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Jr. COSTEP Summer 2013
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This summer I was one of the extremely lucky individuals to be a part of the Jr. COSTEP program. I was thrilled when I first learned of the opportunity to become a COSTEP in the Indian Health Service (IHS), because it combined a summer of travel with the chance to explore many of the avenues of Environmental Health under professionals in the field. After this summer, I will be continuing my education at Eastern Kentucky University in order to get my Bachelor's degree in Environmental Health Science.

In the California Area Office, my preceptor LT Lisa Nakagawa helped me adjust to both Sacramento and the Commissioned Corps. Under her tutelage, I worked on several projects including designing a new certificate system for facilities which pass our sanitation surveys, creating a pilot project Healthy Homes key informant questionnaire, and writing a summer food safety article for the California Area IHS Newsletter. Additionally, through her and other officers, I have learned how to better write technical reports and conduct an assortment of health and safety surveys, including food, pool, hotel, Head Start, and seatbelt surveys.

The task which made the most impact on me this summer was also the most challenging. The Healthy Homes questionnaire, which I designed and utilized in several interviews with tribal leaders, was the most difficult assignment I completed. Through the process of collaborating with LT Nakagawa and CAPT Gordon Tsatoke to create a more comprehensive and clear questionnaire, I refined my writing and understanding of interview techniques. Through the conversations with tribal leaders, I began to understand the practical difficulties of surveys in the real world. I improved my communication and problem solving skills as I discussed with leaders possible ways to better their communities. Despite my struggles with this project, I learned the most while working on it. It is fantastic to learn that after all my hard work, the results can be used to make changes in how IHS interacts with tribes and tribal organizations!



Another impact on my learning this summer was my opportunity to travel and work in other California IHS offices. After operating for the majority of the summer in the Sacramento office, I spent a week in the Ukiah Field Office with LT Tim Shelhamer and then a week in the Redding District Office with LCDR Charles Craig. In Ukiah I performed my first mold investigation, my first hotel sanitation survey, and had the dubious honor of my name being the primary author of several sanitation reports. At Redding I assisted LCDR Craig in Food Handlers and Blood Borne Pathogens training. I also discussed and learned about different health clinics and worked with a Vector

Management company. Through this experience of traveling and working under different officers, I learned more about the differing styles of Commissioned Corps officers; moreover, I became familiar with other offices' primary areas of concern.

My experience this summer has helped me learn so much more about what it means to be both an Environmental Health professional and an employee of the Indian Health Service. I would highly recommend the Jr. COSTEP position to any student interested in gaining practical knowledge in the field of Environmental

Health Science. One thing I will take away from this experience is the kindness and eagerness of everyone; every tribal member or worker I met was interested in answering my questions and helping me understand more about their communities. When we turned to look to their own services and buildings, everyone was eager to understand how they could improve and create better, safer, healthier facilities or programs for their clients. I do not think I would have learned as much as I did, or enjoyed the summer to this extent, without the help and support of all the Environmental Health Officers and my coworkers in each of the offices. Thank you for making this summer such a memorable experience for me!