2025 Explorer-in-Training Program Informational Webinar: Question Responses

Thank you to everyone who submitted questions during the 2025 Explorer-in-Training webinar and webinar registration! While we may not have been able to address every question during the session, we wanted to provide this document as a resource. We've included responses to as many questions as possible and grouped similar ones to provide comprehensive answers.

We appreciate your engagement and interest in the Explorer-in-Training program! If you have additional questions, you may check the Explorer in-Training webpage for more details, or feel free to email us at oer.internships@noaa.gov.

What are the dates for the 10-week internships?

The summer internships are expected to take place over 10-weeks between late May and early August. We prefer that students start around the same time in the first week of June so that all interns are on the same timeline. However, start/end dates are flexible and may be adjusted to accommodate the intern's schedule, family obligations, or prior school/work commitments. Start/end date will be decided on a case-by-case basis with internship mentors and selected applicants.

How do I know if I am eligible for the Explorer-in-Training program?

Eligibility criteria are listed on the Explorer-in-Training webpage, in the "How to Apply" section. If you have read the requirements and still have questions regarding your eligibility, please email oer.internships@noaa.gov.

Are there transcript or GPA requirements in order to apply?

No, there are no transcript or GPA requirements to apply to the Explorer-in-Training program. While many students include GPA on their CV or resume, this is not a requirement, nor is it considered as part of the application review criteria.

Some of the internships are listed as "ideal" for graduate students. Are undergraduates still eligible to apply?

All of the Explorer-in-Training internship opportunities are open to both undergraduate and graduate-level students that are currently enrolled or recently graduated, so we encourage qualified students of all levels to apply. Where opportunities are listed as "ideal" for graduate-level

students is based on the mentors' preference for relative skill-level and experience and is not a hard-and-fast eligibility criteria, so undergraduates will still be considered for these opportunities.

Where are the different locations this program takes place?

The duty stations vary between Explorer-in-Training internship themes, which are listed for each position in the Internship Themes section of the Explorer-in-Training webpage. The following remote/virtual internships are expected to take place entirely remotely: Midwater ROV Annotations, Maritime Heritage Communications, and Science and Native Hawaiian Cultural Communications. The Emerging Technologies in the Deep Sea: Environmental DNA internship will be in-person at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. The Ocean Mapping internship will be in-person aboard NOAA Ship *Okeanos Explorer* in the Central Pacific Ocean, with port stops in Hawai'i and/or other Pacific Island countries and territories.

How do internship payments work?

Participants in the 10-week Explorer-in-Training internship opportunities are paid an honorarium of $7,000, paid in two installments — one at the start and the other halfway through the internship period. Where applicable for in-person opportunities, the $6,000 housing allowance is paid on the same schedule as the honorarium payments, and expenses for relocation are reimbursed after travel is completed.

Participants in the expedition-based Ocean Mapping internship are paid a rate of $208/day, so intern honoraria vary depending on the length of the expedition. Travel reimbursements for getting to/from the ship and the internship honoraria payments are paid after the interns' return travel is completed.

How competitive is the Explorer-in-Training program?

We receive a large number of applications for Explorer-in-Training each year. In 2024, we received a record 995 applications for sixteen internship opportunities: four 10-week opportunities and twelve expedition-based opportunities. We anticipate a similar number of applications for the 2025 program year, and plan to offer thirteen internship opportunities: five 10-week opportunities and eight expedition-based opportunities.

How demanding will the internship be? How many hours a week will interns be expected to commit? Is it feasible to do the internship simultaneously with a job?

Participants in the 10-week summer internships are expected to work full-time (40 hours per week, about 8 hours per day) throughout the 10-week internship period. Specific working hours may be adjusted in consultation with the internship mentor(s) to accommodate student and mentor schedules and availability. Interns are not required to work on federal holidays, including Memorial Day (May 26), Juneteenth National Independence Day (June 19), and Independence Day (July 4). It is not advisable for students to try to maintain a separate job or internship while participating in the Explorer-in-Training internship program.

Are interns required to travel to the internship location every week? Is there temporary housing provided?

Participants in the Emerging Technologies in the Deep Sea: Environmental DNA internship are expected to relocate to the Washington, D.C. area for the 10-week summer internship period. The Explorer-in-Training program does not provide housing directly — it will be the student's responsibility to find and secure their own housing. However, the internship team is happy to help answer any questions the selected intern may have regarding housing, and a housing allowance and reimbursement of relocation expenses are provided to help offset travel and living costs.

