

Olivia Massena
Extern Summer 2021
University of Massachusetts at Lowell
Manlius Field Office
Manlius, New York



My name is Olivia Massena and I am a rising senior at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell in Lowell, MA. I am working towards a degree in Public Health and plan to graduate in May 2022. I learned of this opportunity through a family member who works for Indian Health Service and recommended that I apply to work for IHS over the summer in order to explore different areas of public health and help find a career path that suits me.

During my externship, the field office in Manlius, NY acted as my home base but most of my time was spent working from home. My preceptor, LT Michael Hiles, is stationed at the Nashville Area Office and we worked together through email and also were able to go on a few site visits to different tribes across the region. During my time with Indian Health Service, I worked with the Mississippi Choctaw, the Seneca Cattaraugus, and the Oneida tribes doing a variety of inspections. Most of our time was spent doing food service sanitation surveys of the restaurants and bars on the different reservations. We ensured food was being held at the correct temperatures and was being stored properly in both hot hold and cold hold environments. We also had to make sure there were no fire hazards in the kitchens such as faulty smoke detectors or sprinklers.

Outside of the restaurants, we inspected pools and spas to ensure that the correct chemicals were being used and also to make sure that the proper life-saving equipment such as backboards and life preservers were in place. Our job was to make sure the environments were safe for all guests that would be attending the pools and spas.

One of the biggest highlights of my externship was being able to work with and meet so many different people. Not only did I work with my preceptor, but I was able to work with LT Riley Grinnell in Mississippi and Tom Witchley, an engineer who surveys the Seneca Cattaraugus area and decides where septic systems are able to be installed and also makes sure that the systems are working properly. Working with so many different people gave me a lot of different experiences. I learned about areas such as waste management that I never would have explored if it wasn't for this opportunity. Each person I worked with came from a different background and therefore brought different areas of expertise which really maximized the amount of new information that I acquired throughout the summer.



As my externship comes to a close, I am working to finish my final project. The project is based on the regulations for different types of reduced oxygen packaging methods. The two methods I focused on in my project are the cook chill method and the sous vide method. I am creating a diagram to showcase the steps of both of these processes and also the key things to look for when deciding whether you are executing these methods correctly and safely. The idea is that the diagram will be able to be used in kitchens across the region to make sure the staff has a reference if they are ever unsure of the process. The cook chill and sous vide methods are similar but have a few key differences. In the cook chill method, fully cooked food is immediately bagged and sealed and then rapidly chilled to stop the cooking process. These foods are then held at 36 degrees or colder and can be held for 30 days. In the sous vide method, raw or partially cooked foods are sealed hermetically and also held at or below 36 degrees. The idea behind both of these methods is to limit the amount of oxygen that food is packed with in an effort to be able to keep it for longer without it going bad. This can keep food costs down for restaurants and limit the amount of food waste that they create.

This whole experience with IHS has taught me more in two months than I ever thought possible. It opened my eyes to the extensive amount of careers within the public health world that I didn't even know existed. After this externship, I have a lot to think about in terms of what I want to do with the rest of my life and with my career in Public Health. I am also very grateful that I got to be around the Native American culture and learn from the people that I interacted with. To anyone else considering this experience, I would highly recommend it. I don't think there is another opportunity quite as unique as this one, especially for college students. I learned so much and appreciate everyone who helped me along the way to make sure that I had the best experience possible.