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The World is Her Oyster

One aquarium visit in elementary school was all it took. Maddy Uetrecht has been fascinated with all forms of marine life ever since. That spark of curiosity led to a stint as a volunteer aquarium docent in middle school and high school, independent research projects about jellyfish and anemones — and now an exciting career path.

Uetrecht, a junior ecology and evolution major at UC Santa Barbara, has been awarded an Ernest F. Hollings Undergraduate Scholarship from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). She is one of only 125 undergraduate students in the United States to receive the prestigious award.

The scholarship, named for South Carolina Senator Ernest “Fritz” Hollings, provides up to $9,500 per year in tuition assistance for two years and a 10-week paid internship at a NOAA facility during the summer months.

Uetrecht, who is especially interested in marine ecology, currently works in the Partnership for Interdisciplinary Studies of Coastal Oceans (PISCO) lab, where she studies juvenile marine invertebrates from the Channel Islands and collects data about their changing marine environment.

“There are so many ecosystems and ecological communities to be explored,” said Uetrecht. “My major is teaching me the science and communication skills I need to contribute to research and conservation of the natural world.”

She plans to use her scholarship to help pay for tuition, living expenses and textbooks, and is looking forward to her summer internship at Mook Sea Farm in

Maine, where she will be studying oysters.

“My summer research project is about juvenile oyster calcification in a variable marine environment,” Uetrecht explained. “Ocean acidification is negatively impacting animals with calcium carbonate shells, which is bad news for both the animals and the fisheries that depend on them. I'm eager to apply my knowledge and research experience from my classes to discover more about these oysters and the growing threat of ocean acidification.”

“Maddy is a wonderful example of a dedicated undergraduate student making the most of her time at UCSB,” said Pierre Wiltzius, dean of the division of mathematical, life and physical sciences. “It’s not at all surprising that NOAA recognized her potential and awarded her with this scholarship. We are proud of her accomplishments in both the classroom and the lab, and we’re excited to see where her bright future takes her.”

The Hollings scholarship was established in 2005 in honor of Senator Hollings’ dedication to ocean policy and conservation. The program’s mission is to bolster undergraduate training in NOAA sciences, as well to as increase environmental literacy.

Uetrecht hopes that her participation in the program will lead to a career solving the mysteries of the ocean. “I’m hoping the Hollings Scholarship Program will prepare me for a career with NOAA,” she said. “They do great work studying the environment and promoting sustainable human interactions with the ocean.”

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.