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Julia McElhinney (Winchester, Mass.)

Photography and journalism are two of her passions, but Julia McElhinney of Winchester also loves the environment, something she got to enjoy in a different way this summer as a high school intern at the Woods Hole Science Aquarium, the nation's oldest public research display aquarium and part of NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center in Woods Hole, Mass.

Along with eight other high school students from Montana to Massachusetts, McElhinney participated in the Aquarium's Careers in Marine Science Seminar July 27 to August 7. The career seminar students get training in marine animal husbandry and basic aquarist chores, hear presentations from scientists working in a variety of marine fields, go on collecting trips, visit other Woods Hole science institutions, and go on field trips to the New Bedford waterfront, Whaling Museum and Buttonwood Park Zoo and Nantucket's Maria Mitchell Association Aquarium. The seminar is designed to give students an idea of what people working in Woods Hole do, and how different areas of science contribute to the larger effort to understand the marine world and to manage marine resources wisely.

A senior at Winchester High School, McElhinney is co-editor in chief of the school newspaper and is one of 20 student facilitators in the school's Students United for Receptive Fellowship (SURF) program, aimed at creating a more welcoming and cohesive school community. She serves as the school liaison to the town's energy management committee and is president of EcoAction, the high school's environmental club. As part of an independent study project, she visits four of the town's elementary schools dressed in a green dress and wig as "Go Green Gracie" to promote energy conservation.

McElhinney is interested in pursuing a career in international environmental policy, perhaps working for the United Nations Environment Program. McElhinney's passion has helped develop her career goals, and she credits her father's study of environmental law as sparking her initial interest. "I was always lucky to have parents who encouraged my appreciation for nature."

“I already know that I am going to spend my life working to protect our environment,” she says of the future. “I love photography and find my greatest source of inspiration in nature. Photography is such a powerful medium, and I hope to use it in my career as a means of motivating others to help the environment.”

McElhinney plays volleyball and tennis and is a captain of the Winchester High School tennis team, which has been state champion the past three years in Division II. She is also active in the community as a volunteer Sunday school teacher and active member of the youth council at St. Mary’s In Winchester, and as a volunteer at the Cor Unum Meal Center in Lawrence.

While her favorite subjects may be world history and physics, she likes to write and is more than 160 pages into her first novel. During past summers she has written nearly a dozen screenplays, for many of which she has recruited large casts of family, friends and neighbors.

“I could not have asked for a better summer working experience. I’ve loved volunteering and interning at the Woods Hole Science Aquarium,” McElhinney said. “It has been such a great opportunity for me to learn about so many different areas of marine science and about myself. I’ve made so many wonderful new friends from the staff and my fellow interns. The contact with such inspiring people and the beautiful marine life I’ve been able to experience here has only strengthened my belief and drive to work to better our environment.”

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Related links:

Woods Hole Science Aquarium: <http://aquarium.nefsc.noaa.gov/>

Aquarium Blog: <http://whaquarium.wordpress.com/>