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Jr. COSTEP Summer 2013  
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This summer has been full of exciting and memorable learning experiences that I will carry with me into my future; from flying into the Grand Canyon by helicopter, teaching food handler's courses; experiencing new cultures, histories and beliefs; to inspecting a wide variety of establishments including restaurants, elder homes, hotels, schools, and casinos all across western Arizona in five culturally unique Native American reservations. These reservations include the Colorado River Indian Tribes (CRIT), Havasupai, Hualapai, Fort Mohave, and Chemehuevi. My name is Zachary Hargis, and I was privileged this summer with the temporary ranking of "Ensign" to experience the work and life of an environmental health officer in the Indian Health Service. As an environmental health student at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, VA, I had a small background in the field before arriving at my duty station in Parker, AZ; however over the course of this summer my views on environmental health and its integral relation to the field of public health has broadened and expanded exponentially.



Upon arrival to my duty station I was briefed and assigned a project--create a comprehensive training video for proper hotel inspection to leave behind for future generations of environmental health officers unfamiliar with the process. Along with this daunting task of film creation I was assigned a detailed work calendar showing dates of inspections, travels, and trainings I would be attending and actively participating in. My third day on the job I realized what I had gotten myself into with a trip to Yuma, AZ for a rabies decapitation training course. This course is dedicated to the proper practices and procedures for decapitating suspected animals, labeling, and packaging the specimens for lab delivery and testing of rabies virus. It was an interesting start to many valuable experiences that I

was fortunate enough to partake in during my externship. Some highlighted experiences include my trip to the Grand Canyon reservation, Havasupai, for mosquito trapping, teaching my first food handlers course, and walking on the Skywalk on the Hualapai Reservation during a sanitary wastewater survey among many. I had never had an opportunity to see the Grand Canyon before going to the Havasupai reservation and getting the chance to fly out on a helicopter was a humbling experience to say the least, it gave me such a grand perspective and, like the rest of my time here, has helped me grow as an individual.

The majority of my time was spent conducting facility inspections and writing reports for those inspections. I had an opportunity to inspect and write up a report for a restaurant that had been operating without a food permit license for several years and had many priority (critical) violations. As I was writing the report I remember thinking, "I bet no one will even read this and this restaurant will probably continue to be below health standards". To my surprise, in about a weeks' time I happen to hear talk from Health and Human Services that they got a report for a restaurant that was shocking them. They spoke about how they would eat at this restaurant all the time and had no idea the sanitary conditions. To my surprise it turned out to be the restaurant that I inspected and reported on. The department ultimately summoned the restaurant to court and threatened to shut the facility down if proper health corrections were not implemented immediately. Needless to say, it was a good feeling knowing that I made a difference, even as an extern.

My favorite experiences by far were my two trips into the Supai Reservation. For my first trip I flew in for mosquito trapping and a school inspection and flew out the next day. On my next visit I got to hike into the canyon and experience the eight mile winding pass through the heart of the canyon. On this trip I lead several inspections and once again set mosquito traps around the area. After the work day, I got to visit all the waterfalls on the reservation and let my senses overload by the magnitude of this magical place. The people in this reservation are amazing, and since it was my second time being there I noticed some familiar faces. During my second visit I taught a food handler's course and got to meet even *more* people, so by the time I left I had met a lot of friendly people and smiles that I will remember forever.

Overall I had a great summer and got to learn from some of the best environmental health officers and specialists including my preceptor LCDR Sarah Snyder, CDR Vincent Garcia, LTJG Kendra Vieira, and Isaac Ampadu and many other professionals throughout the reservations. I consider my time spent with IHS successful and rewarding, in both education and personal growth. I hope to see the USPHS in my future, contribute to its mission and see where it can take me.

