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Jr COSTEP Summer 2012
Western Carolina University
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Santa Fe, New Mexico**

My name is Lauren Butner. I live in Cullowhee North Carolina and attend Western Carolina University. This fall will be my last semester of college. In December if everything goes according to plan I will end a four and a half year journey and graduate with a bachelor's degree in Environmental Health.



I was lucky enough to spend my summer of 2011 and 2012 working as a JrCOSTEP with the Indian Health Service (IHS), Office of Environmental Health and Engineering (OEHE&E). My introduction to IHS began last summer in Lakeside Arizona and continued this summer in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The experience I have accumulated working with this program is remarkable. These two internships have greatly enhanced my knowledge of Environmental Health.

Every location in IHS is unique and provides a wide variety of work. In Santa Fe I worked with ten out of the twenty-six tribes the Albuquerque Area serves. Throughout the summer I spent time in the field participating in rabies clinics, food vendor surveys, and facility assessments. I also spent time in the office working on powerpoint presentations, brochures and written reports for public health disease prevention.

At the rabies clinics I helped vaccinate dogs and cats, filled out paperwork for record keeping and got to interact with members of the tribes and their adorable pets! The food vendor surveys took place during feast day festivities. The surveying activities really helped me apply the knowledge and skills I have acquired from the food safety aspect of my major. I was given the opportunity on several occasions to perform these inspections on my own. This independent work helped me gain a sense of responsibility within the Environmental Health team at our service unit as well as taught me how to deal with situations on my own when given a task.



Although feast days provided me with a chance to apply my environmental health knowledge, I also saw them as an excellent opportunity to get a real taste of the pueblo. These days helped provide me with a better understanding of traditional practices within Native American culture. My favorite part about feast days was getting a chance to watch the dancers. The regalia, the drumming, the singing and all of the movement just gives me the chills every time I see it. The pride the tribal members take in their culture and in serving their community this way is something that is truly a privilege to see.

Most of the facility inspections I participated in involved different kinds of food service establishments. These individual surveys typically involve providing a written report afterwards to the management of the facility that includes details about all deficiencies noted. This really helped familiarize me with the FDA food code and obtain better skills with report writing.

The public health prevention document assigned to me addressed many public health issues in this region. I conducted research on bed bugs, head lice, elderly

falls and occupant restraint use. The information gathered helped me understand the significance of these public health concerns and gave me information on prevention techniques I can use in the future to benefit others and myself.

The two experiences I have had as a COSTEP working with the Indian Health Service have broadened my knowledge of the environmental health field. The opportunity I had to work with the tribal members from Pueblos, Jicarilla Apache Nation, and the Ute Tribes performing multiple tasks helped me grasp a better understanding of what it's going to be like working as a professional someday. The work is fun and interesting but the real satisfaction I have received from working with IHS is getting to be a part of the team. A job is supposed to be like a home and that is exactly how IHS feels; like family. This program provides students with an excellent opportunity to apply what they've learned from their studies while working with a well-rounded group of health professionals. The COSTEP internship is one that will challenge, push and change you. I would recommend it to anyone!

