



## **Marine Science Student Interview**

**Name:** Stephen Gill

**Undergraduate institution and program:** Bsc Hons, University of Wales Swansea

### **What made you choose UNCW?**

Since my undergraduate days I knew I wanted to carry my education further and one of my friends had spent a year at Wilmington and he described a fun place on the coast. So it's a mix of a good location and the great reputation of the Marine Science Program and its facilities both on campus and at the Center for Marine Science.

### **What is the difference between marine science as a Masters program and something like Marine Biology, Chemistry or Geology?**

For me the difference was very important coming from my undergraduate work and a year travelling. I still had such a wide range of interests and ambitions that I didn't want to constrain myself to just one small area of study or commit to the four plus years a Ph.D. requires.

The MS Marine Science covers the four aspects of marine science, including biology, chemistry, geology and physics, which encompass the breadth of science related to the study of the oceans and coastal areas. The most attractive to me, however, was that outside these core subjects I can expand in any direction I choose and develop my focus throughout the programme. I have studied courses from a wide range of subjects from *Environmental and Natural Resource Economics* to *Evolution*.

### **Describe your schedule, what is a normal week like at UNCW?**

Well, there really is no set "average week". There is not a definite time limit to the course as it has such a flexible structure.

I arrived without a firm plan for my thesis, however lots of my classmates did have a plan and began their thesis research straight away and are selecting a few classes per semester with the guidance of their advisor.

Personally I was keen to not to spend too long getting my Masters so my first two semesters I had a pretty full schedule of classes. This semester however is much different. My schedule is as follows:

Monday: a full day getting into my thesis work. I'm working with nutrient dynamics.

Tuesday: I get some time in the lab in the morning and then in the afternoon I have office hours in the earth sciences department and I teach a lab portion of a geography class, which makes up my Teaching Assistantship.

Wednesday and Thursday: I am currently an intern with the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources so I'm out on the road with guys getting some first hand experience, great for the CV!

Friday: Meetings in the morning and in the lab again and then graduate seminar in the afternoon, a class covering presentation techniques.

**How do you meet the cost of study?**

As I mentioned earlier I am a Teaching Assistant here at UNCW. That is one of the main ways graduate students fund themselves, either as a Teaching or as a Research Assistant. Also, most of the faculty are receiving outside funding related to their students' thesis research projects from funding agencies such as SeaGrant or the National Science Foundation. The NSF sponsored K-12 program is also good; several of the graduate students go into local North Carolina middle schools to help with teaching sciences.

The faculty here have been really supportive. They helped me find the TA position and always make sure I have some form of financial support. That's a big thing for me being an international student as without that support I couldn't afford to study overseas.

**What are your plans for after graduation?**

I'm hoping to go into industry next year and eventually environmental consultancy. I'm contacting lots of companies at the moment and sending CVs everywhere. It's really good to be able to include the practical experience of a good internship in my CV. Also I get we all get weekly emails, from Dr. Willey, Associate Director of Marine Science for Education, with all the latest job opportunities in our field.

**What have been the highlights and low lights of the program so far?**

Highlights, well definitely the facilities, CMS is awesome and having access to the boat for classes such as cruise field sampling allows us to really get out there.

Lowlights, getting on the boat at 7am in January, ha ha, but winter only seems to last a month here so I can't complain.

**What advice do you have for students thinking of applying to the MS Marine Science program at UNCW?**

The most important insight I have had from the application experience is to get in touch with the professors directly. Don't just fill out the form and send it off. It's crucial to get on to the website and see what the faculty and graduate students are doing and then start contacting people.

Find a member of the faculty whose work you are interested in and that complements your background, and see if there is space for someone new in the project. If so, it all flows from there.