

Zack Shober
JRCOSTEP Summer 2024
Ohio University
Minnesota District Office
Bemidji, Minnesota



My name is Zack Shober and study Environmental Health at Ohio University along with a minor in Biology. I became interested in the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) and the Junior Commissioned Officer Student Training and Extern Program (JRCOSTEP) through information sessions that were provided, and the program was of great interest to me to get practical experience. Applying to this program seemed like a great way to apply my knowledge in a hands-on fashion and gain professional experience while learning from and working with new communities.

I was employed by Indian Health Service (IHS) in Bemidji, MN at the Minnesota District Office (MDO), one of three IHS environmental health locations within the state. I came from Dayton, OH, which entailed a 15 hour drive to the northern part of the U.S. Bemidji was a little different than my hometown of Dayton, but I enjoyed the quieter nature of not only the town but most of Minnesota itself.

My preceptor was LTJG Brady Stidham, Environmental Health Officer, MDO. A few of the priority areas for us were food safety and decreasing the risk of foodborne illness within multiple tribes, along with general health and safety inspections.

My summer project focused on nitrous oxide training for the dental facilities of Oneida Nation, a tribe in Wisconsin. They reached out looking for a more comprehensive refresher, as nitrous oxide exposure can build-up and lead to health issues. I worked on the project with another Bemidji Area extern, Arilyn Lee. We focused on first finding a story that would be easy to format, but also light and interesting. The three little pigs came to mind, and we used the story progression to show the worst errors within a clinic and moved towards the more nominal issues as the pigs progressed. We made sure to add reflection sections to reiterate the information and tried to make it as much of a retraining opportunity as possible.



Through my JRCOSTEP I got to garner many professional skills and grow whilst working with multiple different tribal entities. Directly I experienced the opportunity to learn communication skills as we worked with many different people and groups. Presenting to communities and learning how approach various topics in assorted manners was also valuable towards becoming a better educator and communicator, which is a priceless experience within the field of public health. Having the chance to apply practical knowledge within the field was the same way, where I finally got to internalize it whilst seeing what it may be used for in the field.

There were not too many challenges during my time as a JRCOSTEP, other than initially adjusting to Bemidji. Once I got a routine into place, it ended up being fine and I found ways to stay busy.

Without a doubt I would recommend the JRCOSTEP experience. It was a rewarding opportunity to work and interact with wonderful people and if given a second opportunity I would do it all over again.

I would like to extend a sincere thank you to my preceptor LTJG Brady Stidham, along with LT Joe Sarisky and CDR Tim Taylor for being incredible learning resources.