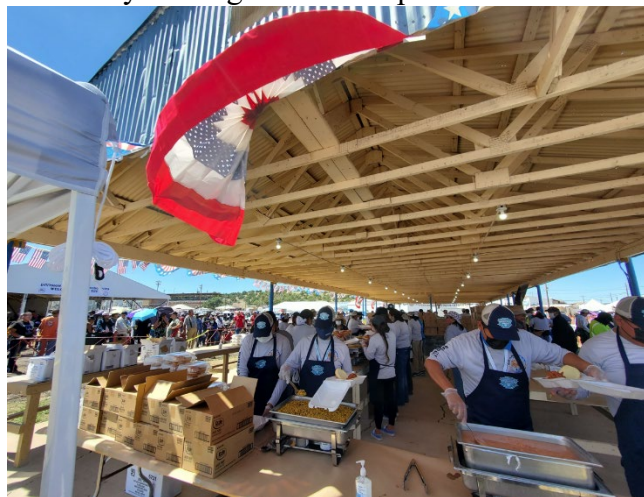


Samantha Shapiro
Extern Summer 2023
University of North Carolina
Shiprock Service Unit
Shiprock, New Mexico



My name is Samantha Shapiro, and I am May 2023 Master of Public Health, Environmental Health Solutions, graduate from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. I had initially heard about the Sanitarian Extern job announcement from my school job postings website without knowing about the Indian Health Service (IHS), Division of Environmental Health Services, COSTEP/Extern program. After my initial application, I received the opportunity to interview with CDR Donna Gilbert and learned more about the Navajo Area IHS as well as the environmental health work I would be doing. When I accepted the job offer, I moved to Farmington, NM and started to work with my preceptor, Samantha Claw, on June 20, 2023 at the Shiprock Service Unit.

I was extremely interested in pursuing this opportunity to get a chance to work outside of my focuses for environmental health: water quality, and sanitation. I had also wanted to learn from and work with the Navajo Nation to better understand the environmental health issues impacting different Chapters. During my externship, working on food service sanitation surveys, comprehensive institutional environmental health surveys, Chapter work plans, and temporary food stand surveys, became a welcome part of my weekly duties. My survey experience included food service and comprehensive surveys of schools, summer school lunch programs, casinos, Navajo Fairs, senior centers, Head Starts, and childcare centers. My preceptor and coworkers Samantha, Donna, Tina, Charley, Lucynda, and Randy helped prepare me for on-the-job surveying and cultural competency considerations when working with Navajo community members. Outside of surveying, other projects I had a chance to pursue surrounded injury prevention including elder fall prevention research for different safety products and helping with data collection for seatbelt surveys throughout the Shiprock Service Unit.



Conducting a food service sanitation survey at the Navajo Nation Fair BBQ in Window Rock

Additionally, I have had more opportunities to pursue environmental public health education through community outreach, food handler training classes, and vector control through integrated pest management in childcare and school settings.

One of the projects I had worked on involved creating a vector control related presentation in two days for Navajo Nation Head Start faculty and staff. It was exciting using my research and presentation knowledge for a public-facing audience, especially relating to vector control, environmental health, and pest management. I was able to learn more about integrated pest management, adapt the information available for Head Starts and childcare, and presented this project to 218 faculty and staff at Crystal Chapter House in Crystal, NM.



Presentation at Crystal Chapter House

Through this work, I had the opportunity to travel to Kayenta, Monument Valley, Mexican Hat, Crystal, Gallup, Chinle for the Central Navajo Fair, and Window Rock for the Navajo Nation Fair. Without this externship, I may have never experienced a Navajo Rodeo, Song and Dance, and Powwow. Alongside of traveling for work, I had the opportunity to visit the local area and explore Durango, the Aztec Ruins, local farmers markets and flea markets, and Canyon de Chelly in Chinle.

I would recommend applying for an externship position as an opportunity to travel to new places and learn from other cultures that may be completely different from yours. On the job, I was able to develop my own public health communication skills and help inform community members about environmental health topics, something that I otherwise would not have had the opportunity to at such a large scale. There are many opportunities to work independently and together with supervisors and coworkers for guidance.

If you're interested in working with rural, underserved communities, willing to learn and try out new things, and take on new roles and responsibilities, I would highly suggest this opportunity, especially with Navajo Area Office. This externship helped me develop professionally and see the tangible impacts when working to facilitate environmental health.



Visit to Monument Valley