



Smithsonian
National Museum of Natural History

11 Jan 2015

Dear Ken, Chrissy, Linda and George,

This letter is written in strong support of Jessica Whelpley's application for an MBARI Summer Internship in the Smith lab. Please seriously consider Jessie for this position because she is a strong candidate for a successful academic career focused on deep-sea biology. She is an extremely bright, promising and accomplished biologist who embodies the spirit of what this program supports.

I have known Jessie since May 2014, when she applied for a contract position with me to work here at the NMNH. Jessie was easily the standout in the applicants for this contractor position because of her two years of work with the Marine Environmental Research Institute where she maintained a monitoring program largely on her own. She had glowing recommendations from this work where she supervised and organized a group of interns and volunteers, as well as from the various research projects she had participated in as an undergraduate. As a contractor in the Department of Invertebrate Zoology, Jessie is leading a sorting and cataloguing project focused on our hydrothermal vent collection. She has trained and supervised a high school intern and an undergraduate intern as part of the project, compiled and cleaned up a substantial dataset and uploaded it to our cataloguing database, sorted large mixed samples of invertebrates to species level (learning the taxa as she went), and curated the sorted samples appropriately. She has been proactive in finding ways to perform the required duties efficiently and to integrate them with the rest of the collection management workflows. Outside her duties as a contractor, she has presented the project in our informal lunch seminar series and worked with our Education Department to design an outreach experience focused on hydrothermal vents biology and geology for the Q?RIUS Education Center here, which is aimed at teens. Her work on this project has demonstrated her strong work ethic, great attention to detail, organization, ability to effectively mentor others, integrate well into a large and personality-rich group of researchers and technicians, and go the extra mile to bring the work she loves to the public at large.

Jessie also agreed to participate in Dave Clague's recent Northern Expedition that explored Axial Seamount, because I couldn't go. This activity was well outside her contract duties and completed on her own time. Over a very short time period, I trained her to use my onboard camera system to photo-document the animals collected, my field information management and cataloguing system, and hazardous materials shipping requirements and packing. I also taught her about the animals I wanted her to collect, how to handle these extremely delicate animals, and how to tissue sample and fix them for multiple research needs. She did an excellent job with all of these responsibilities, kept in touch about all questions and updates, and provided all the data upon her return. She also made a good impression on the research team whom she was meeting for the first time, easily working with them and providing assistance with the data capture and ROV operations as needed. This expedition also sparked Jessie's interest in torquaratorid enteropneusts, which were one of two primary collecting targets. This experience demonstrated Jessie's adaptability, quick and confident learning abilities, responsibility and

organization. It was an impressive accomplishment for someone who had not previously been to sea on a major research expedition and showed me that she will be an excellent graduate student.

Since the expedition, Jessie and I have had several talks about the direction she would like to take her career, possible dissertation projects, appropriate advisors and schools. Despite several other possible projects, she has remained focused on questions related to torquaratorids. Throughout this process, Jessie has always done her background research thoroughly and come to me with great questions that show she is very capable of generating interesting research questions and determining creative and appropriate ways of addressing them. She has developed her interests into a dissertation proposal that is cohesive and manageable, which she submitted for an NSF graduate fellowship. She has developed an integrative project that will produce a well-rounded, biologist who will make significant contributions to evolutionary biology, ecology, and oceanography.

If awarded this internship she would be able to make invaluable connections to your lab, become intimately familiar with the resources you have available for a project such as she has proposed, jump start her dissertation research by completing a preliminary project and collecting samples for her proposed stable isotope work. If her visit to MBARI and preliminary work is not funded through this program, I will pursue funding to help her visit MBARI but would prefer to put that effort toward raising funds for the mass spectrometer fees at SI-MCI.

Jessie is highly motivated, solves challenges thoughtfully and effectively, is able to work independently and efficiently, she interacts easily with everyone she meets, and is a pleasure to have around. She is easily in the top 1% of the contractors, interns, and students I've worked with. I look forward to working with her as she begins here dissertation work and watching her develop her skills and ideas further. Thank you for considering Jessie for the MBARI Summer Internship in your lab.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Karen Osborn', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Karen Osborn
Research Zoologist/ Curator of Annelida and Peracarida

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