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Wright State University
Great Plains Area
Aberdeen, South Dakota**

My name is Christina R. Brock and I am currently pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Health Science at Wright State University. I first learned of the JRCOSTEP while browsing the web in search of a summer internship. As I have a keen interest in Public Health, working for the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corp sounded like a great opportunity. So great in fact, I ended up changing my Biology major to Environmental Health Science so I would be eligible to apply.



Teaching a food safety course

During my JRCOSTEP assignment, I worked out of the Great Plains Area Office, Indian Health Service (IHS), which is located in Aberdeen, SD. The Great Plains Area provides Environmental Health services to 18 tribes in four states (North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska and Iowa). I had to do a lot of driving to reach my fieldwork assignments. I think that being located in the Area Office allowed me a little more flexibility to travel to different locations during my JRCOSTEP and I really enjoyed the variety of experiences. Being able to observe various work styles and interact with the IHS and Tribal Environmental Health staff was very exciting. I found each task/assignment to be very interesting and worth the drive.

During my first weeks in Aberdeen I was tasked with increasing my knowledge of basic environmental health, specifically food safety. To do this I read the FDA Food Code and Food Code Annex and the NEHA Certified Food Safety Professional 3rd edition. One of my first work projects was assisting CAPT Allen and Mr. Wildcat in researching injury prevention products and some environmental health equipment. I looked for the best Carbon Monoxide (CO) and smoke alarms on the market and reasonable prices. My work will aid Mr. Wildcat with making a large purchase of CO and smoke alarms.

My first survey was with Mr. Wildcat and Ms. Leaf-Bellile at the Sisseton Service Unit. I learned the basic principles of how to conduct a food safety survey and create a photo log. Each survey had the same process and over time this became easier to do. First, Ms. Leaf-Bellile would introduce herself and explained the purpose of the survey, which was consultative. Second, she would go around the facility making observations, writing notes and taking photos. If the person in charge was with her, she would explain the findings as she went along. After the field inspection, Ms. Leaf-Bellile would have a final conference (close out) with the person in charge explaining key finding and initial recommendations. Finally, she would have two weeks to finalize her report, upload it to WebEHRS and send the report to the person in charge.



Measuring food temperatures during an inspection

The biggest survey I assisted in was for a powwow. The first step was to develop a lesson plan for a food safety course the vendors had to attend. The second step was to inspect the food vendors' booths.

While my survey work mainly dealt with food safety, I have done a variety of surveys with different goals in mind. One interesting experience was when I worked with CAPT Allen. We surveyed two community ambulance garages on the Standing Rock Reservation. Overall the facilities were in great shape and I learned a great deal about infection control and fire safety. Another different survey experience was when I conducted a hotel survey with Ms. Leaf-Bellile where she taught me how to look for bed bugs and what key issues I needed to look for during a hotel survey.

When I was not conducting surveys, I developed fact sheets on Ergonomic, Food Safety, and Mosquitos/Ticks with the help of CAPT Allen. I have learned more about the subtleties of developing educational material during my stint as an Ensign for the U.S. Public Health Commissioned Corp than I ever did at Wright State. When I was not working on these fact sheets, I was developing a standardized seatbelt observation survey form for Mr. Wildcat. I worked with Ms. Leaf-Bellile and Mr. Wildcat to conduct an observation survey and wrote the report. I had to compile data from past surveys and develop a graph and table to include in the report.

My final assignment for the Area was to assist a Service Unit [i.e. hospital] organize their Safety Data Sheets (SDS) and develop their chemical inventory. This task was the most challenging due to all of the products being used and the different departments I worked with over two weeks. I got to work with a Facility Engineer (CAPT Lee Jackson) along with various department supervisors. With their help I was able to organize the SDS for the hospital and get the inventory placed in a spreadsheet.

What I liked most about my JRCOSTEP experience, above all else, is continuously improving my knowledge and skills in the field of environmental health, safety management and community injury prevention. From doing product research, creating photo logs, writing survey reports, to figuring out how to organize an entire hospital SDS inventory, I have learned new skills and improved existing ones. I have learned more new information than I have ever done before.

The JRCOSTEP offers a unique experience to get out in the field and have real hands-on experience learning the practice of environmental health. I learned an immense amount from the activities I have done and the EHOs I have had the privilege of working with. A huge thank you to CAPT Chris Allen for giving me the opportunity to participate in this program. Thanks everyone who I have worked with and have learned from.