

Entry-level Research Internship in Ecology/Animal Behavior

As part of the Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts, & Letters (UASAL) Internship program, the Seedscape Ecology Group is recruiting an undergraduate intern to engage in faculty-led research. This is an entry-level paid research position (\$2000 scholarship) and no experience is required.



Project Background: We are a team of ecologists interested in understanding how seeds are dispersed by animals. Recently, our research group has been focusing on the hyperdiverse genus of shrubs *Psychotria*, also known as wild coffee. *Psychotria* fruit are small berries dispersed by birds. We have characterized the diversity of phytochemistry found in fruit (pulp and seed) and leaves for 21 species in Panama. The next step of our research is to investigate the role phytochemistry plays in mediating interactions of *Psychotria* fruit with bird seed dispersers.

Responsibilities & Opportunities: The internship consists of approximately 100 hours (10 weeks at 10 hours/week or equivalent). The intern will collect data that quantifies the interaction between birds and fruit by analyzing camera trap videos. Previously, we set out camera traps on Barro Colorado Island, Panama, and recorded the animals visiting each *Psychotria* plant species. The intern would help elucidate who are the main consumers of fruit of the different *Psychotria* species.

The intern would gain first-hand experience in independent research from conceptual development to publication within a team-based setting. Dr. Beckman utilizes a group mentoring approach, which provides mentees with not just one, but several mentors. The intern will be mentored by Dr. Beckman, Dr. Schneider (a postdoctoral scholar), and Elsa Jos (a doctoral student). The intern will learn research skills in recording and analyzing data on animal behavior and develop a variety of other skills required within scientific research. The intern is expected to meet weekly with mentors and to submit an abstract to the 2025 UASAL conference (and attend, if accepted). The intern will also have the opportunity to submit an abstract to the USU Research Symposium and one national science conference (either the Ecological Society of America or SACNAS).

Eligibility: USU undergraduate students enrolled in a STEM program who have had limited previous research experience, such as first- and second-year students or those transitioning from a 2-year to a 4-year degree program. This includes students with no prior research exposure to students with some research experience outside of their chosen field/major.

We especially encourage applications from students that are from traditionally underrepresented groups in biology (i.e., African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, other Pacific Islanders, students with disabilities, first generation college students, and U.S. veterans) to apply.

Application

To apply, please send Dr. Noelle Beckman (noelle.beckman@usu.edu) the following:

1. Resume
2. Essays
 1. With no more than 500 words, describe projects or experiences in which you worked (1) creatively, (2) collaboratively, and (3) independently. Research is a creative and collaborative process that also requires independent contributions. Successful collaboration requires active listening, effective communication, and coming to a consensus. In addition, research requires

strategies to work independently to reach a goal. Describe any relevant successes or challenges and how you overcame them.

2. In no more than 500 words, discuss why you are interested in the internship and what you hope to gain from participating.
3. Contact information for Two References
 1. One reference should be from a professor who can speak to your academic interests and performances. In general, references should be able to speak to your qualifications, qualities, and capabilities that would be relevant to working in a research team; these include dependability, work performance (quality, work ethics, initiative, ability to plan and organize tasks), creativity in problem-solving, curiosity, motivation, enthusiasm, response to constructive feedback, strengths and weaknesses, and ability to work independently and in a diverse team.
4. Unofficial Transcripts

We will begin reviewing applications **May 18, 2024**. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled.

Start date: flexible but sometime between May 25th and June 8th, 2024 is preferred.

Further inquiries should be made to: Dr. Noelle Beckman (noelle.beckman@usu.edu)