NE Aquarium Conservation Learning Internship

Riley Hammack

Western Washington University

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Internship Title: Conservation Learning Intern

Student Name: Riley Hammack

Internship Dates: June 14, 2022 - August 27, 2022

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STUDENT SIGNATURE

DATE: September 12, 2022
New England Aquarium, Boston, MA.

Internship Report

Department
Conservation Learning

On Site NEAQ Supervisor
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Prepared by
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Internship Dates: June 14 - August 27, 2022
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The New England Aquarium, which opened its doors on June 20, 1969, is an institution that has changed the landscape of marine conservation practices and education through scientific research. Their “Protecting the Blue Planet” mission encourages understanding the human impact on marine life and practical solutions to prevent climate change, habitat loss, and other environmental threats. Over the last 50 years, The New England Aquarium has set an example of conservation-based programs and volunteer work, including the Sea Turtle Rescue Program, the Species Survival Plan, an Aquaculture Breeding Program, The Gulf Stream Orphans, and the Quincy Animal Care Center.

The New England Aquarium provides thirty internships for college students and teens throughout the school year and summer, falling under the topics of Animal Husbandry, Research, Animal Health, Museum Operations, Veterinary, and Education internships. Specific positions include monitoring touch tanks, guiding whale watches, and diving in exhibits. My application was for the Conservation Learning position under “Education Internships,” which correlates to my Environmental Education major. The Conservation Learning Internship program lasts 12-16 weeks, from 8 am to 5 pm, three days a week, during the Fall or Summer months. In addition to working hours, interns attend two group sessions to learn how to use the aquarium as a resource and must deliver a presentation on the intern’s choice of topic.
Interns must complete “certifications” for each of the six galleries to be allowed to work unsupervised. Department heads are in charge of leading certifications, first meeting with the intern to discuss materials before testing knowledge on the floor. In the Conservation Learning Office, there are over thirty resource binders. After studying the binder of a designated gallery, the intern must complete a scavenger hunt of frequently asked questions. When completed and reviewed, the department head tests the intern’s knowledge in the gallery. After feedback and revision, a certification appointment is scheduled. During this meeting, the intern works independently while a supervisor observes. If the intern speaks clearly, mentions a conservation message, and provides accurate information to guests, they are officially certified. The certification process begins with the Northern Waters or Temperate galleries, focusing on climate change topics and ocean acidification.

During my time at The New England Aquarium, I worked as a Conservation Learning Intern. My responsibilities included interpreting events in the aquarium, educating visitors on conservation efforts, ensuring the safety of guests and animals in our collection, and providing specific information on the aquarium and its contents. In addition, when not working in public areas, I completed projects and presentations assigned by my advisor, Katie O’Brien. These projects and responsibilities, further explained in this research paper, correlate to my learning objectives and illustrate the knowledge I gained during my internship.
Objectives

During my first year at Western Washington University, I began courses focusing on environmental studies. As a result, I pre-declared my Environmental Studies major, emphasizing eco-social justice and education within The Huxley College of the Environment. While my classes at Western are thought-provoking and engaging, I recognize that practical experience is necessary, which led to my discovery of The New England Aquarium internship program. After my Conservation Learning internship acceptance, I composed a list of four objectives to guide my experience.

Objective 1- Gain teaching experience in a professional setting, including presenting to large, diverse audiences and observing experienced aquarium staff regarding animal care and educational tools.

Objective 2- Work with hands-on projects and marine animals to create dynamic ways to grab attention, foster concern, and generate understanding.

Objective 3- Participate in practical conservation within an urban, marine-based institution with particular regard to social, economic, and political restrictions.

Objective 4- Learn how The New England Aquarium’s public marketing, presentation language, and social media reflect current conservation efforts—understanding its importance for disseminating information and raising awareness.
Teaching Experience

An essential skill of being an educator is public speaking. While I had previous experience with smaller groups in a more controlled space, The New England Aquarium exposed me to more diverse audiences. Tour groups were approximately two hundred people in an open area, ranging vastly in age, ethnicity, socioeconomic level, and educational background. Visitors included camp and school groups, tourists, locals, families, and special-needs guests.

