

**ENS Sydney Harris
JRCOSTEP Summer 2017
Western Carolina University
Lawton Service Unit
Lawton, Oklahoma**

My name is Sydney Harris and I am an upcoming senior pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Health at Western Carolina University. This past summer, I was lucky enough to receive the opportunity of a lifetime and work for the Indian Health Service (IHS). More specifically, I worked at the Office of Environmental Health and Engineering, Lawton Indian Hospital, in Oklahoma. I first heard about the JRCOSTEP two years ago when Commissioned Corps officers visited our school to discuss their field of work, and the opportunities available to students who complete a JRCOSTEP. What interested me the most was how passionate and enthusiastic they were about what they do, and how their jobs have allowed them to travel and experience moments that they may have never gotten to otherwise. It was then that I was immediately intrigued and knew that I wanted to see what a career with the U.S. Public Health Service would be like.

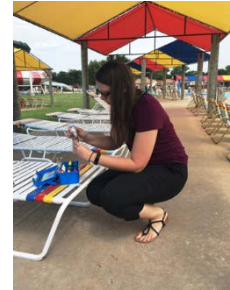


Over the course of my externship, I completed a lot of activities that allowed me to experience all aspects of environmental health. Upon my arrival to Lawton, I was instantly busy with conducting Life Safety and food service sanitation surveys at a number of assorted casinos that the Lawton Service Unit serves. The reports I completed for these surveys involved utilizing the NFPA 101 Life Safety Code, 1910 CFR [OSHA], and the 2013 Food Code. These were used to reference recommendations for correcting violations we noted during the surveys. Once finalized and placed into the Web-based Environmental Health Reporting System (WebEHRS), the reports were sent out to the appropriate personnel. The numerous inspections that I completed with my preceptor were not just limited to casinos, however. We performed many surveys at childcare centers, a water park, gas station, elderly center, youth and women's shelter, and community buildings. I enjoyed being able to survey a variety of buildings because it allowed me to note some of the unique challenges each facility has. Throughout the rest of my summer, I was immersed in a number of other environmental health services that IHS offers. I participated in seatbelt surveys, a car seat check and distribution event, water/wastewater surveys, and much more.

My main project for the summer involved creating a training program for crowd management. The purpose of the project was to improve life safety at tribal events and venues, such as casinos, festivals, powwows, and others, where a large amount of people gather. This project was a joint effort in which I was able to collaborate with JRCOSTEPs at the Pawnee and Shawnee Service Units. Other minor projects that I participated in this summer involved presenting information on bloodborne pathogens and hazard communication to employees at a casino. I presented two Food

Handlers training classes, in which I also administered and graded the tests. Although I was nervous for these presentations, I feel that, in the end, I was given the chance to practice and improve my public speaking. Finally, throughout the summer I visited the local water park and took weekly chlorine and pH measurements.

One of the many reasons why I am so grateful to have been chosen for this externship is because it exposed me to all sides of environmental health, some of which I previously had no experience in. For example, one day, I went with CAPT Chris Kates and was able to assess potential radiation exposure from x-ray systems at a clinic. I also determined the air flow rate, and the number of air changes per hour in the ventilation systems for this clinic. This allowed me to experience topics I may learn about in industrial hygiene and air quality; classes which I have yet to take. Additionally, I was able to put into practice some of the concepts which I already learned in school. Performing the food service sanitation surveys, and teaching the Food Handlers training class, allowed me to employ the knowledge I learned in class, and after these experiences, I feel a lot more confident in my overall ability to practice food safety.



In addition to all that I learned this summer, I also enjoyed some down time, which I was able to use to explore the great state of Oklahoma, and even some of the neighboring states. In Lawton, OK I was able to see bison, longhorn, and prairie dogs at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. From the top of Mount Scott, I discovered a beautiful view of the areas surrounding Lawton. When I first arrived for my externship, there was a local arts festival that I was lucky to attend as well. On the Fourth of July weekend, I listened to some great music and saw a spectacular fireworks display at the Freedom Festival. I enjoyed access to amenities available on Ft. Sill, the military base in town, and spent some time out on the water at Lake Elmer Thomas Recreation Area. One day, I traveled westward to Dallas, TX where I enjoyed a day full of sightseeing. I visited family in New Mexico and traveled through Colorado -- another state I had never been to. It has been amazing seeing parts of the United States that I may have never gotten to see otherwise!

I am eternally grateful for this experience, not only for the professional development that I gained, but also for being able to be surrounded by a great group of people. The people in the office that I worked with were extremely welcoming and kind to me throughout my entire stay. I also couldn't have asked for a better preceptor and mentor. My preceptor, Katie Tompkins, went above and beyond to ensure I was safe, and made it known that she was there for me should I need anything. Thanks to her, I was able to engage in many learning experiences. I can truly say that this experience was an opportunity of a lifetime!

