguaro Lake for my first-ever wakeboarding experience.

I became more familiar with Incident Command, HICS, small scale disaster response, decontamination safety and learned some important emergency preparedness skills. In Supai I was able to meet with the tribe's bioterrorism specialist and find them some assistance in meeting state grant requirements. I got the chance to participate in several clinic surveys, including Ft. Mojave, AZ, and Elko, NV. It was a great introduction to AAHC accreditation standards and also to Life Safety Code applications. During one of the X-ray surveys we

did at the clinic in Owyhee, one of the tribal councilmen introduced himself to us and thanked us for being there. It was great to be able to be of service to the tribe and to know that they wanted us there.

Being involved at the Area level gave me a better understanding of the Indian Health Service. I was able to experience a variety of hands-on tasks in the field. Dave was absolutely the best boss I've ever had and Ricardo was really helpful with all his technical expertise. I came away from this experience with a good grasp on what is expected of an Environmental Health Officer, as well as what Institutional Environmental Health entails. I was also fortunate to do a large project in emergency management; I learned about the process of acquiring needed goods and services as part of an emergency preparedness initiative and was also able to work with the state health department on improving communications and multi-agency collaboration in a crisis. I had a great time participating in an NDMS exercise through the state health department with several other hospitals in Phoenix.



My experience with Indian Health Service this fall has been an extremely positive one. I woke up every morning looking forward to my days in the office, and I got the sense that most of the people I worked with did too. The level of commitment everyone I worked with had toward their jobs out here speaks more highly of IHS than any compliments I could try to give. I really enjoyed the flexibility of serving with IHS; there are many opportunities to help communities become healthier and safer. An Environmental Health Officer must be knowledgeable on a variety of public health topics, so the opportunities for continuing education and career development are practically endless. I was also impressed by how, as an organization, IHS respects and mirrors the values of the cultures they serve. For a public health student wanting to make a difference in the world and use their education to improve people's lives, there's no better place to work than IHS!