Due to Covid-19 protocols, only one of the Aquarium’s touch tanks was open to the public: the 29, 500 gallon Shark and Ray touch tank. The Shark and Ray touch tank, referred to as “SRTT,” is located in a large room next to the aquarium's entrance and is the most popular exhibit. The touch tank is designed around the comfort of the animals, with more room in the back of the tank to escape the noise. The lights dim periodically, mimicking a mangrove forest's day cycle and cloud coverage. In addition, the tank has multiple hidden areas for sharks and stingrays, including underwater caves, fake mangrove trees, and small dunes. The water in the exhibit consists of filtered water from the Boston Harbor.

Interns are permitted to work on SRTT 2, a platform above the tank’s surface, and support SRTT 1. My primary responsibilities included educating visitors about the tank while performing safety demonstrations, crowd control, and correcting visitors. In addition, interns are
expected to identify every species of stingray and sharks, feeding habits, habitat, conservation status, and interesting trivia to field visitors' questions.

While I had previous experience talking to large groups, balancing public speaking and monitoring crowds was challenging. Presentations would frequently be interrupted for behavioral corrections. One of the most important lessons I learned during my internship was maintaining composure. Throughout my time at the aquarium, I encountered children who mishandled animals, irresponsible parents, entitled teenagers, and adults who were reluctant to hear about conservation. My main priority was protecting the animals, and I developed several strategies for dealing with guests. Initially, I would foster empathy by using human metaphors to describe animal behavior. For example, stingrays buried themselves to indicate they wanted to be left alone, which I would compare to covering yourself with blankets to feel safe. Two warnings were given before I asked them to leave and return later. I intended to allow them to learn and correct their behavior.
Excerpt from my journal 06/16/2022:

*During my shift at SRTT 2, I encountered three young boys, most likely around twelve or thirteen. They ignored the speaker on SRTT 1, which caught my attention because the guests needed to understand the rules to touch the tank. While I had little experience with asking guests to leave because of rule-breaking, I knew, based on the boys’ behavior, I might have to prepare myself for it. One of the boys, wearing a green shirt, began throwing sand under the water, which can get in the stingray’s eyes as they swim. I caught his attention by pointing at him, saying he couldn’t throw sand, and told him it could endanger the animals. He nodded, but ten minutes later, he threw sand again, this time joined by his friends. I pointed to them again, advising them it was their second warning, and if they continued, I would ask them to leave. The boys looked up to me and ignored my warning, throwing sand directly at one of the rays buried under the sand. Knowing I had to be professional, I got off my post and approached the boys so they couldn’t ignore my instructions. Once again, all three said they understood and corrected their behavior. They behaved correctly for around fifteen minutes, so I focused my attention elsewhere and kept an eye on them. This moment helped me understand the complicated techniques I would have to learn to improve monitoring and safety while multitasking.*

*After around twenty minutes, all three boys splashed the water across the tank, nearly hitting a shark. Knowing my position of power and ensuring the safety of the animals, I got off my post and, this time told all three boys to leave. Most encounters like this result in the guest leaving the touch tank for the remainder of the day, but I knew I wanted to give the boys another chance. I told them if they...*
came back in about twenty minutes and showed me they could behave, I would allow them back into the tank before it closed. Sure enough, the boys returned a while later and came to my tank side, where they politely asked if they could touch the stingrays. I wondered if they were ready to follow directions. They behaved appropriately for the rest of the day, and I felt proud to have solved the situation without ruining their experience at the aquarium.
Another benefit of being in a professional setting is having access to tools to increase engagement. My passion for the environment began at a young age due to my exposure to conservation efforts and my family’s sustainable way of living. However, when starting at the aquarium, I realized not many people had similar experiences, so using physical tools helped gain visitors’ attention on important topics. For example, during my internship, I was tasked with learning and presenting the Northern Atlantic Right Whale cart, a movable trolley with a large lobster trap, a rope with a buoy, three plastic lobsters, pictures of right whales, and ropeless fishing tactics. We use these educational tools to demonstrate the process of lobster fishing and its consequences on the Northern Atlantic Right Whale population.

