

**ENS Francis Park
JRCOSTEP Summer 2015
California State University, Northridge
Minnesota District Office
Bemidji, Minnesota**

These past several months spent in Bemidji, Minnesota as a JRCOSTEP can only be described as the best decision I could have made. It was expected that coming from the warm weather of Southern California to the woods of Northern Minnesota would be a bit of a change, but sitting here now I am left thinking “California who?”.

Hello, my name is Francis Park and I am the Indian Health Service (IHS) Environmental Health COSTEP here at the Minnesota District Office in Bemidji. I am a senior at California State University, Northridge and will be graduating this Fall with a degree in Environmental & Occupational Health. Like many other COSTEPs this summer, I first heard about the COSTEP program from my college professor and mentor, Dr. Thomas Hatfield. He described this internship, like many others, as a way to learn about environmental health from professionals in the field. Upon experiencing it directly, it is safe to say that this internship is so much more.

Disregarding the beautiful cross country road trip that took place prior to my arrival, the experiences I have been exposed to are quite extensive and continually growing. But it is important to remember that no matter how much potential an opportunity presents, it is up to us ourselves to make the most of it. There will always be projects and tasks that are given in any position, but to expand and grow from them is our responsibility and reward.



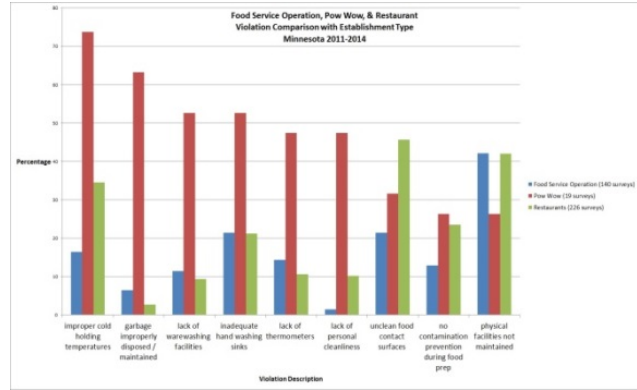
Inside view of a wastewater lift station; snakes free of charge



Performing fit testing at the White Earth Health Center

Beginning from my first day as a COSTEP till now, I have been able to; obtain ServSafe Food Protection Manager certification, certification as a ServSafe instructor and examination proctor, conduct respirator fit testing for over 60 medical practitioners, perform environmental health surveys for establishments including but not limited to – Pow wows, restaurants, and elderly nutrition centers, as well as conduct Minnesota-wide data analysis and educational flyers. The highlight of this list is knowing that the summer not over yet, leaving time for so much more.

Between conducting surveys and writing reports, I was able to make time to pursue personal projects. My preceptor LCDR David Kostamo was very encouraging with project ideas and suggestions which contributed to two of my proudest assignments. By utilizing the Web-based Environmental Health Reporting System (WebEHRS), I was able to compile data from all of Minnesota identifying the most common recurring food violations within the Indian Health Service database. With this data I was able to create an advertising campaign designed to address these issues and lower their incidence rates among itinerant food venues. Knowing how much time and resources that my mentors and the Commissioned Corps had invested in me, I was happy to work towards making a lasting contribution.



Project analysis of Minnesota state (IHS) top six most common violations assessment

I know that for many students the application process can seem quite daunting and time consuming however, I can promise you it is worth it. If you are passionate about environmental health and the opportunity to grow professionally, then a summer as a JRCOSTEP with the Commissioned Corps is the perfect place to be. So many internships simply offer a place to observe the day's ins and outs of a specific position, however the Commissioned Corps offers so much more. In the end, it is up to you to put forth the effort. Nobody is going to hold your hand through it forever and now is the perfect time to start. I urge you to take control of your own future and start working towards your goals today.

Educational flyers addressing the top six & most common food violations for itinerant food vendors

With the start of the semester and California just around the corner, I am able to reflect on my time here in Bemidji and how great of an experience it has been overall. Being given the opportunity to meet with and form bonds with my mentors has helped focus my outlook on my future and my career, and for that I am thankful. In addition to these bonds, the experiences and knowledge I now have has made this summer that much more of an unforgettable experience. Thank you to Bemidji and the U.S Public Health Service for this opportunity, for it will forever hold a special place in my heart.



Posing with after-work hobbies (from left to right) Fred, Jumbo, ENS Park, Wallace, and Pete)