

## End of Summer Internship Reflection

This past summer, I had the pleasure of working with the Atlantic White Shark Conservancy as an Education Intern in the Shark Center. I have wanted to work with this organization since I visited the Center with my family in 2016, and to finally be able to do so was a dream come true. The summer of 2021 was particularly exciting because it was the first time that my position was offered, so I had different responsibilities from previous interns. As soon as I read the online description, I knew that this was the perfect way for me to spend my summer. I have always wanted a career in marine science, but I also became interested in education when I discovered a passion for the performing arts in elementary school. This internship would provide a fantastic opportunity for me to use my artistic skills to promote awareness and conservation of marine life. Additionally, I was eager to learn more about the logistics of running a nonprofit organization. Through my experience with the AWSC, I hoped to gain work experience while making meaningful contributions to an organization that I truly admire.

When I first arrived at the Shark Center, I was immediately struck by the sense of comradery among the AWSC team. The initial phases of onboarding included many team-building activities, in order to establish a sense of mutual trust and support. The staff emphasized that even though everyone had different responsibilities, we could always rely on each other for help if needed. As someone who gets nervous about working with new groups of people, this was huge because I quickly felt accepted by and comfortable among my supervisors and fellow interns. Throughout training, I was also excited to learn that the whole group would get some insight into each aspect of the Conservancy's work. For example, all of the interns spent time going over the basics of shark ID, education programs and receiver tours. This gave all of us a much broader understanding of the Conservancy's mission, which ultimately benefited each of us in our own individual roles. I was especially grateful for the chance to learn more about the research process, as this helped me to confidently and articulately discuss ongoing studies with the public. Looking back on the onboarding process now, I am certain that the group training environment was key to my success as a representative of this organization.

As an Education Intern in the Shark Center, my main responsibilities were to engage with the public in the museum, serve as a naturalist on receiver tours, plan activities for Story Hour and pack merchandise orders. Educational activities were definitely my favorite part of the internship, but they were also the most challenging because I did not have much prior experience in science communication. In order to keep my audience engaged, I had to learn to be brief and clear, as well as adapt my presentation style for various age groups. This took quite a bit of practice, but once I got comfortable with the information I found that I was able to help people of

all ages to not just understand, but truly appreciate the Conservancy's work. The receiver tours were particularly interesting because we were actually surrounded by the wildlife and fishing industry that I was discussing; I was therefore able to show, rather than simply tell guests why marine research and conservation are so important. Both receiver and Shark Center tours were very rewarding for me on a personal level as well, because I was able to see the immediate impact that I had on guests. As a performer, I crave the opportunity to connect with audiences on an emotional and intellectual level, and this internship allowed me to do so on a daily basis. Throughout each tour, I could see people beginning to think and feel about sharks in new ways, and I received many questions from youth and adults alike that showed real interest in the research. I was delighted to watch curiosity and excitement blossom in their faces as I explained what we currently know, and what we have yet to discover about these awe-inspiring predators. There were also many instances when guests surprised me with their prior knowledge of sharks and marine science in general, as these were not very common areas of interest in my hometown. It was truly heartening to see so many individuals, especially children, walking into the Shark Center with a deep love of learning about the natural world. I applied for this position because I wanted to have a positive impact on others, but I never anticipated the impact that the public would have on me. Working as an educator brought me so much joy every day, and I hope that I will have similarly rewarding opportunities in the future.

As my internship comes to an end, I have no words to express my gratitude to the AWSC for this amazing experience. Working with this organization has helped me to grow on a professional and a personal level, and I sincerely hope that I may return here in the future. Thank you to the entire AWSC team for what has truly been the best summer of my life.