The New England Aquarium works with scientists from the ACCOL Right Whale Research Team to study the Northern Atlantic Right Whale. This species is critically endangered, with fewer than 350 individuals left in the world. The cart focuses on the devastating effect of the lobster trade on the whale population. Interns begin by explaining how lobster traps work and have the kids try to navigate the cage like a lobster. The trap is split into two parts; the kitchen with the bait bag and the parlor where the lobsters can get stuck. Ninety percent of lobsters will eat in the kitchen and then leave, but one out of ten times, the lobster might wander into the parlor and become trapped.

The legal limit for small lobsters is 3¼ inches from the eye socket to the end of the carapace or the lobster's middle portion. Since baby and juvenile lobsters are relatively small,
they can easily escape through the trap holes. As a result, lobster fishing is very sustainable, allowing baby and adult lobsters to grow stronger and reproduce for the population to increase. However, the rope and buoy retrieval system is detrimental to the whale population. The whales, mistaking the rope for kelp, entangle themselves and pull traps along the bottom of the ocean. The ropes cause heavy scarring in over 80% of the whales and loss of income for lobstermen and women.

An initial, short-term solution was tear-away ropes. Although these were cost-effective, they did little to alleviate the issue. Scientists have since developed ropeless fishing, which uses technology to set and retrieve traps with an acoustic signal. The ropeless method is beneficial for the whales and the fishermen and has worked brilliantly in Australia and New Zealand, which now use ropeless fishing as the most common form of lobster fishing. It’s not as consistent in the United States for one reason; it’s costly. Technology and salt water do not mix, so developing technology to sit underwater daily is a hefty investment. The Aquaculture industry is generally overlooked, so government subsidies are rare. The burden of transitioning to ropeless traps falls on the fishermen, who do not have the capital for such a costly investment.

The New England Aquarium actively researches solutions for fishermen and the Northern Atlantic Right Whales. They encourage guests to advocate ropeless fishing to officials, research right whales, and purchase sustainably caught lobsters. To make these options accessible, we
provide QR Codes that direct them to their local government official, research on the right whales done by the aquarium, and locations that support sustainable seafood.
Excerpt from my journal 6/28/22:

The NARW cart has been one of my favorite places to teach about Right Whale conservation, but today I encountered a very challenging guest. He was an older man wearing a fishing hat who approached the cart with his family, two small children, and his partner. He saw the lobster trap and began talking about his experience of lobster fishing in Maine, which excited me because I hoped he had heard of “ropeless fishing” before. I started my usual talk about how lobster is caught and sustainable traps for lobster populations. For the most part, he stood quietly, nodding his head, and would add some facts he knew here and there, such as the chemical components of lobsters, the information I would later learn from my training. After I discussed why lobster fishing is a great industry, I began my segway into the ropes’ damage on Right Whales. I noticed his body language change from relaxed to arms crossed and his eyes squinting. I had experience with upset guests before, but it was only when the bathrooms were full or the gift shop prices were too high, never over a conservation message. Finally, he interrupted me, saying the Right Whales were interfering with the lobster traps and that it wasn’t the fishermen’s fault they were getting entangled. I tried to explain how the cart was meant to show our support for fishermen, saying that we want subsidies
to help them afford ways to save the whales and make a profit. He shook off my comments, adding that whales have been an issue for fishing companies for years, which I quickly explained why whales are a keystone species in our oceans. We went back and forth, I kept my composure and made sure not to let my passion get the best of me, but he was gradually getting more aggressive. Remembering my training, I told him that I was taught to explain our aquarium’s conservation efforts from the cart and that he is welcome to believe otherwise. I wanted him to feel heard but not try to force anything onto him. He eventually calmed down and took his family away, which I was grateful for but also upset. I hadn’t meant to offend him, but I also wanted him to see we were trying to help his industry. I know I did my best, and keeping my composure was the most professional thing I could do at that moment; luckily, he was the worst interaction I’ve had so far.
Practicing Conservation

When researching internships, I was looking to study in a facility committed to conservation. The New England Aquarium demonstrated this commitment through its rescue efforts, breeding programs, research, fundraising, and educational initiatives. During my internship with The Conservation Learning Department, I actively researched marine conservation efforts in the Atlantic Ocean and openly conveyed that knowledge to visitors. Each exhibit focuses on preserving habitats and animals, sharing facts to interest visitors, and teaching them how to become conservationists.

