



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

WHO: The U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) is one of the Nation's seven uniformed services and resides in the Department of Health and Human Services. The USPHS has over 6,000 Commissioned Officers whose mission is "Protecting, Promoting, and Advancing the Health and Safety of the Nation".

WHAT: The PHS offers internships through the JRCOSTEP. These training positions are available to fulltime 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>). JRCOSTEPs work in the same exciting Federal agencies and programs as full Commissioned Corps officers. JRCOSTEP's receive the basic pay and allowances of an 0-1 (Ensign) Officer unless they have at least 4 years + 1 day of prior military experience, then they are paid at the 0-1E level.

WHEN: Typical assignments in locations throughout the country vary from **31 to 120 days** during official school breaks. Most JRCOSTEPs are hired for the summer months (i.e., June - August).

WHERE: A JRCOSTEP 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). Students get to select their agency and location preferences on the application; however, there is no guarantee that a student will be matched with their own selections.

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.
- **Complete the prescreen questions!** Complete the prescreen questionnaire, and if basic qualifications are met, a link to the application will be e-mailed within 48 hours.
- **Submit your application early!** We strongly recommend that students seeking summer internships submit their application (form PHS-50) no later than **December 31 of each year**.
- **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), 2 letters of reference, current official college transcripts, and medical forms. Print forms at www.usphs.gov/student/jrcostep.aspx. Additional materials will be required once an agency confirms sponsorship. This will include security and personnel forms.
- **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.
- **Follow-up!** Students have a responsibility to follow-up on the status of an application and ensure a complete application. Not receiving reference letters and transcripts are the most common reasons

Students interested in Environmental Health JRCOSTEPs should visit the "Information for Students" section on the Environmental Health Officer Professional Advisory Committee website www.ehopac.org for additional information, including summaries of previous student's JRCOSTEP experiences.

for holding up applications. To verify all required documents are received, check the PHS link first to review the status. https://dcpweb.psc.gov/rab/scripts/app_main_menu.htm. If there are missing documents you can call the Recruitment Call Center at 1-800-279-1605.

- **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.
- **Student seeks opportunity:** Students are also able to directly contact the agency of interest, to find out if the agency is willing to provide sponsorship. This is essential in gaining a sponsorship if student missed agency selections week or completed an application late in the season.
- **Enrolled in School:** JRCOSTEP applicants must be enrolled fulltime in school to be eligible
- **Good References:** Strong letters of recommendation increase chances of selection
- **Good Grades:** 3.0 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 and wear the PHS uniform with pride, diverse work experience, and demonstrated leadership experience. In addition, students need to meet the physical fitness requirements, including height/weight standards, which can be found on: <http://ccrf.hhs.gov/ccrf/HTWT.htm>.

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. Return to college or to a post-graduate training program in a commissionable profession immediately following participation in JRCOSTEP.
- **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>)
- **Conflicting Obligation.** The student must be free of any obligation or responsibility that would conflict with a call to active duty in the PHS Commissioned Corps.

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