

**ENS Shelby Clark**  
**JRCOSTEP Summer 2016**  
**Western Carolina University**  
**Reno District Office**  
**Reno, Nevada**

My name is Shelby Clark and I am a rising senior in Western Carolina University's Environmental Health Program. Soon after finding my home in the Environmental Health Program I heard about the JRCOSTEP from many of my peers who had recently completed JRCOSTEP experiences. After hearing the great things that my peers were saying about the program I knew I had to apply and I made it a personal goal to one day complete a JRCOSTEP. You can imagine that when I received a phone call stating that I would be spending the summer in the Reno District Office I was ecstatic. After receiving the call all I could do was imagine and anticipate the work and travel experiences that were to come. The ideas that I had formed prior to moving to Reno do not even compare to the amazing experience I have received while in Reno.

On my first day I was provided with a work plan that include majority of the activities I would be completing over the summer. This is when I realized the wide variety of work I would be doing. The Reno District Office serves 32 tribes in Nevada, Utah, and part of California. I had the opportunity to work in all areas of the District which included the Owens Valley, Elko, Schurz, and Uintah & Ouray Service Units. Being placed in the Reno District Office not only allowed me to work in many different places throughout the District but it also provided me with the opportunity to form professional relationships with several Environmental Health staff. I had the opportunity to go out in the field with all the Environmental Health Officers and Specialists, and even some of the Environmental Engineers. Working with many different people throughout the office allowed me to observe the different approaches each professional takes in the field towards their work.

My work included food establishment surveys and reports, domestic water sampling, rabies clinics, temporary food vendor surveys, health clinic surveys, seat belt surveys, mosquito surveillance, and trainings for food handlers and temporary food vendors. All of these experiences allowed me to apply the information I have learned in my environmental health courses. Learning information in the classroom is just the start to fully understanding a topic. When I was out in the field applying this information my brain began to connect all the dots and it all began to make sense and gave the hours of studying potential foodborne illnesses and the collection of endless numbers of water samples a whole new meaning. The first time I fully realized this I was collecting domestic water samples in a neighborhood that had previously experienced high levels of arsenic in their drinking water. The Environmental Health Officers and Environmental Engineers partnered on a project to install point of use water filters designed to remove arsenic from drinking water. I assisted with completing the first round of in-home sampling to determine the effectiveness of the filters. Previously in my water quality class I had tested water samples for many different contaminants but



Collecting domestic water samples



Assisting with a temporary food vendor training



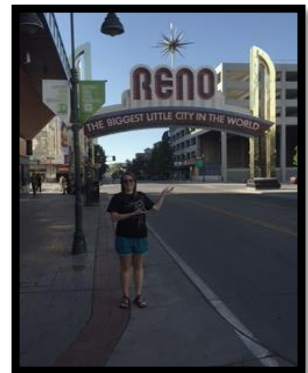
Completing seat belt use surveys

applying this knowledge to a real life situation made it so much more valuable. Another example of this was when I assisted in completing food service surveys. In my food safety course I had learned the FDA Food Code backwards and forwards but I did not understand the importance of these concepts until I applied this information during trainings, food service surveys, and writing reports. It was experiences like these that really made my COSTEP experience valuable.

One major injury prevention project I worked on independently was conducting observational seat belt use surveys and training new Environmental Health Specialists on how to conduct surveys. To complete these surveys I traveled to a community and selected locations that had a large volume of traffic that were representative of the reservation's population. I observed vehicles for one hour and recorded seat belt use of drivers and front seat passengers. By the end of the summer I had completed a total of 10 surveys in Pyramid Lake, Fallon and Walker River. After completing the surveys, I added the data I collected to the District's database. This data will be used to monitor seat belt use over time in these communities and will be presented to tribal stakeholders.

I also had the resources to travel, not only for work but also for leisure. Growing up on the east coast I did not have many opportunities to explore the west coast. While in Reno I was given the opportunity to explore places like Lake Tahoe, Seattle, San Francisco, and the coast of Oregon. I would not have had the opportunity to visit these places if it weren't for the JRCOSTEP.

Although my time in Reno was short, it was packed with invaluable experiences and lessons. I had the opportunity to put my environmental health skills to use while immersing myself in many different cultures. This combination is one that I would not have been able to receive anywhere else. This summer, I learned more about myself and my plans for the future than I ever thought I would, and I will definitely be considering a career in environmental health and more specifically the USPHS. Indian Health Service and the U.S. Public Health Service are great organizations that go above and beyond to ensure the health and safety of each and every person they work with. I am very thankful that I had the opportunity to be a part of these organizations.



Posing with the Reno arch