Research Work in the Bahamas in the Summer of 2019

During the summer of 2019, I visited the Bahamas with generous support from the Duke University Center for International and Global Studies, the Duke Center for Caribbean and Latin American Studies, the Nicholas School of the Environment, and the Kuzmier-Nikitine-Lee Fund. I spent much of the summer conducting semi-structured interviews of tourists at Small Hope Bay Lodge, probing why they had visited the Lodge, how the environmental quality and conservation efforts compared to similar destinations, whether the environmental quality and conservation efforts affect their decision to visit or return to a destination, and whether they considered the engagement of local communities in their tourism decisions. I interviewed fifty-four participants, primarily in pairs or small groups. I transcribed the interviews on-site for future analysis.

I had the opportunity to outcrop young Staghorn corals onto the reef as part of Small Hope Bay’s coral nursery project.

I also performed observational research while at the resort and socializing with guests. I took notes on the information revealed during some of these less formal sessions, when guests sometimes were a bit more open than in a formal interview setting.

After completing my on-site interviews, I set out to gain a broader understanding of the dive operations within the Bahamas beyond Small Hope Bay Lodge and Andros Island. I traveled to two other islands, visiting a large operation and two smaller operations with dive staffs of 1-2 people. (The names of the islands and dive operations will be kept confidential to protect participant confidentiality.) I spoke with managers of these operations about their hiring and engagement of the local community; I asked questions about to what extent their staffs were Bahamian, what the barriers were to hiring more local staff members, and what the environmental attitudes of their staff members were. These interviews provided a valuable perspective from the opposite viewpoint than my inquiries of the tourists.

Research Status and Next Steps

Having returned to the United States, I am now focusing on continuing my interviews with dive operators and analyzing my data. I will reach out to additional dive operators by phone, as well as follow up with those I interviewed in person, as I am interested in gathering additional data regarding the types of tourists these operators serve, to see if that affects their hiring priorities and decisions. I hope to reach out to the majority of the dive operators in the Bahamas, although interviews of individuals in Grand Bahama and the Abacos may be delayed due to the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian, and some questioning may need to be revised to
acknowledge and consider the devastation and challenges caused by the storm. Some dive operations have likely been destroyed.

I am also currently working on a more comprehensive literature review to contextualize my research and frame my analysis. At the same time, I am developing coding strategies so that I can fully analyze my data. This work will continue through the Fall Semester, and I hope to have my data analyzed by the start of the Spring 2020 semester. I will present my work at the Master of Environmental Management spring symposium in April of 2020.

**Beyond Research: Work with the Small Hope Bay Foundation**

While my primary goal this summer was to work on my research, I also made new strides in working with the Small Hope Bay Foundation. We held a Board meeting in my first week at the Resort in June, and I was elected Secretary of the Board of Directors. At that meeting, we identified a mission for the Foundation: “To create capacity for an economically and environmentally sustainable Andros.” We also identified our value statements, vision, and initial programs. I then worked throughout the summer on our 501(c)(3) application, corporate bylaws, a strategic plan, and a more detailed budget.

At the same time, I worked to gain a better understanding of the programs that the Foundation will pursue. With the rest of the Board, I helped clean the coral nurseries and outcrop new growth onto the larger reef. I assisted with swim lessons of three local children. Finally, I conducted an open-water SCUBA course with a college student from the University of Bahamas, who was spending his summer interning for the University of the Bahamas.

Through my work this summer, I gained valuable skills that will help me advance my career. The experience designing and conducting my own research project will help prepare me for future PhD work, which I hope to begin next fall. I also gained practical experience with a non-profit organization that will be beneficial to me in my future work in conservation, regardless of the arena. More importantly, I hope that my research will provide valuable insights for the Small Hope Bay Foundation in its work to create capacity for an environmentally and economically sustainable Andros, ultimately benefitting both the people and the natural environment of the island.

My first open water student as an instructor was a student at the University of Bahamas, who was interning on Andros with the Ministry of Tourism. Conducting this course helped me think about the needs of the Foundation in developing its training programs.