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Jr. COSTEP Summer 2014
Boise State University
Fort Yuma Service Unit
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I am Jessica Porter, a senior completing my fifth year at Boise State University to finish my degree in Environmental and Occupational Health. Although I completed an internship last summer to fill my course requirements, I could not pass up this amazing opportunity after hearing my classmates, Emily Zamzow and Sam Frank, talk about their experiences as Jr. COSTEPs in Arizona and New Mexico. After going through the rigorous application process, I was finally given my orders to work at the Fort Yuma Service Unit in Yuma, Arizona. Finding a place to live was difficult, and my excitement started to get overtaken by nervousness and uncertainty. I had never been to Arizona before, and while I got to see lots of inspiring presentations, I still had no real grasp on a typical day in the life of an Environmental Health Officer (EHO).



**Mosquito trapping in Parker, AZ, with
ENS Andrew Todd**

Looking back at these initial inhibitions, I can see just how far I've come through my experience this summer. My preceptor, LTJG Kendra Vieira, EHO serving the Fort Yuma Service Unit, made me feel instantly welcome and helped me acclimate to my new environment as if she had done it one hundred times before. Her guidance gave me the confidence to undertake my project independently, and I was provided the opportunity to really experience the job as if I were an EHO. I quickly found out that there is no such thing as a "typical day", and that's what I grew to love about the job! The majority of my time was spent conducting general safety, food safety, and hotel surveys at Casinos, as well as Pool, RV park, and Youth Home surveys for the Cocopah and Quechan Tribes. I also wrote up reports associated with these surveys, learning how to use the Web-based Environmental Health Reporting System (WebEHRS) database and familiarizing myself with how to cite findings. Additionally, I had the unique opportunity to spend lots of time in the IHS clinic due to LTJG Vieira's Safety Officer collateral duties and a Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care (AAAH) survey scheduled for August. We led hazard rounds of the facility and I wrote up a hazardous waste spill procedures policy that is site-specific.

Mosquito trapping was another part of the job that I spent a lot of time learning about. The whole point of setting the traps is to collect mosquitos in different areas to test for and track West Nile Virus. The trap is designed to hold dry ice in a bucket with tiny holes at its base, allowing the CO₂ emitted to attract any mosquitos in the area. It is hung somewhat low in a tree so that a fan under the bucket pulls the mosquitos that got close enough down into a net hanging from the bottom of the bucket. These traps would be set out in the evening, and then the next morning we would go to each site, collect them, and bring them to the lab to run Rapid Analyte Measurement Platform (RAMP) testing, which indicates whether or not the sample of mosquitos you are testing has West Nile Virus.

Learning these techniques in Yuma helped me during my field travel assignment opportunities associated with the job. I traveled to Parker, AZ, and helped with their mosquito trapping in addition to participating in a large scale pool survey, where a casino had three pools, one spa, and utilized bromine for disinfection. After Parker, we went to a reservation right by Lake Havasu called Chemehuevi, where I got to participate in a Car Seat Safety class and assembled booster seats. My favorite travel opportunity, however, was visiting the Havasupai Reservation down in the Grand Canyon. This was a moving experience because we got to conduct a jail survey, assessments of multiple homes with mold, and home remediation assessments for elderly individuals. Our home and mold assessments were supporting the requirements for a grant to help fix these places, and they are in dire



**Hilltop, the start of a four hour hike into the Grand Canyon with
ENS Carlie Cleary and CDR Vincent Slayton-Garcia**

need of fixing. It was so hard to see people living in these conditions, and it was even harder to accept the reality of the challenges these individuals face trying to fix problems down in their remote location. At the end of the day, being able to help the Tribe felt very rewarding.

My project was another rewarding task that I had the duration of my internship to finish. Of the two tribes that are in the Fort Yuma Service Unit, one recently passed an ordinance adopting the FDA Food Code. In an effort to advocate passage of a similar ordinance with the other tribe, I developed and distributed a “Food Code Survey” to see how the members of both tribes view food safety, determine what their interest is in a food code, and gauge their awareness of whether or not their respective tribe has a food code.

Furthermore, it serves as a great review of our food safety program to see what areas are being understood by the public versus what is lacking. I took the surveys to two casinos and to a Food Handlers Training that I helped LTJG Vieira conduct. After compiling this initial data, we made some discoveries that will be beneficial to present to tribal council: the public would like to have a food code if they do not have one already, food safety is important to the community, and many individuals have no idea if their tribe has a food code.

While I have detailed many of the activities that I participated in as a JRCOSTEP, I have only skimmed the surface of everything I did this summer. I could keep going, but I learned a lot other than just what activities are associated with the job. You have to be an extremely flexible, outgoing individual to succeed in this field, and you should always be willing to learn. I have gained so much confidence and independence through this internship, and have made memories that I will never forget with people that I will never forget.



**Weekend trip to San Diego with my
preceptor, LTJG Kendra Vieira**