

Meet the Intern

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Jenna Heyer

Host Laboratory: Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Bureau of Laboratories

Degree of Study: Medical laboratory science

Graduation: Spring 2027

School: Michigan Technological University



What is your science background? Did you always have an interest in science?

Science has always been a major part of my life, largely thanks to my mom, who is a medical laboratory scientist working mainly in mycology. Growing up around her work created an early fascination in me with both biological and earth sciences. As a child I initially speculated on the idea of working with animals and veterinary medicine. This care for animals and my mom's excited behavior about her work changed my focus on the small organisms in the world around us. Eventually my curiosity turned into a true love for microbiology and diagnostic science.

Tell us about your educational background?

My educational path started at St. John's High School where I took AP Biology. That was the class that solidified my interest in life sciences. Now I am currently studying medical laboratory science at Michigan Technological University. Beyond my course work I've taken the opportunity to support my fellow students as a teaching assistant in both General Microbiology and Medical Bacteriology. I enjoyed doing this because I helped others build their own foundational knowledge while I gained hands-on experience in the laboratory by setting up cultures and making media.

How did you hear about the Public Health Laboratory Internship Program?

While up in the Keweenaw (at Michigan Technological University), I knew when I came home, I wanted to continue to expand my knowledge of the laboratory setting and gain more hands-on experience. This is what drove me to reach out to my mentor and ask about available opportunities in professional laboratory settings. She pointed me towards the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL) internship program. This turned out to be the perfect fit for me to focus on

diagnostic procedures while also showing me a side of the laboratory I haven't yet experienced.

How did this internship match or exceed your expectations?

This internship has exceeded my expectations in every way, especially by giving me a hand-on experience with a real time public health response during the Cyclospora outbreak. Witnessing how a public health response mobilizes during an active outbreak was eye opening. The scale and influx of specimens in day-to-day work was impressive, while seeing how the laboratory conveys data and findings to the public. It was also interesting to get a peek into the epidemiology side of an outbreak as well. Beyond this emergency response I've also had the chance to work with genomics, which I think is the most exciting up-and-coming technology in the laboratory field. I also got to participate in outreach to the public. This proved to me how important community engagement is in the work that we perform.

Tell us what you learned from your mentor?

My mentor taught me many important skills but out of all the lessons she taught me the most important is the in-depth detail she provided on how a public health system works. While working alongside her she has taught me that a wide variety of work is performed in these types of laboratories. From data collection to informing the public about current outbreak details, she has taught me that connecting it all together creates the big picture. She has shown me the process of an outbreak response and the importance of quality assurance in a public health laboratory. She also showed me that the testing we perform trbored individual tests and that it is vital to understand the role we play in the community's

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public health. This perspective on community health has inspired me to look at every task with purpose and accuracy.

Tell us about your project assignments/laboratory roles.

Starting off at the laboratory, my focus was on outreach and communication which included revamping the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Bureau of Laboratories website and creating informational videos about specific laboratory tests performed by the MDHHS-BOL. However, when the Cyclospora outbreak happened I started to reach out and help wherever needed. This allowed me to experience many different parts of the laboratory including genomics, Dash, microbiology, etc. My day-to-day roles are ever changing. The diverse work includes setting up specimens for polymerase chain reaction (PCR) runs, working with autoclaves, and stepping in to help with the influx of patient specimens being received at the laboratory especially during busy periods. Throughout this experience I have gained an inside look at how each level of public health laboratories work together for the health of the community.

How has your internship experience inspired you?

This internship experience has inspired me by seeing how every test, outreach initiative, and outbreak response contributes to the safety of the community and the purpose behind the science. Being a part of this internship has reinforced my commitment to diagnostic medicine. My time here has truly motivated me to dedicate my time to precision and high standards in clinical testing. More than anything, I've been driven to become a lifelong learner and team player. This experience has taught me to thrive in a high flow environment with a changing schedule every day.

What do you believe the next step will be in your career path?

In the immediate future my next step in my career path will be completing my academic coursework and completing my clinical practicum to earn my degree. After that I will be as flexible as possible when searching for a job. You never know what life will have in store for you and I'm open to anything. I was thinking about looking at a traveling medical laboratory



Marty Soehnlen, PhD, MPH, HCLD(ABB), lab director and intern Jenna Heyer at the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Bureau of Laboratories.

technologist position, but you never know what unique opportunities will open up. Whatever the future leads, I am excited to take the lessons I have learned here and my passion anywhere I go in the future.

How would you describe the APHL Internship when recommending other students to apply?

The APHL Internship is a great opportunity to take what you have learned in class and apply it to real world scenarios and laboratory settings. Other than applying knowledge and gaining skill sets it gives you an insider look at how a public health laboratory works alongside the public. It makes the work you do feel tangible because you're actively contributing, building practical skills, and experiencing the real-world purpose of laboratory science.

Aside from the laboratory science, did you gain any other beneficial life experiences?

Other than laboratory science I gained experience in crucial life tools such as critical problem-solving skills and a strong sense of communication. My time spent inside the laboratory working on the pre-analytical side of things and working on outreach to the community taught me how to be quick on my feet while also being adaptable. Working closely with higher level managers also gave me knowledge of interviewing skills while also increasing my comfort and confidence around colleagues. It was a valuable opportunity to be able to connect with a large range of professionals across different departments. Overall, this internship has greatly boosted the professional skills I will need in my future career path.