The largest tank in the aquarium, The Giant Ocean Tank or GOT, is 200,000 gallons, measuring 40 feet across and 23 feet deep. The tank is home to around 587 individuals ranging from 69 different species, including fish, eels, and three sea turtles. The GOT’s star animal is Myrtle, the 90-year-old green sea turtle, who has lived at the aquarium since its opening in 1969.

The Sea Turtle Rescue Program monitors shorelines during cold months to prevent sea turtles from dying of hypothermia and successfully released over 500 sea turtles in 2021 to
warmer water. Unfortunately, two other sea turtles living in the tank, Carolina and Retread, cannot be released due to permanent injuries but are used to educate visitors on The Sea Turtle Rescue Program. Retread, a 33-year-old survivor from one of the team’s excursions, is 90% blind due to frostbite from getting stuck in cold water. Carolina, also close to 33, suffered neurological damage from frostbite, preventing her from finding food or migrating.

The New England Aquarium has successfully re-released up to 85% of captured sea turtles for over 25 years, showing their overwhelming passion for wildlife protection. In addition, the research facility in Quincy examines sea turtle necropsies, tagging technology, and rehabilitation. These efforts have successfully maintained sea turtle populations that migrate through Boston Harbor. The program is an excellent example of how institutions can encourage local understanding and involvement in conservation efforts.

In a classroom setting, we reflect on the importance of practical conservation. At The New England Aquarium, I witnessed a successful implementation of those ideas. Although it’s beneficial to talk about conservation and preservation, executing a feasible plan is crucial for sustainability. When creating conservation programs, you must consider political, economic, and societal constraints. The New England Aquarium has thoughtfully planned programs designed to benefit organisms, gain support from the community, and create long-term solutions.
I was so excited to feed Myrtle today! I spent the whole day sharing bio facts about sharks and turtles to explaining the importance of both sea turtles and the animals that eat them. When I went into the back office, Jay told me about a turtle named Tumeric, whom he planned to release that week. Tumeric only has three flippers! I asked how the turtle could be released with only three flippers, and he explained how the release process goes through different stages: physical, mental, and medical tests. First, the turtles must be tested on how they swim, eat, sleep, and evade predators. Then, if the turtle can accomplish all the tasks, they are set for mental tests to ensure they can still migrate. Carolina failed this test portion, which is why she lives in the aquarium. Finally, when the turtle proves it can navigate and find food, marine biologists test its blood and reaction time to ensure its survivability is high. Jay said Tumeric passed all of their tests and was set to be released, which blew my mind! I was happy to see that even animals who might not look fit to live in the wild can still survive on their own and hatch new babies for future turtle generations. When I went up to feed Myrtle, I listened to Colin while he was speaking to
understand what to say if I ever came back to talk about the GOT stage. He explained the age of
turtles and where they live, but I wanted him to talk about their incredible survival skills. I now
know for next Summer to bring my twist to the GOT script, adding some fantastic turtle facts to
help people understand how amazing they are. I want to say how turtles can hold their breath for
eight hours; they can survive with three flippers, how strong their shells are, their sense of
navigation, and their weird-looking throats designed to eat stinging jellies. The turtles are my
favorite part of my aquarium, and I’m so excited to talk about them one day to a large audience.
Media

The New England Aquarium provides multiple media outlets to provide visitors with information on conservation projects, current events, news about their exhibits, and a website for purchasing tickets or learning more about the aquarium. This multi-tiered approach is designed to raise awareness and funds to continue The New England Aquarium's work.

