

ENS Candice Graves
JRCOSTEP Summer 2015
Eastern Kentucky University
Ashland Field Office
Ashland, Wisconsin

From the moment I entered the Environmental Health program at my school, Eastern Kentucky University, I was encouraged by my department chair, Dr. Carolyn Harvey, and several other professors to pursue the JRCOSTEP program provided through the United States Public Health Service (USPHS). Eastern has contributed several students to the JRCOSTEP program over the years and I thought it would be a great way to end my undergraduate career. Little did I know that it would be a life changing experience as well. This opportunity posed the chance to expand my current knowledge, apply the concepts taught in class to working skills, and grow on a personal level as I was in a state that was completely foreign to me. Having the privilege to work with the Indian Health Service (IHS) has been very rewarding and I will never forget my time of service as a JRCOSTEP.



I worked in the Ashland Field Office, which is located in a small town on Lake Superior. There are three tribes that my preceptor Martha Maynes services as an Environmental Health Specialist, which include Bad River, La Courte Oreilles, and St. Croix. At each tribe I conducted health and safety surveys at food establishments, hotels, casinos, pools, pow wows, community centers, clinics, food distribution centers, and summer feeding programs. For each survey I generated reports using WebEHRS, which is the online reporting system used throughout IHS. Also, I received my ServSafe certification which expanded my knowledge of the 2013 FDA Food Code and provided me with the foundation to conduct food sanitation surveys. I conducted



several food handler classes which educates employees in the food industry on safe food handling practices. Additionally, I participated in an O&M inspection, a grant writing meeting, and assisted Martha by researching for her Injury Prevention Fellowship which has a focus of Suicide Prevention.

The time I got to spend with the tribes was a positive influence on my experience as a JRCOSTEP as I got to see Martha's relationship building skills and how that is incorporated into the work that she does as an EHS for these tribes. The people we came in contact with while on the reservations respect her and value the advice she gives to improve their establishments and uphold health and safety standards in their community. I, also, respect Martha, and I am thankful to have had her as my preceptor. The amount of knowledge she has about Environmental Health is wide reaching, and if there was something she was unsure about she always knew the right person to ask. With her as my preceptor, this opportunity was

more than just a credit to finish my degree, it was on the job training and experience from a person who wants me to truly succeed in this field following graduation. I will be forever grateful to Martha for the attentive and broad experience she has given me.

My time in Ashland was not all work; I had some fun as well! When first arriving in Ashland, I knew that I wanted to find a church and make friends to help occupy my free time during my four month stay. I was introduced to members of the church and they exposed me to fun activities in Ashland: the Northern Lights, sail boating, camping, bon fires, yard games, swimming, tubing, canoeing, town celebrations, hikes, and Wisconsin ice cream. I do have to admit, the ice cream in Wisconsin is the best ice cream I have ever tasted. Even the Dairy Queen ice cream has a special taste to it! All of these activities helped shaped my experience as a JRCOSTEP. Being the youngest child from a small town in Kentucky, as well as being away from home was difficult, but through the warm faces at the Ashland Field Office and the friends I made it was an easier transition than expected. Through this experience I have learned how to adjust to a new environment, which will make it easier for me as I begin the search for my first career.

Since an internship experience was the last thing necessary to complete my degree, the question of “What are your career goals?” pops up a lot! My main goal is to have a job with IHS by December and join the USPHS Commissioned Corps within the next year. In the future I plan to earn my Masters and Doctorate degree. Eventually I want to become a professor to begin paving the way for future environmental health students. My professors have been very influential in my environmental health career thus far and I would like to provide that to students one day. Also I would like to work with an international mission that provides clean water to underdeveloped nations because that was a special experience I participated in with my internship last summer in Haiti. All of those goals may seem like a jumbled mess, but my overall goal is to use my education, skills and passion for environmental health to help people.

Having the opportunity to be a part of the JRCOSTEP program has been a life changing experience. I would highly recommend this program to any student looking to enter into the environmental health field. Thank you to everyone who made it possible for me to have this experience!

