Career Path
Noah Bourassa
2024 MATE Intern
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I started my career path as an undergraduate student at the University of Maine in Orono. I was studying marine science with a concentration in oceanography. In my high school years, I always gravitated towards the sciences, and I loved the ocean, so this felt like a natural and passionate path to pursue. Well into my undergraduate career I was still steadfast in my decision and thought that I had it all figured out. In the fall semester of my senior year at UMaine I was doing Semester by the Sea at the Darling Marine Center in Damariscotta, Maine. I was taking general oceanography classes as well as scientific diving. There was an elective that involved marine engineering where you get to build your own open source CTD from scratch, wire it up, and code the whole thing before testing. I like working with my hands and I gave it a shot. Prior to this class I had only used coding to process large oceanographic data sets, and now I was using it to make a whole system that could collect data. It changed my whole perspective on my career path. Around the same time my peers were all applying to grad school meanwhile I was questioning everything and did not want to pigeonhole myself into a grad program that I wasn't 100 percent certain about. When it came time to sign up for Spring semester courses, I found a marine engineering course being offered with a professor whom I had previously, so I jumped on the opportunity. On the first day of class I stayed afterwards to ask my professor if I could have a job. I didn't care about pay I just wanted more experience in anything related to marine engineering. He told me that I could work as a graduate research assistant in data processing with Matlab. I was quite anxious since I was not very good with code at the time, but I wanted to push myself. I understood that putting myself into unfamiliar situations was the best way to learn what I wanted or didn't want to do. I learned quickly that I did not want to code large datasets for the rest of my life. Luckily my professor had another grad student who needed help calibrating some magnetometers which was more hands on but still involved code. I enjoyed this work, and when I told that to my professor, he mentioned the MATE program, and that he had a previous student who was a MATE intern and ended up at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI). Unfortunately, the deadline for 2023 had passed not even a couple months before learning about it. With my undergraduate career coming to an end, and me freaking out about my future, I started looking into graduate programs for oceanography. I spent the summer applying to grad programs and jobs, all the while the MATE program lingered in the back of my mind. I discovered that URI offered an online Masters of Oceanography degree which was designed for those working full time. I took this as an opportunity to maybe do a graduate program and the MATE internship at the same time. I got into URI and the MATE program had notified me that the ALVIN ops group was looking for interns and that I was selected for an interview. Among 8, 4 were interviewed and 2 were going to be chosen. I was very insecure about how I looked on paper, including my lack of experience in marine technology. I went into the interview extremely nervous, and I could not tell you anything that happened in the interview except for one question and my answer. "Why should we take you as an intern?" I knew I was not the best qualified, but

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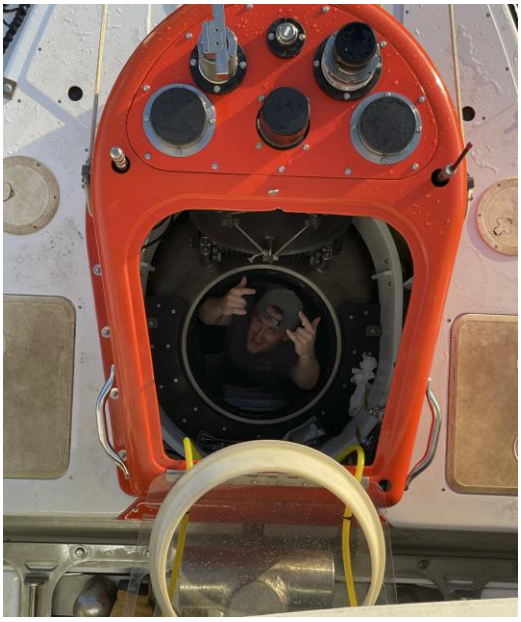
I would make up for it, so I replied, “I would be the hardest working intern that you’ve ever had”. Maybe a week later I was informed that I had been picked for the internship and would be travelling to San Diego to board the r/v Atlantis for a month-long expedition out to sea with the ALVIN ops group.



My MATE internship began in early February, and my classes had already started at URI. The trip was unlike anything I had ever experienced, and over a month at sea went by fast. For a few days near the end of the expedition I was planning how to approach the expedition leader about my desire to stay on for the next trip as well. The other MATE intern was already supposed to be on both, but I was only meant to be on the first one. I walked up to the expedition leader and said, “What do I need to do to be on the next trip?”. I expressed the desire and willingness to do what was necessary, and he made it happen for me. So, I was on another trip out to sea about 10 days later. This second trip was a lot more work, and I asked for it. To help pass the time I created a GoPro day in the life video on this expedition (YouTube link to GoPro video: https://youtu.be/tRCy3LMFn14). Whenever I was not working on the ship, I was mainly doing classwork, which was very taxing over time but if you can power through it, it’s worth it.

My overall internship experience was very positive, and it gave my resume an incredible boost. I cannot fit everything about my experience into this career path summary; I believe I am already beyond the word limit. Instead, I will offer some advice for any future intern; Be bold and confident even if you don’t feel that way on the front end. Once you’re in, be a sponge and take every opportunity to learn. It will not go unnoticed, and you will meet a lot of people. Finally, work harder than you’ve ever worked then work some more. You only have so much time as an intern, so make the best impression that you can and it will also foster a great work ethic that will carry over into your career.

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When I finished my internship, I went home to New Hampshire and started working as a contract engineer and I did a job with NOAA in the Gulf of Mexico for the Mesophotic and Deep Benthic Communities project which involved the Navy Experimental Dive Unit. The ship was a Chouest oil and gas ship called the m/v Island Intervention, and it had a saturation dive system along with 2 high end ROVs. I was contracted by the Inner Space Center at URI to be the IT guy in support of their ship to shore live programs.

Everything was a success, and I met a lot of cool people who I learned a lot from. Not long after that I did a job in American Samoa where I helped the Sentry AUV team from WHOI mobilize for a cruise, but I did not go out to sea. I already knew the team well from my time as a MATE intern because Sentry sailed with ALVIN, and the program manager was asking me what my plans were. I mentioned that I was thinking about getting a PhD in oceanography, but I wasn't sure what my plans were. He said that he would keep me in mind for future cruises depending on what I decided to do. I did not think for very long about it and a few days later I emailed him that I was ditching the idea of a PhD and that I was all in with Sentry. I am now a full-time engineer with the Sentry AUV team at WHOI. Looking back, it feels like a lot of things somehow went right for me to be in this position. I try to give myself credit where credit is due, but I mainly owe my

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success in my career to the opportunities afforded to me by the MATE program and the support from Maria Osiadacz.