The Aquarium promotes the RWRN, or Right Whale Research News, written by the ACCOL Right Whale Research Team. The crew travels on boats to track the number of Northern Atlantic Right Whales and conduct studies on the primary causes of entanglement. Thanks to the team’s research, on September 6, 2022, the Seafood Watch gave fourteen types of seafood a “red rating” due to their impact on the right whale populations. The “red rating” signifies seafood harvested with a particular method harms endangered species. This rating will help increase demand for ropeless fishing and government subsidies, increasing the chances of the Northern Right Whale’s survival.

The second newsletter, The Currents Newsletter, focuses on raising money and discussing events at The New England Aquarium. Articles recently listed include the celebration of Deco the
African penguin’s 41st “Hatch Day,” hammerhead shark sightings along Cape Cod, designs for a sustainable waterfront in Boston, and raffles for concert tickets and Red Sox games. In addition, the Currents Newsletter focuses on increasing community participation. For example, aquarists create blogs discussing important animal husbandry, behavior, and conservation, encouraging guests to ask questions and learn more information. One popular blog surrounds the penguins, discussing enrichment tools used by aquarists to keep them healthy and happy. Guests can observe the penguins and their behaviors through videos and a webcam.

The Aquarium hosts physical art installations in the outdoor plaza to engage the public. In addition, various photographers provide images of wild marine animals to generate empathy in visitors. The interns are given time in their schedule to wander the plaza to look at the photographs, which typically relate to the aquarium’s seasonal messaging. For example, a recent installation portrayed how different fishing gear entangles animals. The installation was a huge success, and the aquarium had more visitors asking how their choices impact fishing practices.

The New England Aquarium has two main buildings, the aquarium, and Simon’s Movie Theatre. The theatre is popular and plays four films simultaneously, correlating to themes and messages the aquarium shares with visitors. This Summer, the four films were “Cephalopods, Creatures of the Deep,” “Superpowered Dogs,” “Nature’s Predators,” and “Spectacular Birds.” Each film shows ads discussing Right Whale research, sea turtle rescue, and specific strategies for sustainable living.

In a tech-savvy world, it’s essential to present conservation messages correctly. Using media as a tool is critical to generating change through promoting empathy and influencing participation. The New England Aquarium’s multi-tiered media approach draws people in and raises funds to continue their vital work in the greater Boston area.
Excerpt from my journal:

Today I went with Antonia and Max to the “Cephalopods, Aliens of the Deep” film. I was expecting some cute videos of octopuses and squid put together to show their intelligence, but instead, the movie felt like a thriller. It was designed to show the true power of cephalopods, their color-changing abilities, morphing their shape to imitate predators, hunting crabs in shallow water, and shooting ink to create copies of themselves. It was insane footage. While I had expected the film to be cute, I was surprised by the direction of the film and how different it was. It showed cephalopods as powerful animals, making people respect them and want to learn more about them. The film is an excellent advertisement for cephalopods, drawing guests in to learn more and see them on exhibit. While some of the film choices were questionable, like the “Superpowered Dogs” movie, the cephalopod film stuck out to me. It showed that animals don’t have to be cute for people to like them. They can have scary abilities or be mysterious to marine biologists; I think the unknown makes an animal more interesting. The media for the aquarium has been a mixed bag, some ads being helpful for guests and others used to bring an “oooh-ahh” effect. However, “Cephalopods, Aliens of the Deep” raised the bar for me for aquarium movies. It was informative, it was jarring, and it was awesome.
Reflection

My experience as a Conservation Learning Intern provided me with marine knowledge, enhanced my public speaking skills, and gave me hands-on projects in a professional, urban environment. In addition, I was given opportunities to create connections with other conservationists and scientists. My fellow educators made The New England Aquarium feel exciting and welcoming, making it easier for me to adapt and feel comfortable with my abilities.

