Whale Research:  
The University of the West Indies  
Barbados

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

The organization that I interned with this summer is based in the University of the West Indies in Cave Hill, Barbados. The internship was created to continue a whale tissue project that I had already been a part of in Sewanee with Professor Russell Fielding. The project focuses on DNA analysis of mercury levels in whale tissue. The basis of the internship was to confirm the species of whale tissue that has already been collected and explore species population size from the DNA of selected individual whales. Also, Dr. Emma Smith, who oversaw the internship, involved us in her studies of cetacean, fish, and sea turtle populations, which included DNA analysis and identification of contaminants.

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?

Through this internship, I was introduced to issues and problems I had never encountered so closely before. I became experienced in the dissection of marine animals and DNA extraction. I analyzed samples of aquatic life that had potentially died from human interference or pollution. Working in this field allowed me to see first hand many of the issues that we discuss in the United States, but do not often encounter in person.

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?

Because of differences in culture, my internship in Barbados was often disrupted by unpreparedness and lack of supplies. Fortunately, Sewanee encourages students to think creatively when faced with difficult problems. My fellow interns and I knew to make the best of our resources.
In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?
Because most of my work was conducted in a biological and chemical lab, precision and safety were vital to a successful internship. My fellow interns and I learned to work well together to ensure accurate and safe lab practices.

How did your internship affect your career plans?
This internship opened my mind to other possible career paths I had not previously considered. I gained experiences and made connections that I'll have forever. I feel that this summer has given me countless new opportunities.

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?
Living in a university dorm in Barbados was an excellent way to encounter people of different backgrounds from my own. I lived amongst and worked alongside people from nearly all islands in the Caribbean and several other countries around the world. With an open and curious mind, I learned more from my peers than I could've imagined. Their dedication and confidence in their work was inspirational.

Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:
This internship experience has truly been a highlight of my academic career. With the help of donors, I was given the opportunity to expand my cultural knowledge and become more experienced in my field of study. I am so grateful for the support of both the University and the donors.