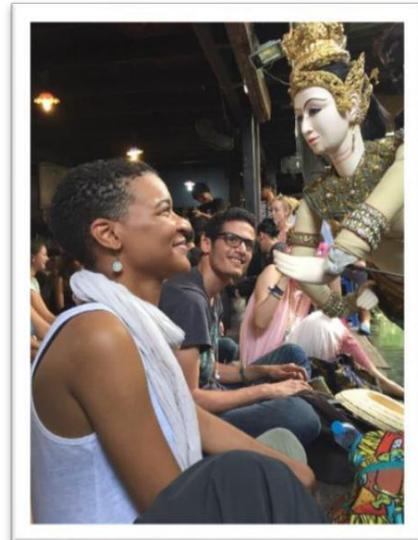


## Extracurricular Activity Blog

Coming from a fishing family on Maryland's Chesapeake Bay, I've always been partial to fishers and those in the seafood production industry. From the time I was eight years old I have been culling oysters and preparing crabs for distribution. In my community this is the expectation; you must do whatever you can to turn a dollar, regardless of environmental conditions, societal norms, or even the law. Due to these experiences, I am keenly aware of just how integral marine ecosystems and fisheries can be to community livelihood and subsistence. I am also aware, however, that this anthropogenic dependence often leads to environmental degradation, critically compromising the waters people depend upon. Following this, I decided that I wanted to focus on governance and fisheries production when developing a topic for my summer placement. Additionally, I wanted to go somewhere where fisheries production was a large component of the national economy.

I was fortunate enough to secure a summer placement in Thailand at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT). During this time, I collaborated with the Aquaculture and Aquatic Resource Management (AARM) department and was under the supervision of Dr. Ram Bhujel. The goal of this project was to examine stakeholder perceptions of aquaculture (a rapidly expanding fisheries production sector) in Eastern and Western markets, specifically Thailand and the UK. This project excited me because it felt very relevant – as aquaculture comes to dominate the fisheries production arena, it has become increasingly important to understand how people perceive its socioeconomic and environmental effects. Additionally, this project allowed me to interview a diverse set of people, visit many farms, and learn more about a very interesting and dynamic sector. Everyone I worked with was very gracious and accommodating, and helped me to communicate and travel despite my horrendous, *horrendous* Thai.



Although the transcontinental nature of this project made it quite challenging and time consuming, I still had time to conduct an independent research experiment, participate in aquaculture workshops, and help design an aquaponics system. As a “visiting researcher” I was even allowed to be a guest lecturer in my supervisor's Aquaculture Business Management class and present my findings to a panel of AARM faculty, staff, and students. My typical workday began at 8AM and ended at 7PM, giving me plenty of time to experience all of the wonderful things AIT has to offer! When I was not working, I could be found at Romprakun Baptist Church,

where I helped teach English classes and tried to improve my Thai and Tagalog. In addition to this, I would ride my bike (or flag down a sörng tãa ou or motorcycle) around Khlong Luang, swim in the grow-out ponds (figured out the hard way that there are pythons in there!) and make a fool of myself trying to speak Thai at the local markets. I was privileged enough to attend the Asian Fisheries Society Fisheries and Aquaculture Forum in Bangkok, and received clearance to visit His Royal Majesty Bhumibol's Royal Chitralada Projects.



All in all, I can honestly say this was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. I am forever grateful to my AARM and Romprakun family, and still speak regularly with many of the individuals that I met during my time in Pathum Thani. I loved every moment of my time in Thailand; I fully intend to return and do more research there in the future! If you are interested in aquaculture and working closely with individuals employed in fisheries production, I fully recommend doing a placement at the Asian Institute of Technology.

