

## My SEAmester Experience

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In a world where society has turned sour, greedy, and egotistic, we were blessed with a wonderful soul “Isabelle Ansorge” who thoughtfully formed SEAmester South Africa. Where free opportunities are rare or have terms and conditions, I got this one free incredible opportunity, to be part of “SEAmester South Africa’s class afloat 2018.”

Trained as a conservationist and or ecologist, never been at sea or on a ship, but loved, and lived in the bush. No one in my social circle would have predicted what I was missing in the marine side of things. My very first experience at sea has no words for description, only tears of joy and endless smiles. All I can say is that I am wiser than I was prior boarding the SA Agulhas II, particularly “participating in SEAmester 2018.”

As an individual who is famished or thirsty for knowledge, I have never come across such passionate lecturers. Classrooms are no best friends to students; however, SEAmester’s classes are what I looked forward to everyday. The enthusiasm, passion and the desire to be understood by students is what I saw in the eyes of our SEAmester lecturers. I have never not ever imagined that someone would spend their time with me after 23:00 pm just to teach me something “Tahlia Henry” or willingly generate a stats teaching session out of normal schedule “Neil Malan” just because I asked, and allow being hijacked at the stair case for a few ODV questions “Tammy Morris & Isabelle Ansorge”. This is what the world needs especially today!

Being a student who believes that nothing comes easy, I found myself adapting quite well in the different learning environment and enjoyed every aspect of it; the principles of oceanography, the tools and oh my God “the data”. Though the oceanography language was foreign to me, I enjoyed it with its challenge. I can now proudly talk about CDTs, Argo floats, Bongo nets, Gyres, Eddies etc. without hiccups and can even give an oceanographic sort of an explanation. I now have an insight on

how reliable weather predictions are, over what period, and how the data is collected. Mapping sea level rise with GIS and learning ODV was quite an interesting practice.

Some classes were unexpectedly effective “Mia Wege’s lecture”; as a master’s student, I had no idea of the value of my data but my results. This is quite common in graduate students, where we tend to forget our data after processing but only focus on the results. In addition, learning about how to write proper sentences is a golden skill to a Master’s student. Such lessons came at the perfect time, “being towards the end of my Master’s.” All lectures however were fundamental; it was just a matter of what I needed at that point in time. Lecturers altogether played a crucial role in shaping my future, “boosting me on my journey to success.” I have acquired skills nobody from my department “Department of Nature Conservation” at TUT has. I am a hero now because of all of you, and my supervisor; Professor Brian Reilly is very proud and grateful.

I gained other new form of experiences; things I never thought in my ecological career I would come across, such as; mosaics, foldscopes, filming, making a plankton splinter and dolphin and seals dissection. I met new friends of a lifetime, future colleagues, and collaborators. The Antarctic /island stories were so mesmerising, I would listen to them repeatedly, because it is also my dream to go there. Having people share stories of their science journeys and life changing experiences is incredible. It brings some sort of self-evaluation and appreciating of certain life privileges.

It is not often that I regret my life choices. However, during the cruise I found myself with constant “what-ifs.”

My SEAmester experience brought forth the desire to improve certain scientific tools, especially Argo floats. It is no doubt the data generated by such tools is worth it, but I personally feel that solving a problem with a problem is actually creating chaos. Thus, I have tasked myself to invent an environmentally friendly Argo float twin. Reducing my carbon footprint is essential to me and if you cannot do it for yourself or me, do it for the innocent child born in the coming centuries.

I do not believe in luck, but hard work. However, after SEAmester I feel like I am the luckiest person alive. “SEAmester,” you have motivated me to become a better scientist. You changed my outlook of things including life and the marine ecosystem, and encouraged me to think outside the box. You have invigorated me to take professional chances regardless of my career background.

A special thanks to Professor Isabelle Ansoorge, for founding SEAmester South Africa, and for granting me the opportunity to be part of it in 2018. To the lecturers, continue shining lights on those in need of finding their paths. What are we “students” without you all? My words of thanks are extended to DEA, DST, NRF, and SAEON, for making this possible financially. I am indebted to you all and all that did not get a chance to be part of SEAmester 2018, to be a better scientist and make a difference. Lastly, thank you for the opportunity to come back next year; you have no idea what it means to me.

Long live SEAMester South Africa, long live!

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*“Let what you leave behind bless the follower” – my motor.*

*The greatest of a man is not in his acquired wealth, but his integrity and ability to affect those around him positively – Bob Marley.*