

## **Summer Internship Report 2017**

### **Lam Ngo, C'20**

Hometown: Ba Ria - Vung Tau Province, Vietnam



### **Biology Research Assistantship: Cave Diversity Cumberland Plateau Area of Tennessee**

*(Lam is on the left)*

**Provide an overview of the organization/research project and a summary of your responsibilities, tasks, and/or projects.**

1. Overview:

This research project on cave biodiversity in the Interior Plateau is a part of the three-year research program of Dr. Kirk Zigler. The goal of this project is to conduct biological inventories of approximately 30 caves in the Interior Plateau karst region of Tennessee, including obtaining important ecological and life history information for subterranean fauna because very little is known regarding the ecology, reproduction and life history of most of those species.

2. My responsibilities:

Assist the professor to collect cave specimens in ~30 caves within the Interior Plateau, Tennessee.  
Conduct visual encounter surveys (VESs) in each cave.  
Identify the specimens collected in each cave using microscope.

**During your internship, what did you accomplish or how did you make a difference? In what ways did you grow in your professional and technical skills?**

I was able to familiarize myself with field research process and different sampling methods such as visual encounter surveys (VESs). I learned so much about the biology of caves and were able to identify most of the invertebrates living in caves around Tennessee using the microscope.

**Describe a problem that you helped to solve at your internship. What skills or knowledge from your education at Sewanee helped you address the problem?**

When working in the lab, my partner and I came across many different species of spiders that we didn't know and we had to work together to figure out what exact species those were. With the skills

we learned from biology classes and IEP Program, we were able to address the problems by analyzing different physical characteristics of each spider species.

**In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?**

I worked with two other interns when caving and we learned to collaborate to search for very small invertebrates. Also, when working in lab, we helped each other identify specimens and manage data.

**How did your internship affect your career plans?**

I am aiming at conducting my own research on cave species and working on cave conservation in the future. Thus, this will be an essential first step for me towards those goals since it provides me with more scientific understanding about the biology of caves.

**In what ways did your internship cause you to encounter people of different backgrounds from your own? What steps did you take to communicate effectively with such persons? What did you learn from such persons' perspectives?**

My research didn't involve meeting many other people of different backgrounds as we spent most of our time going caving and working in the lab. However, before caving, we usually had a brief conversation with the owner of the properties who didn't have a science background. I was surprised about how they were all willing to let us go caving in their properties after knowing that we were biology students studying about the biodiversity of caves. Many of them were also very passionate and helpful that they happily shared their knowledge about the caves, which helped me learn a lot more about the caves.

**Words of advice for future interns (housing, transportation, etc.)?**

Housing and moving: You would have to move out/move in a couple times during your internship, so keep most of your stuff in the storage and carry with you the most essential things!

**Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:**

Thank you for giving me opportunities to learn and explore!