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Jr COSTEP Summer 2012
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The United States Public Health Service (USPHS) and the Indian Health Service (IHS) provided me with the great opportunity to be a JR COSTEP for them in Billings, Montana, which is 1660 miles from my home in Texas. When I first got the call, I was more excited and amazed that I would be able to work with Native Americans than I was about the move to Montana for the summer. Working as an Environmental Health Specialist under my wonderful supervisor, Darcy Merchant, I was able to travel all over the state working with the different tribes and reservations. This summer of 2012 was one to remember. At times during my internship, I felt more like a tourist than I did a government employee. I expected to be filing papers, making copies, organizing closets, and getting coffee, but I was treated more as a coworker and employee than a college junior. During my first week of work in Billings, I was given a computer, telephone, and my own desk, then I was given a car and sent out on my first work experience.



My work as a JR COSTEP involved a range of public health tasks. I was able to inspect food stands at Native American powwows, inspect a town swimming pool, host a car seat clinic, observe an institutional inspection, inspect a casino, and administer an airport survey. I was also on site at one of the emergency locations for victims and volunteers of the Montana fires. I was able to inspect and observe how Big Sky Mobile Catering ran their operation of providing food to the local victims, as well as to those away from the site. As for my office work, I was able to assist in analyzing communicable disease data collected by the Indian Health Service for our area. I helped identify areas in environmental health, infectious disease, emergency preparedness, and other public health related matters that needed to be addressed. I sorted out the communicable diseases by gender and age group for each of the reservations in a 10 year range. What I enjoyed about the disease surveillance is that I was not given stereotypical intern work, but since this data reporting was relatively new for the area I worked with, I was given the opportunity to “make it my own” per se. Essentially, I was handed a project that would be the base for more disease surveillance in the future.

My time as an Environmental Health Specialist has been extremely rewarding. College really only teaches concepts of what you may see out in the work field, but to have the opportunity to actually be a part of the USPHS, I was able to learn hands on what it takes to have a career with a lot of potential. I was able to learn about disease data collection and cleaning methodology. I learned the process and procedures of various inspections and surveys. Ideas of mine were heard by supervisors on what I felt could help the program, and the experience of being around professionals in their field of work taught me more than any textbook could. Another wonderful thing about working with the Native American people was the chance to learn about their culture and history. They are very open and willing to share and answer any questions I had. Their food is amazing and their dances are one of kind. I came into this internship with no idea of what I was about to experience and left with a number of contacts, made great friends, and formed a major understanding of what I can do with my degree in Environmental Health Science. I

can honestly say that being a professional health inspector or sanitarian may not be what I want to do with life, but at least I have more of an idea of the fields in Environmental Health and what it takes to jump start my career once I graduate.

My JR COSTEP experience has provided me with a great foundation for my career in Environmental Health. I strongly recommend interning with the Public Health Service and the COSTEP program. Whether you know exactly what you want for your career or if you have no idea. I was right in between the two of having an idea and having no idea of what I wanted to do after college. Now, I am looking forward to a career as a full-time, active duty Commissioned Corps Officer of the U.S.

Public Health Service. I will never forget my JR COSTEP summer experience and I thank the USPHS and the Indian Health Service for providing me with this amazing experience and opportunity.

