

Marine Plankton Ecology Summer Course Bermuda Institute of Ocean Sciences

As an undergraduate student entering the final year of my degree, I have many times been finding myself questioning what my next step should be, academically or professionally. The education we are receiving at university is undoubtedly rich but it can sometimes fail to provide students with a more realistic and substantial preparation for what a certain field or profession entails. As a result, it is incredibly beneficial for students to actively seek out opportunities outside the familiar setting of their university, which while enriching their educational experience can also show them what “a day in the life” of a potential job position could look like. In such a context students can get even more fascinated than they already are by their subject or contemplate on the compatibility of their fields with their own aspirations and character.

It is this kind of opportunities I am always on the lookout for, and the summer course “Marine Plankton Ecology” at the Bermuda Institute of Ocean Sciences in Bermuda, North Atlantic, was undoubtedly an opportunity not to be missed. During this 3-week highly intensive course, I had this once in a lifetime chance to live and work in a globally renowned oceanographic and biological research station. I got acquainted with professionals who are leading cutting edge research in ocean science and exploration, as well as with like-minded students from around the world. I was lucky enough to experience the natural beauty of Bermuda along with its unique cultural vibe and its welcoming people, while simultaneously gain knowledge and skills the range and amount of which feels unreal considering the relatively short duration of the course.

As a participant in the Marine Plankton Ecology course, I attended a number of incredibly engaging and thought-provoking lectures on Marine Plankton taxonomy, physiology, behavior as well as research methods and protocols, delivered by the most inspiring and passionate academics a student could wish for. Lectures were almost daily followed by extensive laboratory sessions, which were focused on the application of the content taught in the lectures and helped us students improve our lab and analytical skills. Evenly spaced throughout the duration of the course there was also a significant amount of fieldwork, by means of snorkeling and boat surveys around the island. What is more, we had the opportunity to participate in two day cruises with the Research Vessel- Atlantic Explorer and experience research happening in real time by the institute in the Atlantic Ocean.

The best element of this course was the extent to which the entire institute, while running normally, was at the same time welcoming our group to all of its operations, both land-based in the laboratories, as well as off shore in the research vessel. It was a great privilege to be able to witness the scientists conducting their experiments in real time and making use of state-of-the-art scientific equipment as well as occasionally participate and actively help them out while being taught by them the scientific processes institutes of such magnitude follow. I was amazed by the intensity, duration, repetition and combination of different skills required to deliver a scientific project to completion, along with the strong analytical and literature-review experience one needs to have to be able to make a tiny contribution to the existing body of scientific knowledge.

As part of the course, we worked on one planktonic organism each and completed a project in groups, which resulted in a poster presentation that took place on the very last day of the course. The organism I was responsible for researching and presenting was the copepod

Temora Turbinata, one of the most commonly encountered neritic, epipelagic zooplankton that follows diel-vertical migration. Our poster presentation focused on a laboratory session during which we studied the physiological responses of different planktonic species in relation to their size, investigating the concept of allometric scaling.

The Marine Plankton Ecology course of Bermuda Institute of Ocean Sciences was admittedly one of the most challenging ventures I have embarked on. The amount of work needed to be put in, the fast pace of the program and the volume of knowledge constantly needing assimilation was very demanding of us participants. By the end, however, one can only feel deep satisfaction and gratefulness to have been part of this great educational and personal experience that left us all in awe of the beauty of the underwater world, the level of originality and professionalism which characterises the current research in this field, as well as the wonders one can achieve when they have trustworthy and passionate colleagues. It was an experience that has left me with a lot of information to process about my future and the future of our world and has inspired me greatly to contribute in my own way to what comes under the research, conservation and environmental governance sphere of interest.

Without the Bill Chaloner Memorial award, I would not have had this life-changing experience, which is why I feel the need to express my gratefulness to the donors who made this possible for me with their generosity.









