Summer Internship Report 2017

Drew Philpott, C’18
Hometown: St. Louis, Missouri

Forestry Research Assistantship:
Forest Inventory and Watershed Research
Sewanee, Tennessee

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

I worked as a research apprentice at Sewanee under the supervision of Professor Karen Kuers. Our main focus was on the Split Creek Watershed located off of Brakefield Road in Sewanee. We spent the majority of the summer inventorying the forest in Split Creek Watershed. We also re-installed a grid system throughout the watershed that allows students and visitors to easily navigate the watershed. One of our projects was to build 52 leaf litter collection baskets and install them throughout the watershed. We also collected water samples from both Split Creek and Abbo's Alley in order to perform analysis on them in the lab. We did some odd jobs such as cleaning glassware, weed-whacking around the weather station in Split Creek, and removing trash from the watershed. The majority of our time was spent inventorying and making litter baskets. When school starts back up, we have plans to clean out the flume in the watershed and perform some basic maintenance on it. We were unable to do this during our time because it was too wet for the duration of the summer.

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?

One of our biggest accomplishments was completing 50 inventory plots spread throughout Split Creek. We also made a total of 52 litter baskets and installed them. Another large project was removing old PVC piping that marked the grid system within the watershed and making new stakes to mark the grid point locations. Along with making and installing those stakes, we painted witness trees to make it easier to find the grid point locations. All of our hard work will allow us to perform analysis on the data collected to get a better understanding of how the watershed has changed over time. My
understanding of forestry, as well as my knowledge of the types of trees and forest cover in Sewanee, grew immensely over the course of the summer.

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?
The old leaf litter collection baskets in Split Creek were not performing at a high enough level or lasting long enough, so we created plans for new litter baskets that were made out of Shark Bite PVC piping, metal gardening stakes, screen, and fishing line. We had to go through many prototypes before we created a final product. The initial process took a long time to perfect, but eventually, we had it down to an exact science. My time as a student working towards a forestry major helped me be patient and precise with this process.

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?
Working with a non-forestry major helped me strengthen my ability to teach another student what I know about forestry. I also learned a lot about my own knowledge through this teaching process. I also learned that working with someone who may not have the same ideas as you is a great way to problem solve and come up with the best plan of action.

How did your internship affect your career plans?
I learned that I would be very happy working outside as opposed to inside after graduation. Field work was something I had always loved prior to beginning this internship, but I found a new appreciation for it through the course of the summer. I hope to be working in Forestry once I graduate.

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 coworker was not a forestry major, which turned out to be a positive thing. We spent a lot of time teaching each other new ways to go about our tasks, as well as learning how to be patient with each other when tasks took longer than expected. Patience was key and I ended up learning about myself because of our different backgrounds.

Words of advice for future interns (housing, transportation, etc.)?
Have a car at Sewanee, if at all possible. Get to work on time. Dress for the job you will be doing that day. Most importantly, be adaptable, not all plans work as expected and being able to improvise is a necessary skill in the work force.

Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:
I would like to thank Dr. Karen Kuers for giving me this incredible opportunity. I learned so much about forestry, as well as myself. Thank you, Professor Kuers, for hiring me to work so closely with you this summer!