

2026 CMIL MURP Summer Internship

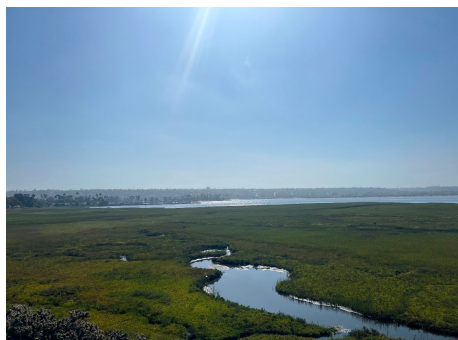
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This summer, I had the amazing opportunity to participate as an undergraduate intern in the CMIL MURP program at the San Diego State University Coastal Marine Institute Laboratory. For 10 weeks, I worked alongside my mentor, Devon Kelley, and another intern as well. The experience allowed me to get a deeper insight into what research involves, to carry out marine biology fieldwork for the first time, and to see up close to the dedication and effort that are involved in graduate-level research. Since marine biology and field research were both fields new to me as a biology student, I was thrilled to get out of the classroom and experience a completely different side of biology.

Throughout the summer, we conducted fieldwork at Kendall-Frost Marsh, Sweetwater Marsh, and the Tijuana Estuary. Devon's research focuses on burrowing crabs, including where they choose to burrow, how environmental conditions may influence their distribution, and how different crab species interact with one another. Before this internship, I had never really thought about how something as small as a crab burrow could influence its surrounding environment. Learning about their role in the marsh made me realize how much there is to understand about even the smallest parts of an ecosystem and how they make big contributions in the Earth.

Fieldwork soon turned into my favorite aspect of the summer. We took water-quality readings and collected ammonium and sodium samples, gathered data, helped with crab traps, and then returned the next day to retrieve them. The crabs were then identified, measured, and recorded before being released back into the marsh again. At the start, everything was new to me, but I gradually became more at ease and confident with each field day. A task which had originally frightened me eventually turned into one that I truly enjoyed.

One of my best memories is the time we spent in the marsh in the mornings working on field work. We walked through the marsh, saw crabs all round us, worked together to gather our samples, and since we were surrounded by all sorts of wildlife, I felt a closer connection to nature than I had ever done before. The opportunity to work in such important coastal habitats was something I will never take for granted; rather than just learning about ecosystems in the classroom, I was actually in the middle of one and had even made a small contribution to the research aimed at gaining a better understanding of it.



A few of my favorite moments from the field: collecting crabs, exploring San Diego's coastal marshes, and learning how to test water quality.

One of the most valuable aspects of this experience was the knowledge I gained from my mentor, Devon. I was continually inspired by her deep knowledge and confidence in her area of expertise and by the extent of her dedication to her research. Yet she was also very down-to-earth and always open to answering our questions and teaching us. I gained so much admiration and respect of what graduate-level research involves and the amount of patience, knowledge, consistency, and hard work it requires.

When I first joined the program, I had very little knowledge of marine fieldwork, but when I finished I had acquired new knowledge, skills, values, connections, and memories that I will take with me for the rest of my academic career. It broadened my understanding of just how wide biology actually is and showed me all the possibilities that are available in research. Most important of all, it taught me not to give up trying something just because I was unfamiliar with it.

I would like to express my great thanks to Devon, the CMIL team, and all those who were involved with MURP for offering me this opportunity. I truly enjoyed my time here, the knowledge I gained and the meaningful experiences that will be shaping my professional career, there was something truly special about being in the marsh, surrounded by wildlife and picking up a new piece of knowledge each day, an experience which I will never forget.