Outside of these objectives, my most valuable insights came from interactions with aquarium professionals. For example, my coworker Jay Dore inspired me to broaden my horizons when it comes to research. At the Quincy facility, he participates in sea turtle tracking projects, observing sea turtle populations, and releasing injured turtles back into the wild. In addition, Jay is a very knowledgeable educator and inundated me with exciting facts about marine life.

Throughout the Summer, I was constantly amazed by the copious amount of marine information I acquired. Each day provided new learning opportunities. As a result, I was increasingly drawn to oceanic studies. At the end of my internship, my supervisors invited me to return next Summer as a part-time paid employee. This experience has reinforced my passions as a teacher and conservationist and helped me examine a possible career in marine facilities.
Acknowledgments

I’d like to extend my sincere thanks to my supervisor, Katie O’Brien, who made my experience at the aquarium educational and enjoyable. Your belief in my abilities and invaluable advice shaped me into a better educator. I cannot leave The New England Aquarium without mentioning Jay and Joseph, whose passion for the environment and conservation inspire me daily. Many thanks to my Conservation Learning coworkers, Winnie, Lily, Hannah, Bailey, Sarah, Andrew, Kim, Caitlin, Ana, Linnea, and Kaylee, for your endless encouragement and patience. It was a pleasure working with my fellow Interns, Max and Antonia. I greatly appreciated your teamwork and inclusion.
Appendix A

Internship Topic Presentation
My Internship at the NEAQ

Riley Hammack
Who Am I?

History with the Museum
- Five years at the Museum
- My previous role as an educator here
- How the Museum shaped my interests

My Major
Environmental Studies
Emphasis: Education and Eco - Social Justice

Where I Go to School
- Western Washington University (WWU)
- Currently going into my Sophomore year

Internship
Conservation Learning
The New England Aquarium
Boston, MA.
Environmental Studies (ENVS)

Studies vs. Sciences

- No policy
- No research sciences
- No environmental engineering

More education based

- Public speaking
- Similar to the Museum Tours
Applying for Internships

- Experiential vs. Academic
- Internships are VERY difficult to acquire
- Research in the FALL and Begin applying EARLY SPR
- Before you apply, have a great RESUME and COVER
- You’re more likely to get internships you have previous experience for (Museum is an AMAZING starting point)
- Apply to something you want to LEARN FROM
## Why The New England Aquarium?

<table>
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<th><strong>Views</strong></th>
<th>Conservation -based education practices and research</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community</strong></td>
<td>Tons of passionate, friendly people who care for the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Boston, being an urban area, was new to me and I wanted to expand my horizons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>My Passion</strong></td>
<td>I love conservation and teaching, so getting to teach thousands of people was exciting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Animals</strong></td>
<td>Need I say more?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Picture Time!!
This is Beach Donkey, she is the best girl.
Crusher claw from a 25lb American Lobster
Ginny the 9 foot long Anaconda
Feeding Myrtle the 90 year old and 550lb green sea turtle.
Jaw from an 18 foot long tiger shark (my favorite biofact)
Holding the rib of a juvenile humpback whale
Jelly Tubes!
NARW Cart
Questions!
Appendix B

Shark Study Presentation
Fish Are Friends, Not Food
Sharks vs. the Media
How Do We View Sharks?

S – superior
H – hunters
A - actively
R - roaming
K – keystone species
How Do Guests View Sharks?

S – super
H – harmful
A – and
R – rampaging
K – killers
Believe it or not, shark attacks are less common than:

- Vending Machines – 13 deaths/year
- Falling Coconuts – 150 deaths/year

Shark attacks trend online, showing the very few instances where sharks interact with humans. While sharks mainly stay away from people, they hunt other animals such as sea turtles or seals. Because of their diet, sharks are seen as “killers.”
Tiger Sharks are one of the few species of sharks that eat sea turtles, which has given them a very poor reputation.
Comments I’ve Gotten When Addressing Sharks and Sea Turtles

“Shark attacks are really common aren’t they?”

“Sharks are bad for environment.”

