

Tips on the Environmental Health Officer (EHO) Junior Commissioned Officer Student Training and Extern Program (JRCOSTEP)

WHO, WHAT: The U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) offers internships through the JRCOSTEP. These training positions are available to students who have completed **at least 2 years** of study in a professionally accredited baccalaureate program in specific health disciplines that meet EHO requirements; or students who are enrolled in a masters level program that meets EHO requirements (for EHO requirements and qualifying degree information, go to <http://usphs.gov/profession/environmental/requirements.aspx>).

JRCOSTEP participants work in the same exciting Federal agencies and programs as full Commissioned Corps officers and earn approximately \$3,000/month as an Ensign in the PHS.

WHEN: Typical assignments in locations throughout the country vary from **31 to 120 days** during official school breaks. Most JRCOSTEP participants are hired for the summer months (i.e., June - August). More information on the JRCOSTEP program is available at www.usphs.gov/student.

WHERE: As a JRCOSTEP, a student is assigned a preceptor at a field location who will assign work/projects related to the field of environmental health. Agencies most likely to hire an EHO JRCOSTEP are Indian Health Service (IHS), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), National Park Service (NPS), and Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). Some duty stations can be rural and isolated. Students can learn more about IHS JRCOSTEP experiences by visiting www.dehs.ihs.gov/costep.

HOW: The JRCOSTEP application and placement process is likely more involved than the typical environmental health internship. Here are some tips for interested students:

- **Review application information carefully!** All of the necessary application information and forms are available at www.usphs.gov/student.
- **Submit your application early!** There is no official application deadline for JRCOSTEP positions; however, we strongly recommend that students seeking summer internships begin their application (submit form PHS-50) by **December 31** to get your name in the database. This is because agencies start looking for JRCOSTEP students in January and February.
- **Make sure you complete ALL the required components!** An application is not complete until all 4 parts are received by PHS. The 4 parts are: the PHS Application (PHS-50), 3 letters of reference, current college transcripts, and medical form. Print forms at www.usphs.gov/student/jrcostep.aspx.
- **Keep copies of your application!** PHS plans to offer a way to apply on-line in the future, but for now they are still using a paper system. Things can and do get lost, so please keep a copy of everything you submit.

This fact sheet was written for Environmental Health students; however, JRCOSTEPs are available for other fields of study such as nursing, general public health, and many more. Go to www.usphs.gov/student for more information.

- **Follow-up!** Students sometimes experience lost forms and slow notifications from PHS. Students should call PHS to make sure their application is complete. Not receiving reference letters and transcripts are the most common reasons for holding up applications. You can call PHS headquarters at 1-800-279-1605, or you can check the status of your application online at: https://dcpweb.psc.gov/rab/scripts/app_main_menu.htm.
- **Use Agency Contacts!** The JRCOSTEP application is processed by PHS but JRCOSTEP participants are selected and placed in assignments by Agency contacts. Advisors and students that make contact with Agencies and current PHS Environmental Health Officers increase their chance of selection.

Student Selection Tips

The following are some common reasons for selecting and not selecting students for JRCOSTEP assignments. This is provided to help understand the process, not as definitive rules.

Student Selection and Notification

Formal selection and notification of students typically takes place around March for that summer's JRCOSTEP assignments. Students that do not hear from PHS by April have a low probability of being selected, but it is possible if other students turn down their opportunity or an agency is late to begin the selection process.

Common factors that contribute to selection

- **Direct Recruitment:** a preceptor contacts the school or student and lines up an assignment.
- **Good References**
- **Good Grades:** 3.5 or greater GPA
- **Good "Fit":** The PHS is not for everyone - we are looking for individuals with career potential, a willingness to accept any assignment, diverse work experience, and demonstrated leadership experience.

Common factors that contribute to non-selection

- **Poor GPA, Weak References.** GPA less than 2.5, very few environmental health courses, very selective on assignment location, little leadership experience.
- **No Career Potential.** No plans of leaving home; no match of student interests and PHS needs.
- **Close to Graduation.** JRCOSTEP participants must be in school to be eligible.
- **No Car.** Many duty locations are remote and rural with housing offsite. An assignment is difficult without a car for off duty transportation.
- **Arrest Record**
- **Fail Medical Clearance.** PHS is a uniform service with physical fitness requirements. Students have been turned down for chronic health conditions and exceeding height/weight standards. (<http://ccrf.hhs.gov/ccrf/HTWT.htm>)