

Dear Class of '55,

My name is Kirtley Hitt and I want to thank you for your generosity. Donations such as yours made it possible for me to travel off-campus this February to San Salvador, Bahamas to the Gerace Research Center.

This experience was truly remarkable. It was only the second time I have been out of the country and was an incredible adventure. We spent time in the laboratory analyzing DNA from one of the local marine species the queen conch. This species is familiar because of the beautiful shells they produce. Learning about the overfishing that this species faces and attempting to help solve the problem through breeding programs with DNA tracking was a really neat and rewarding experience. It was invaluable to be able to see these creatures in their natural habitat while we were snorkeling, rather than just receiving samples in the laboratory.

Furthermore, our snorkeling experiences helped me to appreciate the gorgeous but troubled reefs located in this part of the world. It was amazing to see all the life that these small worlds support. Each evening, we met to share our discoveries and identify the marine species that we saw during our swims. We traveled by boat to a nearby island that supports a unique iguana population and snorkeled at the barrier reef-which was incredibly large. Throughout this trip we were able to see a huge variety of fish species, manta rays, sharks, sea turtles and lobster. Finally, one of my favorite parts of the trip was the fact that we were on the island with two other classes. This made the experience so much greater because we were able to learn from each other. The anthropology class taught us about the culture and life on the island while the geology class taught us about the evolution, history, and rock formations.

This trip definitely gave me more confidence about traveling abroad and greatly increased my desire to see the world and all there is to offer. This summer, I will be doing a medical mission trip in Tanzania and feel much more prepared for it after this international experience.

Learning about different cultures is enlightening and a very rewarding experience. I cannot wait to continue this as I travel to other areas of the world. Thank you again for your contribution that made this wonderful experience possible.

Kirtley Hitt

Class of 2012

