I had the opportunity to intern at the Institute for Infectious Animal Diseases (IIAD) for my Environmental Health capstone internship working in youth and teacher health education. The IIAD is a Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Center of Excellence that specializes in research, education, and outreach for high consequence transboundary zoonotic diseases. I was positioned in the Youth Veterinary Science Program that provides curriculum and skills training for students in high schools, 4H programs, and homeschool cooperatives to become certified veterinary assistants. This program aligns with the IIAD’s mission by preparing a well-trained veterinary workforce capable of responding to disease outbreaks that threaten humans, animals, and the United States’ economy.

As an Environmental Health major, my role in the internship was in program development focused on the One Health mindset of human, animal, and environmental interdependency. My responsibilities during the internship included making presentations to students and teachers on subjects including zoonotic diseases, genetics, infectious disease control, and disease prevention. Other tasks involved teaching veterinary skills like how to bandage a horse’s leg, as well as curriculum development for a veterinary science business textbook. I wrote six chapters of the textbook during my internship, which included lessons on how to make x-ray safety plans, pollution prevention strategies, hazardous waste disposal, and other environmental health specialties.

The variety within the internship was one of my favorite aspects of my experience at the IIAD. I had the opportunity to travel throughout the state of Texas nearly each week, and even participated in a teacher training in Delaware. Working at the IIAD sharpened my written and oral communication skills and developed a high level of confidence in my ability to present information to a wide range of ages and educational backgrounds. Furthermore, working alongside the staff at the IIAD, who are leaders in the field of disease management and prevention, allowed me to become accustomed to the routine of working within the professional world.

This internship was a fantastic way to finish my undergraduate education and developed many skills that I will use in my future in the medical field. The IIAD offers internships each year in different areas within the institute, including positions in research and epidemiology. The beauty in the field of Environmental Health is the diversity of career opportunities, and working at the IIAD allowed me to directly apply many topics that I learned during my undergraduate education to the professional world.