Student Evaluation:

This summer I worked with the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), Section of Epidemiology on a project looking at Asian American and Pacific Islander fish consumption practices within the Anchorage area. Previously, Alaska (and more specifically my preceptor) had created their own fish consumption guidelines that took into account the numerous benefits of fish consumption. These guidelines are particularly tailored to the Alaska Native population. My project looked to expand the knowledge that the DHSS had on Asian American and Pacific Islander communities, so that future guidelines and projects would have a better snapshot of Alaska’s fish consumers.

The main tool I used to gather information was the use of a survey. My preceptor and I designing and distributed a survey to the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities that inquired about the types of fish eaten, meal size, frequency of fish meals, sources of fish, and previous knowledge participants had about Alaska’s fish consumption guidelines. I also was able to take hair samples from willing individuals for future analysis of mercury content. An individual’s mercury content is almost always related to the type and frequency of fish consumption. Thus, the hair mercury test would reveal the amount of mercury within their body and help them make future decision about the type and quantity of fish to consume.

I was also extremely fortunate to have been able to attend the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists conference in Anchorage. During this three day event, I listened to experts in their field talk about current issues such as the Flint water crisis, the increasing suicide rates and prescription drug addition in the U.S., enteric outbreaks, increasing tick-borne disease rates, and many more topics.

If you enjoy epidemiology, designing surveys, analyzing data, and working with the public, this is a fantastic internship opportunity for you. Students with a passion for their community and a desire to learn more about the inner workings of the state department’s epidemiology section will thrive in this position.