

ENS Cecelia Austin
JRCOSTEP Summer 2017
Missouri Southern State University
Shawnee Service Unit
Shawnee, Oklahoma

Hello, my name is Cecelia Austin. I am a senior Environmental Health and Safety major at Missouri Southern State University, Joplin, Missouri. I was first introduced to the JRCOSTEP when my advisor mentioned that the JRCOSTEP is the absolute best externship you can get in the environmental health field. I was pleasantly surprised a few months after submitting my application, when CAPT Danny Walters, Director, Division of Environmental Health Services, Oklahoma City Area, Indian Health Service, emailed me the day after I got married to see if I was interested in a JRCOSTEP in Oklahoma!

I conducted my JRCOSTEP as an Environmental Health Officer (EHO) for the Indian Health Service in Shawnee, Oklahoma and worked under the direction of an outstanding preceptor, Kayla Davis. The tribes served by the Shawnee Service Unit include the Kickapoo Tribe, Sac and Fox Tribe, Iowa Tribe, and the Citizen Potawatomi Tribe.

During my externship, I completed courses in: Food Handler's Training; Safe Kids Outdoor Play; Dental Sterilization; Assessment Writing; and in Epi Info. I also had the chance to apply that knowledge first hand. Kayla wanted me to experience as many different environmental health areas as possible. I was able to partake in surveys of several facility types: food service; water and wastewater; pools; powwow grounds; juvenile detention centers; and others. During my externship, I took a sterilization course at the Area Office. The next day I used what I learned at the Wewoka Dental Facility where I was able to see the sterilization procedures and equipment first hand. I feel fortunate to have this valuable, hands-on experience to add to my education.

One highlight of my internship was getting to take a week-long CDC Epi Info course. I was able to design forms useful for gathering data in the field. Another favorite part of my externship was the food service sanitation surveys. I was able to help with over 35 food surveys. One of which, resulted in a temporary kitchen being closed. It was nice to experience a non-regulatory side of food safety. Our help and expertise was welcomed. My experience showed me the importance of tactfully and respectfully communicating safety discrepancies.

My JRCOSTEP definitely exposed me to Native American culture in a way I otherwise would not have. I had Kayla there to answer any and all of my questions, from technical food safety to culture differences. Hearing the different IHS employees' and tribal workers' stories and thoughts helped me better understand the purpose and importance of the Indian Health Service. It allowed me to appreciate the goal is to provide non-regulatory, technical assistance to the tribes we serve.

I would recommend the JRCOSTEP to any student looking for an externship opportunity. The real life applications and practical experience I gained will benefit me forever. I am thankful to have had this incredible opportunity.