Are certain themes only for graduate students? Is Explorer-in-Training open to undergraduate and graduate students? Can I apply if I've recently graduated?

Explorer-in-Training is open to both current and recently graduated undergraduate and graduate students, where we define "recently graduated" as someone who graduated within one year of the application period. Some positions may indicate a preference for graduate-level students, but this is more based on a preference for skill and/or experience level rather than a hard-and-fast rule. Students of all levels are welcome to apply to any of the positions available. Explorer-in-Training participants include a range of currently enrolled and recently graduated undergraduates, master's, and doctoral students. See our Previous Student Explorers page for more information about former Explorer-in-Training and other NOAA Ocean Exploration interns.

I am an older student. Are there any limitations or concerns with me applying?

Participants must be at least 18 years of age at the time of the internship. Otherwise, there is no age restriction for participation in the Explorer-in-Training program.

How flexible is the interviewing schedule?

We plan to conduct interviews during the month of March. Selected finalists will be invited to participate in an interview with the internship program coordinator and internship theme mentor(s), and given a number of available timeslots to choose from based on their availability. There is some flexibility in scheduling during the month of March, but the interview team reserves the right to rescind the offer to interview if the candidate is unavailable throughout the selection process period.

Will interns need to do any prior training if we were to get the internship?

No prior training, research, reading, or other preparation is required of selected participants prior to the start of the internship. The internship mentor(s) may provide some resources upon request, but the intern is not expected to work outside of the internship period.

Are there any post-internship benefits, such as direct hiring certificates?

Explorer-in-Training program alumni are invited to join the Ocean Exploration Internship/Fellowship Alumni Group on LinkedIn to build and maintain connections with other group admins and interns from across NOAA Ocean Exploration and the Ocean Exploration Cooperative Institute, including Ocean Exploration Trust and the University of Southern Mississippi. At this point, the Explorer-in-Training program does not offer direct hire authority (DHA), but is working towards gaining eligibility to offer DHA through the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps Act of 2019 (CCA). If approved, DHA would only apply to the 10-week summer internships (not expedition-based opportunities), per the requirements of the CCA. However, as CCA-DHA eligibility is based on the students' graduation date, rather than when program eligibility is approved, the authority would apply retroactively to eligible participants.

Is there an opportunity for the interns' work to contribute to research publications?

Yes, interns may collaborate with their mentors on research publications. Additionally, all NOAA Ocean Exploration data are publicly accessible, including those collected on NOAA Ship *Okeanos Explorer*, and available to use in pursuit of original research outside of the Explorer-in-Training program.

If I don't have good grades, what can I do to show my value?

Explorer-in-Training does not have a GPA requirement for eligibility to the program. If your grades aren't strong, applicants may focus on showcasing relevant skills, experiences, and achievements outside of academics. For example, applicants may wish to highlight internships, volunteer work, leadership roles, or projects that demonstrate your abilities and work ethic, emphasizing transferable skills like problem-solving, teamwork, and communication, and be ready to share specific examples of how you've made an impact.

How to answer the DEIA question apart from belonging to an underrepresented group or having a disability?

Responses may include: sharing your personal journey or experience; how you've demonstrated your commitment to fostering inclusivity, equity, and accessibility through actions or experiences; ways in which you've supported diverse perspectives, created inclusive environments, or advocated for underrepresented groups, including examples like mentoring, community involvement, or promoting collaboration among people with different backgrounds.

Does the internship need to be done through the student's host school (i.e. for credit)?

No, the Explorer-in-Training program does not need to be completed through the student's host school. However, we are happy to work with the student to facilitate credit if they wish to pursue it through their institution.

For the remote internships, is there any opportunity for in-person work?

Remote/virtual internships are expected to be conducted entirely remotely and interns will have opportunities to participate in virtual staff meetings and professional development. However, there may be opportunities for interns to attend in-person site visits, training workshops, or conferences. Opportunities for in-person professional development will be identified in consultation with the internship mentors, and considered on a case-by-case basis depending on logistics and availability of funding.

What are the dates and locations (port stops) for the Ocean mapping internship? When will the dates for the Ocean Mapping expedition be known?

