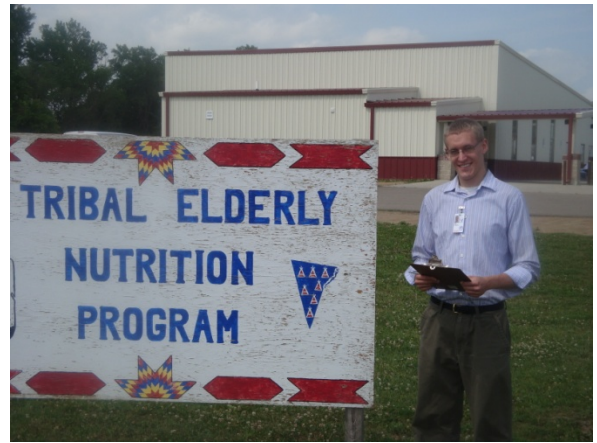


ENS Tyler White
Jr. COSTEP Summer 2012
Saint Louis University
Woodrow Wilson Keeble Memorial Health
Care Center
Sisseton, SD



My name is Tyler White; I am currently pursuing a graduate degree in Environmental Health at Saint Louis University in Saint Louis, MO. I was assigned as a JRCOSTEP this summer to the Sisseton Indian Health Service Unit located in the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate Tribal community in South Dakota. My work this summer focused on injury prevention and food safety. Initially, I was unsure of what to expect, having no extensive experience outside the classroom with either of these two fields. However, I soon discovered their value to the community and within the broader context of public health.

With Tribal Injury Prevention Specialist Shannon White as a preceptor, I gained an inside look at the formidable alliance of public health and law enforcement. Throughout the summer, I conducted both observational seatbelt surveys and speed detection surveys. In a push towards evidence-based public health, these surveys become vital to providing necessary data for the evaluation of past programs and the planning of future ones.

In addition to collecting and analyzing these data, I researched current information on child passenger safety and impaired driving prevention, for incorporation into an article for the tribal newspaper and a presentation at the July meeting of the Community Injury Prevention Team (CIPT), respectively. To supplement this informational aspect, Shannon White provided me with several hands-on opportunities to learn more about motor vehicle injury prevention. These included a ride along with a tribal police officer, participation in a sobriety checkpoint, and attendance at the monthly CIPT meetings. Not only did this allow me to apply the theoretical basis for prevention work, but it also served as a reminder of the importance behind our efforts: saving lives.



The crux of my work in injury prevention this summer revolved around a project investigating the difference in DUI records between the Tribal Police Department and the Tribal Courts. Law enforcement had been expressing frustration as the number of impaired driving arrests is often significantly greater than the number of fully charged DUIs. This results in a greater number of potential repeat offenders. After collecting the police records on DUI arrests and comparing them with the tribal court case records, I was able to summarize some of the reasons behind the difference. This information will be useful for making policy recommendations for the handling of DUI cases, both in collecting the evidence and in how cases are prosecuted in the Tribal Court system.

In Environmental Health, I was able to delve into the practice of food safety with Environmental Health Officer LCDR Martin Stephens. Together, we surveyed 16 food service establishments, including schools, restaurants, casinos, convenience stores and Pow-Wow mobile food vendors. I developed an understanding and appreciation for a balanced approach to food safety. The goal of our survey work was to make observations, justified by the evidence-based FDA Food Code, and build cooperation and trust with the facility operators to ensure appropriate steps were taken to reduce food safety risks. Thus, I learned to focus on the operational aspects that posed the greatest risk to health and safety, such as hand washing techniques, cross contamination

issues and maintaining proper hot/cold holding temperatures. Moreover, I observed how proper communication with managers and employees can often identify new, innovative solutions to potential risks observed in a survey. This was especially true in the Pow-Wow food vendor surveys, where the context of a ceremonial gathering and a rush of business squeezed into one weekend presented new challenges and opportunities.

In conjunction with the in-person surveys, I also compiled the written photo log reports. Working on these reports steered me toward further information on food safety, including an online training session provided by the Albuquerque Area IHS. I continued to develop my own knowledge on the subject, while contributing what I had learned to each additional survey and report. To me, this continual learning process is central to the role of a public health professional, and is the reason my experience this summer has been so valuable.



I am very grateful for having such a unique opportunity to apply my education to an exciting and important public health context. It was fascinating to hone in on the context of motor vehicle accidents through the lens of prevention. Collaborating with the CIPT, the Tribal Police Department, and the Tribal Courts afforded me a constructive insight into interdisciplinary research in action. Conducting surveys and compiling reports sharpened my perspective on risk analysis and communication. All this while also experiencing the inviting culture and strong sense of community of the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate Tribe made this summer COSTEP a one of a kind experience.

