

Sea Grant offers graduate students experience and financial support

A university may be proud of its beautiful setting, its fine facilities for learning, its distinguished faculty and alumni. But finally its reason for being is its students; and the quality of education they receive at the university is the best testament to its success.

Today's graduate students are tomorrow's professionals. Along the way to their futures, these young people need both enriching experiences and financial support. Oregon Sea Grant is happy to be able to help. Over the past decade, Sea Grant has provided a total of \$2.5 million to dozens of students. The experience Sea Grant offers comes in the form of graduate research assistantships, special research scholarships, and unique fellowships in Oregon and in Washington, D.C. In each instance, these advanced students receive the sort of mentoring and professional guidance that help them grow into tomorrow's leaders in academia, in resource agencies, in the private sector, and in other domains of the marine world.

Each Sea Grant student has a unique story—about intellectual interest, commitment, and achievement. One of the very first Oregon Sea Grant graduate students is today's Sea Grant director, Bob Malouf.

Malouf believes that experience changed his life. "I think that the concept of focusing on students,

and the fact that I've benefited from that and that it did make a difference in my life, have stuck with me. I've tried to think about students in the same way that I thought about myself when I first started.

"Sea Grant has a philosophy that is, I think, reflected in the kind of students we support and in what they become," Malouf said. "Our philosophy is that the science is not enough. If it's not good science, it's not going to help anyone, and that has to come first. But we're interested in supporting work that makes a difference and that answers questions that need to be answered, so that resources can be managed wisely."

An excellent example along that line is Maggie Sommer, who was a 2002 Oregon Sea Grant Natural Resource Fellow when she was a graduate student in Marine Resource Management.

Her fellowship role put her working with a group of Oregon resource agencies to inventory and map all the human-made erosion-control structures on the Oregon coast.

"I actually went out with a GPS [Global Positioning System receiver], a digital camera, a laser rangefinder to measure the lengths of these structures which were rock revetments, also called riprap," said Sommer. "We went up and down the Oregon coast, mapped and documented them all and put it all



Maggie Sommer, the 2002 Oregon Sea Grant Natural Resource Fellow.

together in a great big spatial database so it now can be accessed by those agencies who are responsible for issuing permits for these structures and evaluating their effects on the environment.

"I learned a lot about database and GIS development," she said, "and it was also new for me to work with such a big group of agencies and coordinate all their interest in this project and the individual outcomes they all were hoping for from it."

Her sponsors and partners recognized that the fellowship was designed to be a learning experience for her, and, Sommer said, "they were all very helpful, and they definitely went out of their way to make help available to me in any areas I needed it."

Sommer believes her Sea Grant fellowship was a "great experience" for her. "I certainly learned a lot. And employers that I've worked for since then have been very impressed by that experience on my



résumé, both of the specific project and of working for Sea Grant.”

Sommer currently works for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in Newport.

Across the country, the John R. Knauss Marine Policy Fellowship Program is arguably the most prestigious fellowship in the nation for graduate students interested in the marine environment. Annually, the 30 state Sea Grant programs may nominate up to four students for the fellowship, and a national selection committee decides on about 30 of these students to serve for a year in either the legislative or executive branch of the federal government in Washington, D.C.

Oregon Sea Grant has had an enviable success rate with its nominees in this very competitive program: since 1980 Oregon has placed an average of one fellow per year. In 2003, Cidney Howard, a graduate student in the OSU College of Oceanic and Atmospheric Sciences, was selected. Her interest in improving the connections between science and marine



Cidney Howard, Oregon Sea Grant's 2003 Knauss Fellow.

policy landed her a position with the U.S. State Department.

“It really opened my mind to people’s different perspectives when you see them internationally,” said Howard. “You deal with people from all economic classes and education, so that’s definitely a growing experience.

“It’s a win-win situation,” she said, “because the State Department doesn’t have a lot of scientists in their office—but they are making policy decisions based on science—and they get recent graduates who know the latest research. So I think it’s really beneficial for them to have this young person who is just out of school and has all these fresh ideas, and can really add a lot to the dialogue when it comes to policymaking decisions.”

Howard has returned to Oregon, where she works in a science-policy position with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. She credits the Knauss fellowship with influencing her career path. “It just gave me a really unique perspective,” she said. “How many people can say that they worked at the State Department and get that international worldwide view of marine policy? I think that’s just really special.”

The opportunity to do what she passionately wanted to—but could not have, without funding, is familiar to Lisa Krentz, who was a recipient of an Oregon Sea Grant research scholarship in 2003.

“I was seriously looking into having to take a hiatus from school just so I could work for a little while to earn enough money to then be able to go back,” said



Lisa Krentz, former OSU graduate student in fisheries and wildlife.

Krentz, a former graduate student in the OSU Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, who was conducting research on cutthroat trout. “This is not something you want to do when you’re in the middle of a project. You know your data well, you’re ready to write, and that’s not the time you want to leave it.

“Sea Grant’s fellowship was, for me, a very large chunk of money that really helped me at a point where I was thinking, O.K., what am I gonna do now? I’ve got the rest of this to finish, but I’ve got no money to live on. Certainly, I could not have [finished my research] without the help of Sea Grant.”

The brief accounts of these three young women may perhaps suggest the quality of experience that Sea Grant funding affords graduate students—ever since those misty days three decades ago when Bob Malouf began to take oysters seriously.

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