**REU Essay Prompt:** This essay covers four areas: Motivation, Achievement, Research Interests and Career Goals. Describe your motivation to study marine sciences, your relevant academic achievements, your specific research interests and career goals as they relate to this REU program.

**Essay Advice:** Your essay needs to include everything asked for in the prompt. That doesn’t mean your essay has to address each part of prompt in the same order as it’s written (though it’s fine if it does), but, after reading your essay, a reviewer should have a clear idea about your motivation, achievements, interests and career goals, and how our REU will help you achieve your goals. And it’s ok to say that you’re still exploring your interests or don’t know yet what exactly your career will be.

Below are excerpts from a selection of student essays that demonstrate effectively the key areas asked for in the essay prompt. **These are examples only**—your essay can and must be unique to you, your experience and goals, so do not copy these and do not feel that your writing must be similar to what is presented here. These are merely examples where students have successfully communicated their motivations, achievements, research interests or career goals.

**Student Essay Excerpts**

**Example 1 (describes and connects prior and current research interests)** “The best overarching theme for my research interests involves the interactions of organisms with their environment, and how the physical environment affects the form and reactions of the organism. From working in a remote sensing lab at the [X Lab] studying the accuracy of prediction chlorophyll-a levels from irradiance detected from satellites to determining whether a relationship exists between trematodes in an intermediate host for the parasite and the abundance of its terminal host, the diamondback terrapin; from assisting in a long term epidemiological study on the health risks of [professionals in X county] to studying the biomechanics of stigma closure in the Mimulus spp. and it’s implications for the life history of the plant. Much of my experience with research up to this point was a desire to determine exactly where my interests lead me, and that has landed me in my final lab on plant biomechanics.”

**Example 2 (demonstrates Research interests and connection to potential mentor)** “Of the list of current mentors, [Professor X’s] research intrigues me the most. Marine geophysics currently interests me a lot more than seismic, perhaps due to the fact that up until this point I have had a lot more experience dealing with the ocean. I noticed that [Professor X] has experience creating numerical models to better understand ocean dynamics. One of my priorities this spring when looking for an internship was to find a project that would allow me to continue to develop my computer science and math skills while working within the earth and ocean environment, and that has landed me in my final lab on plant biomechanics.”

**Comment [bc1]:** Demonstrating a connection between your experiences is very compelling to a review committee. You may or may not have experiences under your belt that follow a clear research theme, but you can think about the “bigger picture” about what you’ve learned from your experiences and how that informs what you want to do next.

**Comment [bc2]:** It is perfectly fine (and expected) for most students to not yet know what they want to study or pursue as a career. If you’re unsure, or looking for a first experience to help you explore an interest, say so. If you know where you want to go in your career, and think this program will help you get there by providing X, say so.

**Comment [bc3]:** Again, excellent example of connecting previous experiences and clearly communicating to reviewers where this student’s current interests come from.

**Comment [bc4]:** The highlighted sections of this paragraph indicated how this student clearly connected their research and scholarship goals with those of a potential mentor. This is important and compelling to our review committee because it 1) demonstrates that the student has done their homework in learning about a mentor, and, more importantly, 2) demonstrates that the student has thought about how the REU will benefit their goal of a career in the ocean sciences.
sciences. In the lab that I am working in now, an understanding of partial differential equations is needed to run and amend the parameters put into the script before you run the code. While I do not necessarily have to work on a project that I am already familiar with, if given the opportunity I would prefer to do something that has current relevance to the work that I am doing at the [Home University]. I hope that an REU internship in Monterey Bay would allow me to continue to develop my general earth and ocean science knowledge while also sharpening my ability to do research in marine geophysics.”

Example 3 (demonstrates motivation to study marine science) “Growing up with Indonesian ancestry and getting the opportunity to visit the coral reefs and brilliant marine habitat in person was one of my most powerful experiences as a biologist. Being immersed in that ecosystem while simultaneously realizing that it was visibly declining in appearance and biodiversity made marine conservation a personal issue for me growing up. Now, as a current undergraduate, my interests have expanded greatly, but I remain very interested in the conservation of marine habitats locally and globally through the lens of molecular biology.”

Example 4 (demonstrates motivation to study marine science) “Floating quietly in what looks like a barren area, all I could see was an intertwining maze of roots from what appears to be the only life around me. The water is freezing cold, and I was shivering, yet while I knew that sunlight and warmth awaited me on the boat, I stayed frozen in the water, waiting. Then, as if out of nowhere, an ecosystem opened up around me. The bed of seagrass below me was no longer a thick mat of green, but rather a lush array of biodiversity: I immediately noticed five different species, I see crabs, worms, bivalves, and fish, all hidden within the thick meadow of grasses. What once appeared to be a dull, boring environment to visit is suddenly full of life, and all the possibilities and complexities of that habitat. This is what inspired me to study marine science.”

Example 5 (demonstrates career goals) “Nothing could be more satisfying in my life than to inspire students as I have been inspired, so my ultimate career goal is to become a professor. This road, of course, is going to lead me to graduate school and a PhD program filled with extensive research experience. I feel that the best way to prepare for this is to gain a great breadth of knowledge, allowing me to have basic understanding of many different branches of science.”

Example 6 (demonstrates career goals) “As far as my aspirations, I plan to graduate with a BS in Marine Science, with a minor in Geospatial Science. Before then, I hope to participate in undergraduate research that is relevant to my field. After my undergraduate studies, I plan to apply to and attend graduate school to pursue a master’s in Environmental Science or Marine Biology. From there, I hope to find a position in my field that would allow me to do fieldwork as well as lab work, and also participate in activism to increase awareness of environmental matters.”

Comment [bc5]: Many students state in their essays that they want to pursue conservation goals, yet most don’t make an impact on our reviewers because there 1) their statements are vague, and 2) there is no clear connection between the student’s experiences and their stated interest in conservation. This is a great example of a student making that connection.

Comment [bc6]: This is a great example of a student approaching conservation from a specific perspective. Whatever your interests, show us you’ve thought about them deeply by including specifics when appropriate.

Comment [bc7]: The very descriptive paragraph leading to this statement shows, rather than tells, the reader that they are observant, thoughtful, curious and passionate about marine science. One recommendation would be that this is perhaps too long, and you don’t have to be this descriptive, but an authentic connection to what motivates you is compelling to a reader, so think deeply about whatever it is that motivates you to study marine science.

Comment [bc8]: It’s important to give us some idea of what you envision yourself doing for your career, even if you’re not certain yet what that might be (and that’s ok). Many students talk about graduate school—which is great but not absolutely necessary for this program. We want students pursuing careers in ocean sciences, not all of which require graduate school. What is really compelling about this student’s paragraph, in addition to showing us they’ve thought about where they want to go is WHY. The inspiration given here shows thoughtfulness.

Comment [bc9]: Here’s a student who has some idea of the type of work they want to do, if not the specifics. That is perfectly fine. That this student has a clear path and the drive to pursue it comes through in their writing, even if they don’t know exactly what their career or graduate school may be yet. They also nicely put the REU into their plan.