MEM Course Testimonial

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I joined the Marine Environmental Management course immediately after completing my BSc in Zoology at Newcastle University. During the three years of undergraduate study, my interest in marine ecosystems grew and, along with experiences of marine fieldwork during summer vacations, this consolidated my desire to continue learning about the marine environment.

The MEM course at York appealed me due to the emphasis on human influences on marine ecosystems and how best to manage these. The modular structure of the course enabled me to pick and choose certain topics, in order to tailor the course to my own interests. Since I did not have a background in marine biology it was compulsory that I also took the modules, ‘Marine Ecosystems’ and ‘Oceans, Coasts & Climate Change’. These two modules were extremely interesting and informative, and were aimed at a high enough level for non-marine specialists to understand, without being patronising.

One module in particular, was always going to be a challenge! Statistics, as the largest compulsory ‘taught module’ of 20 credits, was a rather daunting module to start; for me and many of my course-mates. However, the lectures and practicals were taught extremely well, with help always at hand from PhD support staff present at all lectures and practicals, to extra help sessions and online forums set up especially for our classes.

Many modules also were taught in a variety of styles, aside from the standard presentation-style lectures. Environmental Governance, for example comprised solely of individual seminars; each week had a different emphasis on an aspect of marine or terrestrial-ecosystem governance and was taught by different staff members. There were interactive classes during Statistics, and debates chaired by peers during the ‘Current Research’ module.

All the lecturers in the department were friendly and welcoming, willing to help or offer advice when stress levels were high. There was also an expectation that students would meet with a designated pastoral supervisor at least once a term to discuss how things were going, or resolve any problems/worries we may have had. This support extended to discussions over choice of topic for both the York Dissertation and Summer Placement modules; initially I was so interested in every aspect of the course so this was a challenge!

The Summer Placement, as I am sure all students will agree, was the highlight of the course. Following help from my supervisor to pin down one specific interest area, I was lucky enough to do my placement with the Manta Trust, completing a social science project researching the historical distributions of manta rays in the Maldives, and gauging the dive community’s perception of marine conservation in the Maldives.

The opportunities this MEM course has offered, including spending eight weeks in the Maldives, have been outstanding. I am not saying the Masters was a complete walk in the park; at times far from it! But I have learnt so much in this past year and have emerged on the other side (now my final assignment has been handed in) inspired to continue to work to protect the wonderful ecosystem that lies beneath the waves.