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This summer, I was assigned to Indian Health Services, Oklahoma Area, Lawton Service Unit, for a 10-week internship. Before I arrived in Lawton, I was rather nervous and did not know what to expect. However, this internship turned out to be one of the best experiences I have ever had, and I have learned more than what I ever imagined. Upon arrival, I was assigned to Katie Tompkins as her intern. Although it was her first time being a preceptor, she made my experience as a JrCOSTEP meaningful and memorable.

In the beginning, I received an orientation from Mr. Farrel Smith about the Commission Corps. and also the assignments to complete throughout my stay in Lawton. I learned about the government system of the Public Health Service and also the difference between Commission Corps. and Civil Service. I also received an orientation with the Lawton Indian Hospital to make sure that I am well-trained for all the basic information on patient privacy, employee conduct, and the emergency management codes. After the logistics were settled we immediately dived into our work routine!

Under Katie's guidance, I was exposed to a variety of work that an Environmental Health Officer conducts on a daily basis. I participated in activities such as routine food inspections and life safety inspections, sitting in the monthly Native American Injury Prevention Coalition meeting and learning how to inspect for penetration of the fire walls with the Lawton Indian Hospital assistant safety officer, Dustin Joplin.

I found conducting surveys with Katie one of the most important learning experience. As an undergraduate student in Environmental Health, I have learned many of the different hazards in the environment and ways to eliminate them. However, through the survey, I was able to apply what I learned into real life experience. What I found most challenging was that inspections depend greatly on knowledge and keen eyes to determine whether what we see are hazardous, without any known target to look for. In addition, writing the reports was also a very valuable learning experience. Not only did I learn to read and reference the FDA Food Code and the NFPA Life Safety Code in order to provide recommendation to the facilities owners, but also I learned to write reports tailored to the readers, making sure that each finding and recommendation was formal and suitable for the reports, and also easy for the reader to understand. Furthermore, because of the diversity of facilities we inspected, including elderly centers, head starts, day cares, food distribution centers, water treatment plants, and casinos, I also learned different things to inspect, depending on the facility type. For example, inspecting playground fall material for head starts and occupancy load for casinos are inspections specific to the facilities.

In addition to field surveys, I was also given the assignment to remake the bloodborne pathogen Powerpoint, revise the food and employee health policy tailored to the 2009 FDA Food Code, teach all the food handler's training classes and also conduct pool inspection for a nearby water park twice a week. For the bloodborne pathogen Powerpoint, coincidentally I had just made one for school a month before I came to Lawton. Therefore, I did some research and revised my Powerpoint to tailor it for the Oklahoma area and for IHS.



Twice a week, we would visit the Comanche Nation Water Park. In the beginning of this summer, the staff there just experienced management changes. Therefore, we paid close attention to their management and water quality. At first, they encountered some difficulties of raising the chlorine level and lowering the pH value. With much of Katie's knowledge and our persistency of checking the water frequently, the facility acknowledged the importance of their water quality and signed up for pool management classes in order to improve their management practice. In addition, they began to record their water testing results to keep track of their water quality, and made comparisons with what we measured.

In order to revise the Employee Health Policy, I read through the Food Code, Section 2-2, Employee Health, and summarized it into an outline. I also did some research to compare the differences between the 2005 and 2009 Food Codes. After reading the previous policy template, I felt that the policy was not clear enough on the appropriate procedures to take at different employee sickness timelines. Therefore, after discussing with Katie about my idea of reformatting the policy, I was able to develop another policy that hopefully would bring better clarity for each food service worker when it comes to employee health.

Teaching the food handling classes was also one of my favorite assignments to do. We had our routine classes at the Comanche Business Center. This allowed me to gain more experience giving presentations. We also went to facilities such as the Delaware Goldriver Casino and Ft. Sill Apache Elderly Center to conduct food handler's training.

In the beginning of this internship, Mr. Farrel Smith emphasized in the orientation that I was allowed to explore the local environment and culture during my stay. As a result, not only did I learn from the regular work, but I also learned the culture and history of this region through visiting places such as Fort Sill, Wichita Wildlife Refuge, Medicine Park, and Powwows. In addition, we visited many towns as we went to different places for inspections, including Walters, Carnegie, Anadarko, Apache, etc. Not only was I able to see the natural sceneries that are very different from Seattle, Washington, where I came from, but also I experienced the Native American culture that I never had before. We participated in the Kiowa Powwow, which we did a health walk with the public health nurses. I also had Indian tacos, which was one of the highlights!



To sum up, this internship with IHS as a JrCOSTEP was truly much beyond what I imagined. It provided me with a variety of experiences in the environmental health field, and equipped me to jump right into the work force after my graduation. Furthermore, not only did I gain academic and technical knowledge, but I also gained the knowledge of working with people of different ages, culture and background. If anyone of my classmates were to ask me where they should intern, I would with all my heart recommend them to join JrCOSTEP!