

## **Environmental Health Summer Internship Program**

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In 2003 the Columbus Health Department (CHD) created an Environmental Health (EH) Summer Internship Program. Since its inception, CHD has employed three interns from university-based accredited environmental health programs within Ohio and the region. The internship runs for 12 weeks (480 hours) and is a requirement for graduation. Students from Ohio University and Bowling Green University have participated each year.

The internship program benefits CHD, the participating universities, and the students. Within the program, summer interns receive rigorous exposure to and intensive immersion in the real-world practice of environmental health in an urban public health setting. One main goal of the program is to create an effective learning environment that offers first-hand experiences in a large urban environmental public health workplace. CHD values the internship program since it helps identify and recruit well-trained and qualified environmental health professionals; this makes the summer internship program a valued workforce development tool because it gives CHD a means to prescreen potential future employees. We seek to establish an effective infrastructure within the department to demonstrate to interns the practice and application of environmental health principles.

We use numerous tools to enrich the internship experience. Each intern is placed within a primary program area within the Division of Environmental Health and is assigned a project. Once the projects are complete, interns are required to present their project results and findings to their environmental health colleagues. For most interns, this is their first experience with presentation to a professional audience. In addition to the project focus, one day each week is devoted to a field experience rotation through all of the different environmental health programs to ensure the broadest possible exposure to the entire range of programs, procedures and tools employed within the division. All students are required to keep a daily journal of their experiences and the participating universities provide feedback to CHD regarding academic requirements. Typically, faculty from each university conducts a site visit during the internship period to interview the student and his or her supervisor to gauge their progress and involvement. We feel we are building a long-term institutional relationship between the participating universities and the department. CHD has a commitment to educating students in the public health field and the integrity of the university educational program. In exchange, CHD is developing a positive source of recruitment and employment possibilities.

The most important measure of the success of the internships has been reflected in new employment. Of the eight interns over the past three years, two were hired after graduation for fulltime employment as sanitarians. During the same period five other graduates from the participating universities were hired as sanitarians into the Environmental Health Division. Several internship projects have developed into working processes of existing programs or as a foundation for newly created programs.

The internship is an investment in all environmental health students, an investment in future public health employees and a great recruitment tool. The interns make each of us, as sanitarians and staff, better employees. If we have an intern looking over our shoulder, have to explain in detail a procedure or need to answer that additional question "why", it requires us to be sharper and more aware of how and why we do our jobs.