## Sea Grant Community-Engaged Undergraduate Internship Program: A Proposal

Sea Grant’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and Traditional and Local Knowledge (TLK) visioning teams propose the development of an internship program for undergraduate students from underrepresented and indigenous communities. The overarching goal of this internship program is to broaden participation in marine and coastal professions by providing training and mentorship to the next generation of scientists, decision makers, and citizens. The program will do so by recruiting, retaining and engaging diverse students in place-based research, extension, education, and/or communication that respects and integrates local ways of knowing.

**Background**

One of the many strengths of Sea Grant is its ability to provide place-based solutions to scientific problems by partnering with a diverse range of communities, including rural and urban areas that differ greatly in culture, racial and ethnic composition, and socioeconomic status and history. By more fully representing and serving our diverse coastal communities, we are poised to use the full knowledge and creativity available to meet the most pressing coastal and Great Lakes challenges.

Place-based knowledge is advanced by broadening participation, in particular, engaging underrepresented and indigenous communities in Sea Grant programs. Underrepresented communities and tribes generally have experienced low levels of access to Sea Grant programming. Additionally, their representation in Sea Grant programs is smaller than that of the general population. Communities may be underrepresented because of distant/remote locations of offices, inconvenient meeting schedules, irrelevant research topics or additional resources are needed to participate in programming.

The full inclusion and participation of individuals from a broad diversity of backgrounds puts to use a range of perspectives, values, and tools that are necessary to address major coastal, marine and Great Lakes issues. Broadening participation in Sea Grant research, outreach, and education activities enables the application of TLK, which can inform science by providing local ecological information, narrative histories, and social understanding of local ecosystems. These narratives and knowledge can then be applied to develop valuable practices and rules about how to live in relationship with and care for the natural world that is our shared home.

**Program Implementation Plan**

The proposed internship program will focus on engaging early stage university and community college students with the intent to train a workforce that represents the demographics of the locations where Sea Grant programs operate. Each participating state Sea Grant program will recruit and hire one or more interns to implement projects that have an applied TLK focus benefitting an underrepresented or indigenous community. Internship projects that engage and respond to the needs of, and ideally are co-developed with underrepresented community partners or tribal entities will be encouraged. The student will work under the supervision of a “Sea Grant mentor” to obtain on-the-ground learning experience by directly supporting Sea Grant-led and/or Sea Grant partners’ research, extension, education, and/or communications programs. The intern’s placement can be at a Sea Grant office, community partner organization, or university lab or office where Sea Grant funded research is taking place.

Sea Grant’s community-engaged internship will last for 10-weeks over the summer months with the intern working 40 hours/week. Interns will spend 8 weeks to complete a project that extends the knowledge of community stakeholders to address a coastal, marine, or Great Lakes issue of environmental, economic, and/or social importance. The other two weeks will be invested in professional development.

Participating Sea Grant programs will work with a program coordination committee to build an internship cohort that results in professional development opportunities for student interns. An online and app-based communication forum (for example, Slack or basecamp) will be used to promote intern peer-to-peer mentoring throughout the summer. Periodic webinar-based professional development sessions will be provided to interns throughout the internship period. Students will participate in a four-day meeting at the end of the internship program to further learn about the mission and work of Sea Grant, exchange knowledge, explore the role they can play to solve coastal, marine, and Great Lakes challenges, and celebrate their graduation from the program. The in-person meeting will also provide an opportunity to the undergraduate interns to meet with their peers from other Sea Grant programs and build lasting professional relationships with one another.

**Program Coordination**

The program will be led by a program coordination committee that includes representatives from DEI and TLK vision groups as well as representatives from the NSGO. The committee will provide guidance to state Sea Grant programs on local intern recruitment, assessment, and improvement of the internship experience, as well as periodic professional development opportunities for interns. The committee will ideally work in partnership with an internship coordinator who will be responsible for developing orientation and professional development opportunities for students and overall assessment of the program. The internship coordinator could be a Knauss Fellow or representative from the program coordination committee, for example.

