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Meghan-Elizabeth Foster (Milford, Mass.)

Spending time on or near the ocean and teaching others about the marine environment is something Meghan-Elizabeth Foster of Milford, Mass., is passionate about.

As a summer high school volunteer in 2007, one of three paid college student interns in 2008, and the assistant aquarist this year at the Woods Hole Science Aquarium in Falmouth, Mass., she has led collecting trips to local beaches, taught young children about animals in the Aquarium's touch tanks, and became convinced informal education in marine biology is the career for her.

"I want to teach the public how to preserve our marine life," Foster said of her summer experiences. "I had hands-on experience working with animals at the Aquarium, especially the two harbor seals LuSeal and Bumper, and met many marine scientists. And I got to teach children and adults about the animals they see when they go to the beach. I know now that I want to pursue a career in informal ocean education."

A 2007 graduate of Milford High School, Foster is entering her junior year at Roger Williams University pursuing a double major in marine biology and secondary education. She is a member of the college's marine science, outing and SCUBA clubs, Future Teachers of America, and plays intramural soccer. She also serves as a referee for the Hopedale soccer league and is active in Girl Scouts, earning the organization's highest honor, the Girl Scout Gold Award, in 2007. This past year she volunteered at the Audubon Society of Rhode Island's Environmental Education Center in Bristol.

Despite a demanding schedule, Foster spends as much time as she can on and around the ocean. While in high school she attended the Massachusetts Maritime Academy's Environmental Symposiums to learn about careers in marine and environmental sciences from 2004 to 2006.

Foster also sailed aboard the *Corwith Cramer*, studying oceanography and the intertidal zone of Appledore Island Marine Lab in the Gulf of Maine as a participant in a Sea Education Association high school program. And she visited Belize during a school

vacation with a marine biology teacher and ten other students, studying both the rain forest and Mayan culture and the Central American nation's coral reefs.

Given her interest in both marine biology and education, Foster took early childhood education classes in high school, working with second graders in a local elementary school and writing and illustrating a children's book as part of psychology of early childhood courses. An independent study in the sciences enabled Foster to gain experience organizing specimens in the high school's science department and teach marine science classes about SCUBA and setting up and maintaining an aquarium.

In 2007, Foster applied to the Careers in Marine Science Program at the Woods Hole Science Aquarium, a two-week volunteer program for students to learn about potential careers through seminars and lectures, lab tours and field trips. She also worked with the college interns and Aquarium staff to learn animal husbandry, basic duties of an aquarist, and how to collect specimens. One of her favorite duties was assisting with the rehabilitation of Cumin, a loggerhead sea turtle released back to the wild at the end of the summer.

She returned in 2008 as one of three college students in the Bradford E. Brown Student Internship Program at the Aquarium. The program is named in honor of a retired NOAA Fisheries scientist who was a leader in recruiting young people into fishery science.

This year Foster was the only Brad Brown college intern at the Aquarium, which kept her busier than ever. Last summer, she helped mentor eight high school students and train the Aquarium's newest resident, a one-year old male harbor seal named Bumper who stranded on Long Island after a shark attack, which left him blind and unable to survive in the wild. This summer she coordinated nine high school interns and served as assistant aquarist, working with Bumper again and with the older female harbor seal, LuSeal.

Foster and the other students were kept busy during the day, but enjoyed many activities together at night and on weekends, from playing soccer to seeing the latest film at the local theater and going to the country fair.

"I really enjoy the collecting walks because people of all ages participate," Foster said of the weekly trips, of which there were a dozen this summer. "Everyone learns something, and the people are so grateful for the experience. Working with the seals is also great fun because the public is very interested in learning about them."

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Related links:

Woods Hole Science Aquarium: <http://aquarium.nefsc.noaa.gov/>

Aquarium Blog: <http://whaquarium.wordpress.com/>

Aquarium Facebook Fan Page: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Woods-Hole-MA/Woods-Hole-Science-Aquarium/117867055521>

Bradford E. Brown Summer Internship Program: <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/sstudent/>