The 2025 *Okeanos* field season will take place in the central Pacific Ocean region as part of the Beyond the Blue campaign. Tentative expedition dates, days at sea (DAS), and port locations for 2025 Explorer-in-Training opportunities are as follows:

- EX2506: July 22 - August 11 (21 DAS), Palau - Guam
- EX2507: August 20 - September 4 (14 DAS), Guam - Guam
- EX2508: September 12 - October 8 (27 DAS), Guam - Palau
- EX2601: October 16 - November 20 (28 DAS), Guam - Honolulu

Note: The expedition schedule is subject to change due to a variety of factors including federal budget appropriations, weather, mechanical issues, and other logistical challenges. Final expedition dates and locations, as well as any changes in the expedition schedule, will be communicated with selected applicants. Check out our Expeditions webpage for more information about past, current, and upcoming expeditions.

Are valid U.S. passports needed at the time of application for the internships that require them?

Applicants are not required to have or provide proof of a valid U.S. passport at the time of the application. However, applicants will be required to have them before expedition departure. Note that NOAA Ocean Exploration and UCAR CPAESS, who help administer the Explorer-in-Training program, are not able to sponsor passport fees for applicants or selected participants.

What can interns expect in the Ocean Mapping internship? What does a typical 8-hour shift look like?

There are typically three Explorers-in-Training interns (EiTs) on each mapping expedition. During an 8-hr mapping shift, the EiT will be mentored by the watch lead they are scheduled with (EiTs often overlap 4 hrs with one watch lead and 4 hrs with another). The mapping watch lead is primarily responsible for acquisition and ensuring that we are collecting the highest quality data possible in real time (e.g. monitoring sonar performance with respect to environmental conditions, evaluating trackline spacing & data coverage, etc). EiTs will learn about watchstanding, but their primary role during the 8-hr watch is to process the data once it has been collected. This involves using a variety of software (Qimera, FMGT, FM Midwater, Sound Speed Manager, etc.) to "clean" spurious data, and to create useful data products to visualize what was collected each day. Data processing requires engaging with detailed step-by-step procedure manuals, and being diligent with data management and organization. Everyone on board does their best to make watches fun, so there's always chatter, music, memes, games, etc.

What type of mapping technology and GIS software are used in the Ocean Mapping internship?

NOAA Ship *Okeanos Explorer* is equipped with a multibeam echosounder capable of detecting the seafloor between 200-10,000 meters, a sub-bottom profiler to collect shallow seismic reflection profiles, and several EK echosounders to detect objects in the water column. XBTs are also launched to measure and correct for sound speed using the software: AMVERSEAS for XBT autolaunches, WinMK21 for collecting XBT data, and Sound Speed Manager for generating sound speed profiles. Bathymetry data are processed and visualized using the Qimera and Fledermaus. Water column data is processed using FM Midwater, backscatter data is processed using FMGT, and seismic and sub-bottom data are processed using NRCAN (SegJp2). GIS softwares used during expedition planning and execution include ArcGIS Pro and Hypack.

Regarding the Ocean Mapping Explorer-in-Training program, is previous GIS knowledge required?

While prior GIS experience is beneficial, it is not required to participate in the Ocean Mapping internship.

Do Ocean Mapping interns handle physical samples?

Ocean Mapping interns primary responsibility is to assist with processing mapping data after it is acquired. Depending on the mission objectives of the specific expedition, interns may participate in other shipboard operations (e.g., environmental DNA samples). Interns will be trained in relevant procedures as necessary.

Will flights to the expedition boarding location be covered by the program?

Yes, the Explorer-in-Training program provides travel support for getting to and from the ship. UCAR CPAESS will book and pay for flights directly. Interns will be reimbursed for additional travel expenses, including ground transportation, baggage fees, daily meal per diem for travel days, and hotel lodging (if required). Lodging is provided on the ship throughout the duration of the expedition and is generally provided during travel days before and after the expedition, but this may depend on the specific expedition and port location.

Are we required to have the Covid vaccine?

Vaccination against Covid-19 is encouraged for participation in the expedition-based Ocean Mapping internship, but is not required. Prior to sailing, all expedition participants will be required to complete required NOAA medical clearance, including a health services questionnaire and tuberculosis screening form.

What is the application deadline for the ocean mapping theme?

Applications for the 2-4 week expedition-based ocean mapping internship will be accepted on a rolling basis, with a priority deadline of January 31, 2025. After this priority deadline, applications will still be accepted until all slots are filled for the 2025 field season.

What are living accommodations like? Are the bunks designated for individuals or are they rotated due to the shiftwork? Are there lockers to store personal items? Is there an option to do laundry onboard?

