

Nicole Sulikowski
Intern Summer 2018
Illinois State University
Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC)
Sitka, Alaska

My name is Nicole Sulikowski and I am entering my senior year at Illinois State University this fall. I am on track to graduate in December of 2018 with a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Health. This program requires nine weeks of professional practice in order to graduate, and I was given the opportunity to complete this academic requirement with Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC) in Sitka, AK.

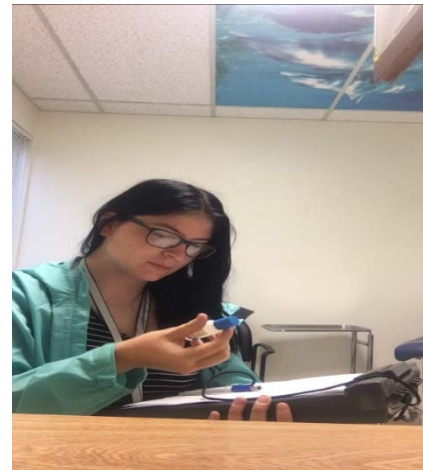


I was first introduced to the Indian Health Service (IHS) from one of my professors, CAPT George Byrns, USPHS (Ret),. Dr. Byrns always spoke highly and passionately of his time serving IHS, and that further confirmed that this type of work was something I wanted to be doing. I grew up with a family that was interested in Native American tradition and lifestyle and I am grateful to have come across an opportunity that allowed me to directly learn more about the culture.

After arriving to Sitka, I worked with my supervisor, Andrew Atkinson, to come up with a game plan for the summer. Some the tasks assigned to me included hazardous chemical inventory, conducting environmental tours across the consortium, respirator fit testing, and accompanying Raven's Way, the adolescent rehabilitation program, on a nine day wilderness expedition to observe safety procedures.

The main project I worked on was hazardous chemical inventory. This project consumed most of my time because inventory needed to be taken or collected from every department at every clinic in the Consortium. I either traveled and took inventory myself, or requested it be sent to me so I could enter the list on an online system SEARHC uses. The chemicals listed online have a safety data sheet attached to it so that in the event of an emergency, an employee has quick access to it.

I was fortunate enough to travel to different clinics across Southeast Alaska when doing environmental tours. This was one of my favorite parts of the summer because it allowed me



to experience flying in smaller planes and see different Native communities, cultures, and traditions. Not to mention how gorgeous the places I visited were!

I am also grateful that I was able to observe Raven's Way's safety procedures during the wilderness expedition because safety was something that I was not extremely confident with, so it challenged me and helped progress my academics. The team and I kayaked over twenty miles and lived outside in different areas for nine days, so safety was staff's number one priority. I saw incredible wildlife, built friendships with the staff members, and learned more about myself during the difficult times of the trip. This experience is almost indescribable and it is something that I will never forget.



The people I worked with were welcoming, funny, and informative, as they all had different focus areas. I cannot thank them all enough for everything they taught me! This internship has given me the opportunity to extend my studies, grow as professional, and also learn more about safety, a field so closely related to environmental health. I have become more confident in my knowledge and look forward to seeing how this experience and everything I have gained from it will help me in the future. I highly recommend working for SEARHC if possible. I will miss Sitka and I hope I can visit sometime in the near future!