

**ENS Graham Siegel
JRCOSTEP Summer 2021
Western Carolina University
Reno District Office
Reno, Nevada**



My name is Graham Siegel and I am a junior at Western Carolina University and will be graduating in May 2022 with a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Environmental Health Science. Following my graduation I intend to pursue a career in the public sector within my local health department in Charlotte, North Carolina and pursue distance learning/professional track for a graduate degree in Environmental Health Science. This summer I had the opportunity to serve with the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps as part of the Junior Commissioned Officer Student Training Externship Program (JRCOSTEP). I was stationed at the Indian Health Service (IHS), Division of Environmental Health Services, Reno District Office in Reno, NV. The office serves a multi-state region encompassing 28 tribes across Nevada, Utah, and California.

I learned about the JRCOSTEP through Western Carolina University and, after receiving a recommendation from the head of the department, I applied for the program. I received a response and happily accepted a position with the Indian Health Service at the Reno District Office. My preceptor for the COSTEP was Ms. Jennifer Corrigan, an Environmental Health Specialist who accompanied me on surveys and led my summer of public health activities. I consider myself lucky to have had such a friendly, knowledgeable, and reliable mentor for my COSTEP experience. Ms. Corrigan provided me with an understanding of the IHS mission and how I could best do my job to assist the tribal communities we serve.



During my COSTEP I had the opportunity to engage with various tribes and experience their communities first hand. This was primarily through the performance of food service sanitation surveys in which I applied my existing knowledge of food preparation and safety to identify health concerns and provide guidance to various facilities (e.g. elder nutrition programs, Head Start Centers, child care facilities, and summer food service programs). Much of the work that I did consisted of food surveys, though I also had the chance to participate in sanitary and comprehensive surveys. This involved the cross-referencing of material safety data sheets with manufacturer instructions, testing of sanitizer concentrations and expiration dates, and inspecting the quality, maintenance, and condition of facilities and their equipment. I gained additional experience by accompanying Brad Strait, Environmental Health Specialist, to Bishop, CA and the opportunity to learn about the engineering side of the Indian Health Service. Following these surveys in Bishop I assisted in completing survey reports in which the observations made at the facilities were recorded with recommended corrective action to take to remedy potential hazards.

My time with the JRCOSTEP took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and response. As such, many of the facilities had already established responses to the pandemic based guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). I had the opportunity to examine, compare, and recommend action regarding the pandemic and vaccination effort, utilizing the CDC guidance to help better educate facility staff and management. This was done at the end of surveys and served as an opportunity for facility managers and staff to voice concerns and questions they had regarding observations made during the survey and how they could best remedy them. These discussions allowed for a healthy and communicative relationship between the district office and the tribes it serves, highlighting the value of good communication when working within IHS.

I also had the opportunity to work with LTJG Andrew Park, Environmental Health Officer, in the Elko Service Unit conducting facility surveys and performing ATP bioluminescence testing to determine the effectiveness of the clinic's cleaning and disinfection procedures. Andrew also shared his experience and knowledge of backflow prevention, where we toured a wastewater treatment plant. Alongside the rest of the office, Andrew offered his expertise on the Commission Corps in helping me better understand what long-term service would look like, and his personal experience within the service and how his background in backflow prevention helped him. My trip to Elko, NV was one of the greatest experiences I had this summer and I am grateful for the education it has provided me in deciding my future career path.



My time spent within the JRCOSTEP this summer has been fantastic and more than I could have ever hoped for. I had the opportunity to take advantage of all that I had previously learned while still acquiring new knowledge and information; all of which was focused on assisting the broader community. I feel as though I have both been able to improve myself and contribute to public health in a way I have never before. It is thanks to the guidance I received from my fellow district office members that my experience was such an enlightening one. My hope is after my JRCOSTEP experience I can take all the knowledge given to me and apply it wherever I may find myself in the future.