“We should keep the turtles safe, not the sharks.”
How I Approach the “Shark Talk”:

1. **Fear**: Most guests begin here when it comes to sharks.
2. **Interest**: I try to tell cool facts to peak their interest.
3. **Curiosity**: They ask more shark-related questions.
4. **Understanding**: They realize why sharks are important.
5. **Impact**: Ask how their actions impact sharks.
6. **New Found Love**: Want to protect sharks and their habitats.
Why Tiger Sharks Eating Sea Turtles Is a Good Thing

Sea Grass
Sea turtles can consume up to 5lbs of sea grass per day, which can have heavy impacts on marine ecosystems. Countless animals rely on sea grass for food, shelter, and camouflage. If an area has too many turtles eating sea grass, the beds can dissipate and leave other organisms without the resources they need.

What Do the Sharks Do?
Since tiger sharks eat sea turtles, it allows for the sea grass populations to regrow without large patches gone missing at one time. Tiger sharks also control the population of sea turtles. I always remind guests that tiger sharks don’t count the turtles or know they’re endangered and that humans are the ones doing the most harm to our turtle friends.
Where to Go From Here

**Spread Shark Love!**

Helping show guests why sharks play a significant role in our oceans does more than you think. If they leave knowing sharks aren't the “bad guys,” they're more likely to defend them or want to protect them!

**Post Fin-Tastic Things About Sharks!**

Since sharks have such a bad rep on social media, encourage others and yourself to post some cool things you learn. So while some may see a seal being eaten, others will see a beautiful creature maintaining balance in our oceans.

**Learn More!**

Taking the time to learn more about sharks and their behavior is a great way to share not only awesome facts with visitors, but feel more comfortable addressing “anti-shark” comments.
Any Questions?

Thank you 😊
Appendix C

The New England Aquarium Homepage:

https://www.neaq.org/visit/reopen/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=sea
rch_nea_branded_top-conversion_broad&gclid=CjwKCAjwvsqZBhAIwAqAHEIfQHmlu8rHJ
J5jKWRCyOUhO63XvCLx5tocGnsWVmja2XLVbI82NRMhoCfWAQAQAvD_BwE
Appendix D

End of Internship Letter
Dear Mr. Weber,

It was a pleasure having Riley Hammack as one of our 2022 summer Visitor Education interns at the New England Aquarium! She was an integral part of our team during our busiest season of the year. As her supervisor, I was particularly impressed with her enthusiasm for education and willingness to take on new challenges in order to diversify her skill sets.

While Riley completed all of her learning objectives for the internship, a few I wanted to highlight are working alongside marine biologists to conduct marine conservation educational practices, working with touch tanks and marine creatures, and learning how public marketing applies to conservation efforts and support. She was an amazing help to our work translating data received from our research team into easily accessible wording for the public, particularly in the field of marine species tagging and new fishing technology implementation. The Shark and Ray Touch Tank is one of our most popular exhibits, and Riley was instrumental in ensuring both guest and animal safety while also providing information and answers to questions received from guests. She was also a key leader in the Conservation Learning department’s latest work to build empathy-based understanding into our interpretation in order to more easily build connections with the public and activate ocean advocates. Riley even incorporated empathy into her intern presentation to the institution, in which she discussed common falsities about sharks that she frequently heard from guests and how to address them in a way that pivots to caring about, and for, a vital marine animal. It was wonderful to watch her finesse skills she already had, hone new skills, and put them together so succinctly, both on the floor for guests and behind the scenes to support her colleagues.

In total, the New England Aquarium sees thousands of guests a day, and they range in age, background, and accessibility levels. The experience that Riley gained with us is applicable across a number of audiences and a lot of different fields. She became proficient in customer service and protocol management (e.g., the steps that must be followed to retrieve a lost guest item from the penguin tray) in addition to aquarium animal welfare and conservation education. Riley was a true asset to our team, and I’m excited to see where her journey takes her next!

Working with you and Riley to ensure this was a successful internship was a great experience, and I hope we see more students from Western in the future. If you have any questions about Riley’s internship, or about the Conservation Learning work that we do at the New England Aquarium, you can always reach out to me at kohrien@neaq.org.

Thank you,

Kathlena O’Brien

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