Faculty and Graduate Student Mentoring in the Hutton Junior Fisheries Biology Program

Graduate and undergraduate students in fisheries benefit from membership and participation in the American Fisheries Society (AFS) in many ways, from leadership opportunities across the Society’s hierarchy to the educational and professional benefits of attendance at conferences. However, many graduate students and their advisers may be less familiar with an AFS program that involves students in fisheries before they arrive at college. The Hutton Junior Fisheries Biology Program pairs high school students with fisheries biologist mentors for eight weeks of hands-on experience over the summer. The Hutton Program aspires to encourage interest in fisheries careers among high school students from underrepresented backgrounds in the field, including minorities and women. Junior and senior high school students are eligible to apply, and beyond an exceptional introduction to field and laboratory science, students are also compensated with a $3,000 stipend from AFS. Started in 2001, the Hutton Program now has 321 alumni, many of whom have gone on to pursue college careers in fisheries or related natural resource and biology fields. More information on the Hutton Program for both prospective students and mentors is available at www.fisheries.org/afs/hutton.html.

Faculty and graduate students interested in serving as Hutton Program mentors should visit the program website: www.fisheries.org/afs/hutton.html.

Kerry Ung, a 2009 Hutton Program student, measures crayfish at Mineral Lake, Washington, as part of a study documenting distributions of aquatic invasive species.

Faculty and graduate students are in the process of applying for or deciding on a college to attend. Faculty and graduate student mentors are well-situated to provide guidance on what to expect from college and how to navigate an undergraduate degree in the sciences. For example, faculty and graduate students can provide guidance not only on recommended classes, but also the importance of acquiring laboratory and field experience through jobs and internships, and the importance of professional contacts for future employment or admission to graduate school. University faculty are also well-versed in the expectations and demands placed on undergraduates, while graduate students have recently navigated the undergraduate experience themselves, resulting in Hutton Program mentors who can provide students with an invaluable

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glimpse into the educational and professional world they’re entering.

An additional benefit of a university setting for Hutton Program students is the diversity of research and management activities participants can experience over an eight-week period. The Hutton Program encourages co-mentoring of students to broaden the diversity of work and research exposure for participants, and universities provide an exceptional venue for this purpose. Several faculty or graduate students might co-mentor a Hutton Program student, offering exposure to a breadth of study environments, organisms, research approaches, and personalities. Such information could be extremely informative in making educational and career decisions. Although similar benefits can certainly be obtained from other prospective Hutton Program mentors (e.g., state and federal agencies), universities may be well positioned to allow Hutton Program students to work in both marine and freshwater environments, the laboratory and the field, and with scientists ranging in experience from Ph.D.-holding faculty to undergraduate technicians.

Faculty and graduate students also benefit from participation in the Hutton Program. Hutton Program students are selected from a large, talented, and motivated pool of applicants that can provide high-quality work in the laboratory and field for researchers who can often use the extra assistance. Furthermore, mentoring a Hutton Program student directly exposes a young person to issues in the environment and natural resource stewardship that will influence them and their personal decisions for a lifetime, regardless of their ultimate career path. Participation in the Hutton Program by faculty and graduate students may also feed back with outreach or citizen science efforts through community groups or schools, serving as sources for future Hutton Program applicants or means for Hutton Program students to remain engaged with their mentor following the conclusion of their time in the program. In this way, Hutton Program students may serve as a bridge between the laboratory and their school or community, facilitating interaction between university and community projects, such as habitat restoration or volunteer invasive species monitoring. It’s even conceivable that the mentor and adviser relationship could extend into the future, with past Hutton Program students becoming undergraduate technicians or eventual graduate students in the lab that first exposed them to work in fisheries.

During the summer of 2009, my adviser Julian Olden and I mentored two Hutton Program students from Seattle, Washington—Francis Lin and Kerry Ung. Both students were responsible, reliable, and performed excellent work on projects evaluating the distribution and ecological impacts of freshwater invasive species in lakes of western Washington. It was enormously rewarding as a mentor to not only provide advice and encouragement on each students’ college and career plans, but to also watch them develop new skills and abilities over the short expanse of a summer, from learning to paddle a canoe to identifying fish and invertebrates to acquiring basic laboratory skills. It’s my hope that both students left the program not only with new skills but also with a better understanding of how to pursue a career in science and the confidence to do so. My experience as a graduate student mentor of Hutton Program students was extremely rewarding, and I would encourage other fisheries graduate students and their faculty advisers to consider participation in this valuable AFS program.

Faculty and graduate students interested in serving as Hutton Program mentors should visit the program website for additional information. The American Fisheries Society provides brochures, posters, and other promotional materials to advertise the program to schools. Prospective mentors should recruit applicants in the autumn prior to mid-winter application deadlines for both students and mentors. Although the AFS cannot guarantee pairing of students with the mentors who encouraged them to apply, advertising the program broadly is necessary to help guarantee a diverse, talented pool of prospective Hutton Program participants. Involvement in the Hutton Junior Fisheries Biology Program has enormous benefits for students and mentors alike, and I encourage other graduate students and their faculty advisers to get involved in this valuable AFS program.