Expedition participants are assigned to a 2 to 4-person bunkroom, and each person has their own personal bunk to use throughout the duration of the expedition. There are dresser drawers and cabinets throughout each bunkroom to store personal items, and individuals may bring locks for added security if they prefer. Each bunkroom shares a bathroom with an adjacent 2 to 4-person bunkroom, and additional public bathrooms are available throughout the ship. There are shared washers and dryers to do laundry on the ship.

For the at-sea internship opportunities: does internship participation count for USCG sea service?

Participation in the Explorer-in-Training Ocean Mapping internship does not count as sea service, as they will not be performing duties relevant towards a USCG certification.

What happens if expedition dates are changed due to weather, mechanical issues, emergencies, or other logistical challenges?

Any changes in the expedition schedule will be communicated with selected applicants. In the event that an expedition is cancelled or cut short due to weather, mechanical issues, or other

emergencies, the internship team will consider whether rescheduling or deferring the internship opportunity to a later year is appropriate or possible.

For the Midwater ROV Annotations internship, do interns only interact with data collected by the UAV, or do they also interact with the UAV?

The Midwater ROV intern will be analyzing data collected previously during the 2018-2022 ASPIRE expeditions conducted in the Atlantic Ocean. The intern will review, annotate, and analyze previously collected ROV footage and associated acoustic and environmental data. The intern will not be interacting directly with the ROV or NOAA Ship *Okeanos Explorer*.

How often are new species discovered in the Midwater ROV Annotations internship project, and are there long periods of time no animals are detected?

The frequency of detections depends on the location and depths of the ROV dives. Some ROV footage can have long periods where no animals are detected in the water column, while some can have animals detected the whole time. Each dive usually has at least one unique detection which could include a new species, a new behavior, or a range extension. However, it is difficult to say for sure using just the ROV footage, and follow-on work is usually required for confirmation.

For the 10-week Science and Native Hawaiian Cultural Communications internship, what kind of personal connection is expected?

During the experience, the intern will develop communication products and outreach experiences that build upon personal interests and passions in order to connect and engage with local and Indigenous communities. While the intern is not expected to develop individual connections on their own, working with internship mentors, the intern could interact and connect directly with local and Indigenous communities through activities such as live ship-to-shore interactions or connect indirectly, such as through things such as the development of engaging web or social media content.

Will we need to be experts in science and Native Hawaiian culture to participate in the communications internship?

This Science and Native Hawaiian Communications internship is specifically seeking holistic experiences and knowledge inclusive of Science and Native Hawaiian culture to assist in developing communications products focused on the incorporation of Hawaiian language and/or culture in storytelling and communicating about the value and importance of the deep sea and the exploration work being conducted. The activities also include applying Native Hawaiian knowledge, values and practices to enhance public awareness of research in Indigenous spaces. While familiarity with marine science and Native Hawaiian culture will be helpful, applicants are not expected to be experts in either, as the intern will have access to experts who can help them learn throughout the experience.

What is the virtual setup of the Science and Native Hawaiian Cultural Communications position?

The intern will work remotely with NOAA Ocean Exploration and ONMS staff mentors, who are based across the eastern coast of the U.S. and Hawai'i. Interns will be expected to work approximately 8 hours per day, 40 hours per week throughout the 10-week internship period, but specific working hours may be adjusted to accommodate student and mentor schedules and availability. For example, interns may set core hours from 1-5 PM ET to accommodate mentor time zones, but may work their remaining hours independently outside of that schedule. Interns should plan to use their own computers or laptops, but IT equipment may be supplied for the student to borrow during the internship period if needed.

For the communication internship, could you provide examples of projects from past interns?

Specific deliverables will be determined based on NOAA needs and the intern's interests and may range from products focused on writing, art, web content, video production, and more. Some examples of communications products from previous Explorer-in-Training interns are listed below:

- Lia Kim's Daily Reflection Logs (Lia Kim, 2024 Explorer-in-Training)
- What is bathymetry? (Lia Kim, 2024 Explorer-in-Training)
- EX2501 Reflections (Sarah Hutchinson and Astrid, 2024 Explorers-in-Training)
- Modeling *Bear* Through the Years (1874-1963) (Raymond Phipps, 2024 Explorer-in-Training)
- SeaTube: A Collaborative Tool for Maritime Heritage Analysis Fact Sheet (Raymond Phipps, 2024 Explorer-in-Training)
- Video Feature: A Colorful Ctenophore (Hannah Miller, 2021 Explorer-in-Training)
- Exploration Tools: Photogrammetry (Phoebe Lease, 2020 College-Supported NOAA Internship Program)