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Jr COSTEP Summer 2011
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After three years of anticipation, I finally had the opportunity to fulfill my desire to complete a JRCOSTEP internship. I transferred to Colorado State University my sophomore year and right away got involved with their Environmental Health (EH) program. I attended a meeting where a man from the Indian Health Service (IHS) spoke about an internship opportunity for students. After that meeting I knew that at some point in my college career I would get involved with the JRCOSTEP program. To graduate with an EH degree, students must complete a capstone internship their senior year, so I decided to wait until I could use the internship for my capstone. The man who spoke was Jeff Dickson from the Santa Fe Service Unit. I kept in touch with him about my interest and more detailed questions I had about the opportunity. When the time came to apply, he greatly helped guide me through the long and confusing process.

I found out in March that I was going to be placed in the Santa Fe office with Jeff Dickson and Katie Noonan Hubbard, which I was pleased about since I already established a relationship with Jeff and had a good feeling about who I would be working with. Initially I was under the impression that I would start in mid-May, after my school year had ended. Unfortunately, I did not get to start until July 5 due to many setbacks including waiting for the Surgeon General to sign an important document, and lack of organization and communication resulting in the loss of paperwork as well as receiving the wrong paperwork. It was quite the unexpected experience and it has taught me a lot about flexibility. I would highly advise students wanting to participate in the JRCOSTEP internship to expect the unexpected, be flexible, and have a back-up in case you decide to not wait around due to the financial and educational needs of a college student. With that said, I am really glad that I waited for things to work out so that, even though my time was split in half, I was able to have the experience and gain the knowledge that I now have.



When I finally made it to Santa Fe, Jeff and Katie had me hit the ground running. One of the very first things I did was get a cultural lesson from Anthony Candelaria, one of the field technicians. I learned about the differences between Pueblos and other tribes and within the Pueblo tribes, their history, their celebrations and traditions, government organization, and IHS's role in their lives (this is something that I learned more about throughout my internship). The first week I was already doing food surveys and writing reports. Each of the Pueblo tribes has a Feast Day celebration to honor the saint that is associated with their tribe. At these events, many people come and sell food and crafts. IHS is invited by the tribes to survey the food vendors as well as enjoy the celebration and food. I was able to go to three of these events. Although it was hot inside the food stands, I liked doing these types of surveys because you start to see the same vendors at different events and they get to know you, so a relationship is formed. One of the best parts of this experience was talking, listening, and learning from this unique population.

Two of the major services that the Santa Fe office offers their tribes are food handlers' trainings and rabies clinics. For someone to serve food on tribal land, most tribes require that a person have a food handlers card,

which they can obtain from taking a free class and passing a short test that an IHS employee administers. The rabies clinics are free as well. People simply come to the table we set up outside, give information about the animal, and the cat or dog gets vaccinated and given a tag.

I also got to take a tour of a tribe's water and wastewater treatment facility. It was educational to see in person what these systems look like and how they work. I did get to oversee the construction of a sewage system for one man's home, something that the engineers in the office are highly involved with. One type of survey that I was a part of was a facility survey, mainly daycare and early development centers, where the conditions of a building are reported so that the tribes can use the report to access grant funds and make repairs. Not all my time was spent in the field however; on days that I was in the office, I had projects to work on.

My experience as a JRCOSTEP has helped me in many ways. As mentioned, it has helped me become more flexible with situations when they do not go as planned. It has also taught me about a culture and population that most don't think twice about. Also, being in a city where I do not know anyone, I was able to find the courage to go out and explore and meet people on my own, which I can now say is a valuable skill to learn. And of course, it has helped me gain knowledge in the different aspects of public health and give me more of an idea as to what path I may take once I graduate.

