What is your major?
I am a Zoology major.

How did you find your internship?
I found my Fall 2011 internship through an email I received from the internship office.

Your internship was especially ambitious since you had to move to Hawaii for a semester, how were you able to coordinate moving so far away for a semester?
I was able to coordinate moving to Oahu for a semester with the help from the EBE office, and staying in touch with the coordinator of the internship. Also, my parents were very supportive. The EBE office assisted me in completing all of the paperwork I needed for school. The coordinator for Dolphin Quest gave me great information on the cost of living and housing. I definitely planned in advance to make sure everything would work out.

What are your main responsibilities as an intern?
My main responsibilities as an intern are sorting fish in the morning and getting coolers prepared, daily dolphin assessments (where I get a dolphin to look over for any new injuries or make every morning), helping with feeding and gating, teaching the kids program, teaching the Wee program with kids 5 years and younger (which is recent), giving talks about how we train, our medical procedures, and echolocation to guests before programs begin, life jacketing the guests and welcoming them, giving the conservation talk, engaging with guests and answering any questions they might have, pointing and receiving dolphins, hand feeding the sea turtles and fish, fish training, getting in with the sting ray for the kids program, making toys for the dolphins, keeping the kitchen clean and free of scales, and working on behaviors with each of the dolphins on a daily basis. It sounds like a lot of work, but I can assure you it’s very rewarding.

What type of experience have you gained so far that you wouldn’t have learned in a classroom?
The job of a dolphin trainer is very hands on and to be honest I couldn’t learn most of the responsibilities the job entails by sitting in a classroom. I learned so much just in the first week of the internship from watching, learning, and working alongside the trainers. There is an immense amount of work that goes on behind the scenes that one might not think about when pursuing this career. The internship has truly opened my eyes to ALL aspects and demands of the job.

What is the most exciting part of your internship?
For me the most exciting part of the internship is building a relationship with the dolphins. Going to work everyday is not a job for me. It’s fun, exciting, and unique everyday. They are incredible creatures. I’m teaching and training dolphins, while at the same time they’re teaching me. I love learning from them and just saying it’s a lot better than sitting and listening to a professor in a classroom all day...haha!

Do you have any suggestions for students who would like to do something similar?
For students who want to do something similar...DO IT!!! This is a chance of a lifetime for me and the best decision I could have made, especially for the major I chose. I couldn’t ask for a better opportunity in such a beautiful place! So, do it for the incredible experience, before college is over, while you still have the chance, and while you’re still young! You’ll be glad you did. But I warn you there’s only one problem....you won’t want to go home...haha!

Do you think your internship will play an important role in your education and career?
I do think the internship will play a role in my education and career. When I get back, I already plan on taking more courses related to the internship and marine life. The experience opened up a whole new perspective for me. It has definitely helped me decide if this is the career I want to pursue with my degree after college - which I absolutely do!

Do you have any internship advice you would like to pass on to other students?
The internship advice I would give to other students is to go for it. You do not get the skills, training, and hands on experience from sitting in a classroom, especially for something like training dolphins. It is an incredible experience that you can gain a lot from. It looks great on the resume and it is also nice to go somewhere warm and get away from Oswego for a bit if you have the chance. : ) I did it, accomplished so much already, and am loving every minute of it.

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Christina Topliffe—Dolphin Quest—Oahu, Hawaii

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