

2026 CMIL MURP

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This summer, I participated as an intern in the MURP program for Shoshana Lescht-Smith in the Hovel Lab at San Diego State's Coastal and Marine Institute Laboratory (CMIL). During my 10 weeks as an intern at CMIL, I was able to refine my laboratory and field work skills. My intern partner and I learned to weigh and measure different species, how to drop and pick up lobster traps, and how to set up and take down experimental trials. The MURP program really gave me the chance to see many different pathways and opportunities in marine science that I had been curious about. The best part about this program was that none of it was alone, and it was really helpful to have a mentor to reach out to during any part of the program. My mentor, Shoshana, was there for us to answer any questions about what a day to day looked like as a grad student or even any other questions about the marine science field and what some career opportunities looked like.

This summer, we got hands-on experience working with California spiny lobsters and learning what it is like to do marine ecology research. Our project investigated lobster feeding behavior and prey preference, including prey such as sea urchins, mussels, and wavy turban snails. A typical lab day at CMIL would include helping weigh and prepare prey, weigh lobsters, clean tanks, feed the lobsters, and take care of the experimental setups. We also learned how researchers collect observations and data during experiments. These daily tasks really showed me how much day to day work goes into keeping an experiment organized and consistent.



Running trials was also a learning experience, since this is something I had never done before. Our experimental setup consisted of four water tables, each containing one lobster. Two of the water tables were kept at ambient temperature, while the other two were kept at a warmer temperature. In each table, the lobster was given two of each prey type, and each trial was recorded for 48 hours. This allowed us to compare feeding behavior and see whether warmer water affected what and how much the lobsters ate, which was one of the main questions of the project.



Before each trial, we had to clean and prepare the water tables, set up the prey, and position the GoPros so they could record the lobsters throughout the experiment. The GoPros were used to help us observe which prey the lobsters preferred and how long it took them to handle and eat their prey. After the 48 hours were over, we checked the tables and recorded what had been eaten and what was still alive. We then went through the GoPro pictures to get a closer look at the lobsters' feeding behavior.

One of the more challenging, but fun parts of the experience was handling the lobsters and working out on the boats. At first, I had a hard time catching the lobsters and moving them from the large holding tanks into the water tables because they were much faster than I expected, but over time I became more comfortable handling them. There were also difficult moments when some of the lobsters or prey died. It was sad to see, but I learned that this can be part of working with live animals in a research setting.

Overall, MURP was such an amazing experience. My favorite part of this summer was this internship and being able to gain hands-on experience. The balance between our field and lab days was the perfect combination to learn both data analysis and field work skills. I am grateful to have experienced this in such a collaborative setting and to have learned so much about marine science and see what possibilities are out there post graduation!

