

***ACES James Scholardom: A Gateway to Your Future!***  
**By Eleanor Hodak, B.S., ACES James Scholar Alumna (Class of 2005)**



***Eleanor Hodak***

<http://www.coas.oregonstate.edu/index.cfm?fuseaction=faculty.detail&id=770>

Why are you a James Scholar? Think about this before you continue reading.

Is it because you get to register for classes early? Is it because your parents want you to be in the program? Do you want to challenge yourself? Are you prepping for a stint in graduate school? Are you preparing for a life of research in academia?

During my first three years in Champaign-Urbana, I would have answered that I stuck with it because I enjoyed the challenge of honors classes but also *really* enjoyed kinesiology classes like tennis and ice-skating. Hindsight, though, is most definitely 20-20, and being a James Scholar allowed me to find and be accepted into my ideal graduate program.

As an undergrad, I worked with Dr. Joanne Vining and conducted visitor surveys at the Shedd Aquarium to see what part of the aquarium experience communicated conservation messages most effectively. The paper that I wrote for that project led me to Oregon State's College of Oceanic and Atmospheric Sciences and Dr. Shawn Rowe.

Shawn studies free-choice learning, or learning that takes place outside of classrooms when a learner gets to choose what he or she wants to learn. Most of our life's "education" doesn't occur in school, and Shawn and his research team study potential educational opportunities at zoos, aquariums, museums, and even along the Oregon coast. It's an absolutely perfect match for me! I found a professor on the cutting-edge of a new, exciting discipline and a Marine Resources Management Program practically tailor-made for my interest in aquarium education.

After another fabulous summer at Isle Royale National Park, I packed my life into two duffel bags and left my friends and family in the Midwest and headed for Oregon, where the only Oregonians that I knew were currently living in Wisconsin and New Zealand. Oregon State has a very nice campus – much more compact than UIUC because there are only 20,000 students milling about. Like Illinois, it's a land grant university, so there's a dairy farm, but OSU also has a sheep farm, a superb climbing wall, and is only an hour away from both the Pacific Ocean and amazing ski hills on actual mountains.

Instead of Champaign-Urbana's custard, there's really good gelato. Instead of amazing basketball, there's national championship winning baseball. Instead of orange and blue, it's orange and black T-shirts that read "Beaver Fever." It's not C-U, though. The live music heads to Portland and Eugene instead of Corvallis. There's not an ice arena, so there are no hockey

games on Friday nights – and worse yet, there’s no broomball. And it rains – a lot! That’s probably not a bad thing. It should help curb my constant need to be outside when the sun is shining, but ask me again after my third straight week of winter rain.

I wouldn’t be on the edge of a most excellent adventure known as grad school were it not for my undergraduate research project. It paired me with a graduate advisor and ensured me not only admission into a world-renowned marine graduate program but also secured me funding. I would not have been motivated to conduct undergraduate research without having been a James Scholar. So here’s to Dr. Vining, Dean Simmons, and Rob Chappell! Thanks to them, I’ll be exploring the Pacific Northwest for the next two years, taking interesting oceanography classes, and contributing valuable research to a developing, important field.

Now, it’s time to go white-water kayaking!