

**ENS Kristen Walters
Jr. COSTEP Summer 2014
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
Rhineland District Office
Rhineland, WI**



Working the BAIHS booth at a health fair with another Jr. COSTEP.

This summer was an excellent learning experience, both professionally and personally. I was able to experience what it is like to be a public health officer, learn about Native American culture and meet many great people along the journey. I understand the importance of the Bemidji Area Indian Health Service (BAIHS) in helping keep WI, MI, and MN tribes healthy and safe, as well as how city/county/tribal public health officials strive for healthy and safe communities. Being able to complete surveys independently and teaching food handler trainings were the highlights of my professional experience with the BAIHS!

I worked under a great preceptor who allowed me to develop skills and grow in my understanding of public health. She challenged my survey and report writing skills to help me become more effective and efficient in my work. I was able to experience many different areas of public health such as, environmental sustainability/resiliency, teaching and proctoring food safety courses, report writing, attending health fairs, working with other agencies, restaurant, pool, casino, temporary food vendor, clinic, elder center, rec center, and gas station surveys.

As a non-traditional student I have always worried about whether I was making the correct decision for my family in returning to school to complete a second bachelor's degree. I gained an incredible amount of confidence and feel now, more than ever, that I made the correct decision and will enjoy and succeed at the next step in my life as a professional public health officer.

BAIHS was an excellent agency to work for and I will encourage fellow students to apply for a Jr. COSTEP position when I return to school.

My main concerns with working for the BAIHS were the internet connection and the computers available for use. From the first day I started I had many problems with the slow internet and my computer not working properly. I feel like having access to better technology would greatly improve the productivity of people working in the office. I became frustrated at the time it would take to open a webpage or to type a report. Multiple times I would lose internet connection and would have to restart my computer to get back onto the internet. The IT personnel did a wonderful job trying to help, but often there was nothing they could do but have me restart the computer. This was an extreme waste of time for me and for the IT personnel, who officially held the titles of facility engineer and district environmental health officer. They both were always so busy with their regular work or traveling in the field that I felt bad watching them helping everyone in the office with technology (computer and internet) problems.

Overall it was a privilege to participate in the Jr. COSTEP program. I have developed and refined skills learned in class by applying them my job. I will miss working with all of the wonderful people I met working in the BAIHS Rhineland District Office, but am ready for the next step in my career.