**Program Eligibility**

Dependent on funding, all state Sea Grant programs will be eligible to host one or more interns. Each program will be required to submit an application to the internship program committee. The application will include information about the specific internship project to be completed, recruitment strategy, internship mentor, workplace culture, and other details to ensure the internship meets its intended goals. For example, the recruitment strategy should explain how underrepresented or indigenous students will be made aware of the internship and have a clear rationale for why the students identified are considered underrepresented, or how the project will work on a project important to and in collaboration with tribal entities. The committee will provide feedback on the internship plan.

**Evaluation**

Sea Grant mentors will develop a plan of work in partnership with their student mentees to identify clear goals, objectives, outcomes and metrics for success. Project work plan development should be an active exchange with the intern to advance their project management skills. Formative, interim (midway) and summative assessment will be conducted. The internship coordinator and/or program coordination committee will facilitate the evaluation process.

**Results**

In an academic setting, undergraduate students from underrepresented communities are seldom given responsibilities commensurate with their potential. Sea Grant’s community-engaged internship program will address this gap. In addition, Sea Grant seeks to engage more fully with tribal entities in education, extension, and research. Place-based research opportunities extended to undergraduate student scholars is likely to yield societal, economic, and environmental benefits in future years. The project undertaken by the Sea Grant intern will result in research, extension, education, and/or communications product(s) that apply TLK to enhance the practical use and conservation of coastal, marine, and Great Lakes resources in a broad array of communities. By engaging students in place-based inquiry that integrates TLK, students will learn how to incorporate multiple ways of knowing into their scientific process. Well-executed mentorship experiences can be transformative for students in helping them achieve their career goals. The process of intern recruitment will allow state Sea Grant programs to develop and build on relationships with national, state, and local organizations that champion traditional and local knowledge and engage underrepresented and indigenous communities. The internship program will provide coastal and Great Lakes work experience to the next generation workforce that represents the demographics of the locations where Sea Grant programs operate. This experience is also likely to influence student decisions to enter graduate or professional schools in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). Promotion of this program will also make the student body and faculty more aware of the National Sea Grant network and its efforts to address place-based coastal, marine, and Great Lakes issues.

**Proposal Partners**

Mona Behl, Georgia Sea Grant & Jane Harrison, North Carolina Sea Grant

Coordinators of the *Sea Grant Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Visioning Group*

Matt Bethel, Louisiana Sea Grant & Davin Holen, Alaska Sea Grant

Coordinators of the *Sea Grant Traditional and Local Knowledge Visioning Group*

**Annual Budget & Justification**

The cost for program implementation would be split between the NSGO and state Sea Grant programs[[1]](#footnote-1). Federal funds would cover salary, travel, and housing for interns and network-wide internship coordination duties, while state funding would cover staff supervision and mentorship duties. Highlighted below is an itemized list of expenses.

a. Personnel costs: $4,500 for intern stipend

b. Four day in-person meeting: $2,000 for travel and registration

c. Supplies: 0

d. Equipment: 0

e. Contractual: 0

f. Other costs (itemize): $1,000 for housing stipend

g. State Sea Grant program in-kind contribution: $5000 for staff support to supervise intern

and/or augment intern personnel, travel, and housing costs in more expensive areas.

h. Total project costs per intern: $12,500

In addition to the cost of supporting an intern at each state Sea Grant program, internship coordination duties will need to be undertaken. These duties would represent about ten percent of a National Sea Grant Office or state Sea Grant program employee’s work time, with an estimated cost of $10,000 including benefits. Recruitment of a minimum of ten interns per year is needed to create the cohort experience; total costs will depend on the number of participating interns.

1. Costs may vary based on cost of living differences, local wages, and travel costs. An additional cost of living allowance and travel stipend covered by federal funds would encourage all state Sea Grant programs to participate. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)