

**ENS William Bloomfield**  
**JRCOSTEP Summer 2021**  
**Ohio University**  
**Oklahoma City Area Office**  
**Oklahoma City, Oklahoma**



I am an incoming senior at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, graduating in April of 2022, with a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Health. I am interested in continuing with the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps upon graduation and feel I gained a great deal of experience and knowledge regarding environmental and institutional health during this externship. I would not have known about the Commissioned Corps if it were not for my college advisor who told me about their externship program during a campus visit my senior year of high school. I was immediately interested in it and knew I wanted to pursue this opportunity. I feel fortunate I was selected to spend the summer at the Indian Health Service (IHS), Oklahoma City Area Office, Office of Environmental Health and Engineering, Division of Environmental Health Services, especially after feeling a little unsure whether or not the externship would happen at all after the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

At the Oklahoma City Area IHS, we provide care to Native Americans at two hospitals and eight clinics in Oklahoma and Kansas. At these locations, we serve approximately 30 tribes in total. My preceptor, CDR David Bales, Environmental Health Officer, ensured I was exposed to these facilities and the people involved with these facilities throughout my externship. CDR Bales focuses on injury prevention and institutional environmental health, which was what most of my work consisted of. We conducted ventilation surveys and x-ray equipment surveys that I did not know much about beforehand, so it was interesting being able to experience a side of environmental health that had not been a focus of mine previously. CDR Bales also arranged a variety of experiences for me with other staff at IHS, so I could gain knowledge of other areas and see what I could potentially do once I obtain my degree. This made for an exciting time because I was always with new people doing new things, such as waste anesthetic gas monitoring, infection control surveys, and casino inspections.



I spent a great deal of my time doing ventilation surveys with CDR Bales and CAPT Chris Kates, and they both did a great job teaching me everything I needed to know. They made me feel comfortable and confident in making an updated survey form and using that to do a ventilation survey by myself. Along with the ventilation surveys, we would usually test the x-ray equipment too to make sure it was shooting normally. Besides these two areas, CAPT Kates also showed me how to monitor waste anesthetic gas, which I found interesting because we sat in on a few procedures at the hospitals to make sure no one was being overexposed. Additionally, I was given an opportunity to help with infection control surveys of a clinic or hospital to ensure everything was safe, clean, and the employees were taking the correct COVID-19 precautions. I also performed general casino surveys making sure their kitchens, pools, hotel rooms, and the casino areas were up to standard

and safe. I performed the casino surveys with many different people and they were all very informative and made sure I knew what I needed to do, which I appreciated.

For my project, I was tasked with updating facility information and to see if any additions were made because of COVID-19. This information will be helpful for anyone coming into these facilities because it will let them know if there is any new equipment that will need to be tested and shows the extent the facilities responded to the virus. It was interesting visiting the different facilities and seeing how they handled the virus protocols with many of them making external additions like drive-through testing areas and isolation rooms.

One of the highlights of my externship was when I climbed a water tower during a sanitary survey to observe the condition of the tower. It was scary, but really cool to have been able to do something like that. Additional highlights would have to be the people I met and learning about the various cultures of the area that are so different than what I am used to in Ohio. Moreover, the feeling of making a difference for the people of this area, especially with the pandemic, was another plus for me. I enjoyed being able to deliver vaccines knowing I was playing a part in trying to slow down the spread of the virus.

Along with the highlights there were also challenges I had to overcome while working here. Learning all of the new tasks was challenging, but once I started performing them, I figured them out and learned from it all. The work kept me on my toes because we did something new almost every day, which I appreciated. It was nice learning about both the field work and the office work and how they both complement each other. Learning the work duties was not my only challenge though, another big one was getting used to living by myself in a completely new area far away from my family and friends. So, not only did I gain knowledge about environmental and institutional health, I also learned quite a bit about myself and how life after college will be.



I had an unforgettable experience working this summer for IHS in Oklahoma City and I would highly recommend this program to others who are looking for a rewarding externship. It allowed me to gain so much knowledge and experience in a short amount of time, not only about the job itself, but about life in general. Additionally, my main recommendation to future externs is to be open to everything the externship and your supervisor has to offer to maximize your experience. Lastly, I would like to say thank you to IHS for this once in a lifetime opportunity!