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Jr. COSTEP Summer 2008
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My name is Elizabeth Cookson, and I am a Native Oklahoman in more ways than one. My COSTEP experience started with conversations with my academic advisor, Patrick Bohan, a retired USPHS captain. Astounded that I'd made it to my senior year "so quickly" (It felt like a long three years to me!), Capt. Bohan suggested I do my required internship with the Commissioned Corps.



I was uncertain at first. The application website made my head spin with the volume of paperwork. However, I can now confidently say that *paperwork no longer scares me*. With support from Capt. Bohan, I sent in my application. It soon became common among my fellow COSTEP applicants at East Central University in Ada to ask, "Heard from 'em yet?"

Well, thankfully, I was eventually called by LCDR Celeste Davis. LCDR Davis is an alumnus of East Central, as were several other people I met during my internship. At the recommendation of my advisor, I was offered a chance to go to Albuquerque, New Mexico, and work in the Area Office. Thrilled, I quickly agreed.

After a vexing experience trying to find housing in Albuquerque, I finally arrived at my duty station. My first day was spent getting settled and entered into the system, which is no easy task. Before I left for the day my preceptor stated casually, "Oh, you'll be doing a rabies clinic tomorrow." Confused, I spent the next ten minutes finding out exactly what a rabies clinic was and where the clinic would be. Apparently, rabies clinics are common out here, much to my surprise. I was told I would be giving vaccinations to dogs and cats to help prevent rabies in the IHS service communities IHS. My first rabies clinic was at the Jicarilla Apache Nation, and we vaccinated almost 400 animals that day.

That was the start of my COSTEP experience, and it has been quite a ride ever since! Since I was stationed in the Area Office, I was given a unique opportunity to work with both the Santa Fe and Albuquerque Service Units. My time in New Mexico was divided between visiting eight pueblos and the Jicarilla Apache nation to perform five rabies clinics, teach three food handlers classes, survey food vendors, perform Head Start and pool surveys, and teach children proper hand washing. When not out in the field, I

worked on and compiled a community environmental health profile for the Pueblo of Sandia, assembled two PowerPoint presentations for Climate Change and Zoonotic and Vector Borne Diseases, as well as entered data into WebEHRS.



Aside from gaining valuable work experience, I was also privileged to observe the Pueblo peoples' Feast Days, which are quite different from anything I had ever seen before. Each Pueblo has a patron saint, given to them by the Spanish when the conquistadors first swept through this area. Every year, on their Feast Day, the patron saint is brought out of the church and traditional dances are performed. The sight is beautiful. If ever given the chance, everyone

should make it out to see a Feast Day.

The experience with COSTEP has been wonderful. I've gained practical, hands on experience that will help me in my future career. While I don't know for sure if I'll be going into IHS, I do know that the experiences I've had will last a life time. A profound thank you goes out to everyone who has encouraged and helped me through my COSTEP. I must especially thank the Albuquerque Service Unit, with whom I spent most of my time in the field. They 'adopted' me and were all amazingly tolerant of my constant questions.

If you're still having doubts about signing up for a COSTEP, all I can say is *Go for it!* The paperwork is daunting, but the outcome will be well worth the effort.