I was fortunate enough to arrange my summer placement with The Pew Charitable Trusts conducting surveys on the perceptions and attitudes of artisanal fishermen toward sharks on islands in the Dutch Caribbean. In my two months of research I was able to survey a total of 77 fishermen on Curacao, Bonaire, and St. Eustatius.

Social science was a new field for me, and I learned different skills in the field to make approaching busy fishermen that can seem intimidating easier. Many of these fishermen were very nice and willing to tell me stories of the ‘old days’, and it was a great opportunity to speak Spanish.

Every day was an adventure as I drove around the islands and got to meet and speak with people truly affected and reliant on the fishing industry. I learned a lot about the history and culture on the three islands and the real challenges artisanal fishermen face.

I was able to volunteer on every island, from beach cleanup days to preparing for shark week to monitoring sea turtle nests. It was such an amazing opportunity to help out on the islands in fields I wouldn’t normally get the chance to participate in.

My two months in the Dutch Caribbean taught me invaluable skills on conducting social science research with influential and often misunderstood stakeholders. I networked with key individuals in the shark conservation field and was given the opportunity to fly to Washington D.C. to present my findings. The people I met and lessons I learned will stay with me forever.