Provide an overview of the organization/research project and a summary of your responsibilities, tasks, and/or projects.

The Sewanee Mustang Island internship consists of two parts: being on staff at the Mustang Island Family Camp, as well as volunteering at the University of Texas Marine Science Institute. My role as a staff member was to lead one hour per day of environmental activities for families, as well as to be a family facilitator for all other programming. During my time volunteering at the University of Texas Marine Science Institute, my responsibilities included administering food and medicine to all animals, as well as cleaning their cages and toys.
During your internship, what did you accomplish or how did you make a difference? In what ways did you grow in your professional and technical skills?

I felt a great sense of accomplishment when I saved a turtle that was near death. I assisted in keeping her head above water while others administered an IV into her neck, which helped her get her strength back. I definitely made a difference in that turtle's life, and I would like to believe that I did the same for some of the other animals that I worked with. I became a better communicator and much more flexible in what I am willing to do to help others.

Describe a problem that you helped to solve at your internship. What skills or knowledge from your education at Sewanee helped you address the problem?

One day at the beach, several children had filled a shallow bucket with various sea creatures they collected over the course of the afternoon. Hours after they had put the hermit crabs and minnows in the bucket, it became apparent that they were not doing so well. The water felt warm and the fish had slowly stopped moving. I remembered that in my intro Chemistry class, my professor talked about how the oxygen in the water is diminished much more quickly when exposed to sunlight. Knowing this, I moved the bucket into the shade and added some fresh water. The minnows began to swim around once more, and the creatures were saved.

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?

Working at Mustang Island required constant cooperation between the eight staff members that led all the activities and programming during camp. One instance in which this was found to be challenging was on a Sunday afternoon during beach time. All eight of the staff members were on the beach with the families, when all of a sudden, it began to thunder and rain with tremendous strength. We hadn't ever discussed what to do in this situation, so we were all confused and talking over one another. After about a minute, it occurred to us that we simply needed to help one another in taking down the tents so they wouldn't blow away, and get families inside quickly and safely. We were all very stressed out because of the cold water that was soaking our clothes and the strength of the wind that threatened to carry away our beach tents, but we were able to fight through the overwhelming situation by communicating with one another and making a plan for moving forward.

How did your internship affect your career plans?

Working in animal rehabilitation for an entire summer helped me realize that I want to be more involved with hands-on care for animals. It was so rewarding to watch the wildlife that I nurtured slowly recuperate, and I came to realize that it was a feeling that is worth chasing. For this reason, I intend on finding a career that allows me to combine my passion for helping animals with my interest in environmental chemistry.

In what ways did your internship cause you to encounter people of different backgrounds from your own? What steps did you take to communicate effectively with such persons? What did you learn from such persons' perspectives?

There were people from all socioeconomic backgrounds volunteering at the Animal Rehabilitation Keep. I found this to be especially endearing because many of the people there did not lead comfortable lifestyles that allowed them to volunteer for an organization easily; money was tight for many of them, and so their selfless dedication of time to our cause touched my heart. Having the opportunity to learn from these individuals and hear their stories taught me that people from all backgrounds can exercise their passions for helping the environment.
Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:

Thank you so much for this exceptional opportunity to explore the practical aspects of environmental studies and sustainability. I feel that I have grown to be a more grounded environmentalist and I believe that I have a clearer understanding of the day-to-day operating of an animal rehabilitation worker, which has allowed me to gain great insight into how I want to move forward with my studies and career aspirations.