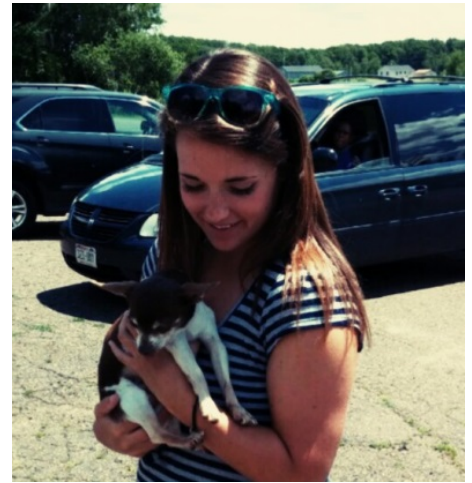


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Jr. COSTEP Summer 2014
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Ashland Field Office
Ashland, Wisconsin



Boozhoo! Which means hello in Ojibwe. Working for Indian Health Service (IHS) as a Jr. COSTEP Officer was an experience that I will cherish the rest of my life. The amount of knowledge I have gained over this summer will be more useful than any of my college courses and past internships combined. Working for IHS combined the concepts of environmental health and taught me how to apply them to real world situations. This experience helped me grow personally and professionally.

The value of this experience lies within the broad exposure I obtained in the environmental health & safety field. The Ashland Field Office covers 4 tribes St. Croix, Lac Courte Oreilles, Bad River and Red Cliff. At each tribe I worked in several different settings including food establishments, homes, casinos, pools, playgrounds, schools, road work sites, health facilities, classrooms, cultural celebrations and more. The activities I participated in included teaching food handler classes, taking and passing the ServSafe exam, conducting food establishment inspections, conducting pool chemistry surveys, reporting & recording findings using mobile WebEHRS, inspecting pow wow vendors, participating in a rabies vaccination clinic, O & M inspections, home inspection, tribal meetings, institutional inspections and drafting an outline for a methamphetamine remediation policy. Clearly, the wide range of settings and activities allowed me to participate and observe the broad spectrum of duties that environmental health specialists are responsible for at IHS. Participating in these activities also taught me valuable lessons about relationship building.

Prior to this internship I was fortunate to have taken a Native American History course at CMU taught by Benjamin Ramirez who is a member of the Saginaw Chippewa Tribe in Mount Pleasant, MI. This course did expose me to cultural differences, but the experience I got through IHS working with the 4 tribes was more enriching than learning the culture through study and literature. Trust is a major factor in working with any customer, so building relationships with your customers is vital to being efficient. Observing Martha's relationships showed me that the more time she took to build a relationship with a customer the better the service IHS could provide. Building relationships and assuring the customer that you are available to them helps the customer to see that the overall goal of IHS is to improve the quality of life in their community.

Ashland, WI is 10 hours from my home town Northville, MI. This is the farthest I have been from home independently. The weeks prior to my call to active duty I was nervous. To my surprise adapting to my new environment occurred quickly, but a major factor was the Ashland Field Office team. Martha and the other officers were very welcoming and made me feel comfortable. Martha was helpful on showing me places to eat and things to do. I have always been an independent person and I am dedicated to my fitness, so filling up free time was easy. I spent the first 30 days in an Inn on the bay, which was awesome because the beach and running trail were across the street. I then switched over to the Northland College dorms for the last two months. I preferred the inn over the dorms. Although I enjoyed the company in the dorms I preferred the privacy of the Inn. I think moving twice did provide me another opportunity to experience adapting to a new environment. By the end of my tour I knew the city of Ashland fairly well and had made it to most of the restaurants and city events. We also spent overnights working in Siren, Hayward, and New Buffalo Michigan. The overnights added even more travel experience. I also spent two weekends traveling for fun to Minneapolis, MN and Appleton, WI. Over the course of my tour I have grown to enjoy travel and am hoping that my first job will include occasional to frequent travel assignments.

There were optional activities that I chose to spend my own time on during my tour. One was preparing my resume. Martha was a huge resource when it came to resume building, especially since she understands the application process of the federal government. Another thing that Martha made accessible to me is some of her Registered Environmental Health Specialist (REHS) study materials. The REHS exam is a challenging exam that most environmental health jobs require employees to obtain shortly after employment. One of my goals is to take and pass the REHS exam first attempt. By studying now it will make it much easier to absorb material that I am exposed to over time instead of cramming right before the exam. Applying the field experience I gained at IHS with the REHS study materials will improve my chances of a first time passing score. Committing extra time to working on these items will assist me in reaching career goals.



My current goal is to find employment before I graduate in December. This can be challenging, but I set my goals high. At this point I am open to careers at all levels including local, state, and federal. Also, I am willing to relocate. My experience as a Jr. COSTEP will give me a competitive edge when applying to jobs. I do plan to commission at some point in my career. The sooner the better, but I have to be proactive and patient. Indian Health Service would be a great place for me to start my career and then commission, but at this point I am open to all opportunities. A future goal is to acquire my master's degree in either public health or environmental management. A lot of students want to dive right into graduate school, but exploring the field of environmental health is important to me before making decisions on graduate school.

Overall the Jr. COSTEP program is an exceptional internship opportunity. I recommend this program to any student in a field that this internship is applicable.

Miigwech (Thank you!)