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Jr COSTEP Summer 2012
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Hello, my name is Emily Patton, and this upcoming fall semester I will be a senior at Western Carolina University working towards a bachelor's degree in Environmental Health. When I first heard that it is required for all juniors in the major to complete a summer internship I was so excited, but I had no idea where I would be able to intern at. That is when my professor's told me about the COSTEP program with the Commissioned Corp. This opportunity would give me the chance to use the knowledge I learned in my major and apply it to situations I would face working out in the field. I immediately made it my goal to get this internship and started my application. Needless to say the application process was challenging and certainly tested my patience, but after all of my hard work, I was finally rewarded with the opportunity to intern in Nashville, TN at the Nashville Area Indian Health Service.



To give you a little background information, the Nashville Area Office serves 29 different tribes in 27 states along the east coast making it the largest area served geographically. I was thrilled to learn that I would get the opportunity to travel to a few of these tribes alongside Riley Grinnell, the Field Environmental Health Specialist. While working in the office, my duties consisted of helping with food inspection reports using the FDA 2009 Food Code and putting the finalized reports into a new system called WebEHRS. I felt very confident about these tasks, because I had previously completed a Food Sanitation and Safety course at Western that dealt with the same food code and the WebEHRS system was so new that it was a learning experience for both Riley and me.



Some days at the office were very slow, but it paid off to get to travel. Our first travel destination was to the Coushatta, Tunica-Biloxi and Chitimacha tribes in Louisiana where we got to spend a week doing various inspections. At the Coushatta tribe we inspected the kitchen and storage room of a new hotel and a laundry warehouse. At the Paragon Hotel and Casino in Tunica-Biloxi I was able to assist Riley with the inspections of seven different food establishments and a spa. Before we left Tunica-Biloxi, we met with a few of the general managers, the head of the food and beverage management, and the tribal chief to discuss the violations

that we found at each facility and what IHS can do help to prevent these violation from happening in the future. Our last stop was Chitimacha, where they had just built a new hotel onto to the casino and we got to inspect the kitchen and a dry storage room in this facility. We couldn't leave Louisiana without doing a little sight-seeing. So, our last night we were able to go out and enjoy the night life on Bourbon Street which was...an adventure and I highly recommend everyone to go at least once.

Within the next month, I was able to travel with Riley again to the Alabama-Coushatta tribe in Texas. Here we spent our week completing annual surveys of the Elder Feeding Program, Daycare kitchen, Headstart kitchen, Daycare and Headstart playgrounds, After School Youth Program, gym concession, and One-Stop food service. I was also able to assist Riley with Hazard Communication training for the employees at the Daycare while he trained them on Bloodborne Pathogens. The trainings were a little challenging for me, because I am terrified of public speaking, but it turned out to be a good learning experience in the end.

I feel like my time in Nashville was unlike a lot of other JrCOSTEP internships, because I got the chance to travel so much and get a feel for doing many different tasks out in the field. My fellow employees and mentor here at Nashville were exceptionally helpful and very easy to get along with. This became my home away from home and I'm going to miss working with them very much. I feel very fortunate to have received this opportunity and strongly advise anyone else studying environmental health to work hard to get the JrCOSTEP experience. It will change your life!

