This summer I interned with the Larimer County Department of Health and Environment. Students in this internship have the opportunity to gain experience in a wide variety of specialties including food safety, epidemiology, water and air quality, and zoonotic disease control. Since my ultimate goal was to work as an Environmental Health Specialist I chose to focus on food safety; food safety is incorporated into consumer protection where most EH Specialists begin their career before branching off into other specialties.

What I enjoyed most about doing food safety and inspections was being able to apply the knowledge I learned in classes such as microbiology. Most of my days consisted of shadowing inspectors in the beginning, and gradually worked up to performing joint inspections and ultimately supervised inspections of my own. To perform this type of work it is important to be personable and be able to communicate effectively with people of varying levels of education. In this role I felt like I could actually make an impact on community health and safety by educating restaurant operators on the safest methods in food preparation and service.

One of my largest projects over the course of the summer was developing guidelines for inspectors for radon monitoring that will be required in all childcare facilities in Colorado beginning May, 2017, and developing a recordkeeping database to record the results. I was also involved in various projects including a planning field trip with a group of county planners to review land use applications on site at various sites requesting building permits or business changes. I also investigated a prairie dog population die off that was potentially linked to plague and assisted with rabies monitoring and testing.

I believe the best part of this internship is that it is customizable to the student’s interests. There are a set number of requirements for the intern to complete, but the rest of the time can be devoted to whichever area the intern would like experience in. Everyone was very welcoming and willing to take me out in the field, but it did require planning on my end. I planned my week out based on what I wanted experience in and found someone to take me with them for each day.

Overall this experience was invaluable to me and I believe it is an internship anyone can enjoy and make their own. I never once had the Monday dread of starting the work week, I was always excited because every day was so different from the one before. The health department has a great sense of community and I will truly miss being there.