

July 20, 2010

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Recommended Citation

St. Martin, Greg, "2010-07-20: CDC co-op answers a dream" (2010). *News@Northeastern*. Paper 642. <http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20001885>

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CDC co-op answers a dream



Northeastern student Katelyn Hardy inspects a lab instrument while on co-op with the CDC in Atlanta. *Courtesy photo.*

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Katelyn Hardy recalls reading, "The Hot Zone" — a book that explores the deadliness of the Ebola virus — when she was 14 and fantasizing about one day working with such dangerous viruses. It's a dream the Northeastern student was able to fulfill on **co-op** at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta.

Hardy said she selected Northeastern for the vast experiential learning opportunities available to students, already hoping to work for the CDC. That desire grew stronger after she took an honors seminar, "Global Political Ecology," taught by Daniel Faber, a professor in sociology and director of the **Northeastern**

Environmental Justice Research Collaborative. The seminar broadened her understanding of the CDC's role in protecting public health — such as researching the environmental hazards of everything from lead paint and poor air quality to natural disasters.

Hardy, a **chemistry** major who enters her junior year in the fall, ultimately spent two co-ops at the CDC's National Center for Environmental Health. From January to August 2009, she helped expand the CDC's work in natural disaster response. Hardy edited presentations and facilitated collaboration with the Department of Homeland Security and Federal Emergency Management Agency on a project to develop an environmental health- training course for local governments.

As rewarding as that experience was, Hardy said she realized her true calling during her second CDC co-op from January to June 2010, working in the center's emergency response and air toxicants branch.

Hardy gained substantial experience in the chemical terrorism methods development lab, analyzing dangerous nerve agents often used in terror attacks. Memorably, she helped to automate a manual program of testing clinical samples for the presence of five nerve agents, which increased the lab's productivity.

Hardy said she enjoyed the autonomy of working in the lab, which helped reinforce her desire to work in lab settings in her career. She also found the daily challenges of lab work extremely rewarding.

"You kind of solve puzzles all day, and I like that."

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