The summer before my senior year, I spent two and a half months interning at Oceana’s International Headquarters in Washington, DC on the Seafood Fraud and IUU (Illegal, Unregulated, and Unreported) Fishing campaign team.

The Seafood Fraud campaign is a well-established campaign at Oceana, as it launched in 2011. Seafood Fraud includes any illegal misrepresentation of fish, encompassing mislabeling of species, country, processes used, or short-weighting the fish. Since its launch, the campaign has released about 12 reports, including a national study revealing up to 30% of seafood fraud in restaurants and grocery stores. It was exciting to be involved with the launch in July of a “Names Report” calling for “One Name One Fish,” to avoid consumer confusion with seafood labels.

The summer was an active time in the campaign, as one year previously Obama had announced a Presidential Task Force on Combatting IUU Fishing and Seafood Fraud. The Task Force had several deadlines throughout the summer, releasing lists of species “at-risk” of IUU fishing as well as information that will be required for seafood imports into the US. I became familiar with combing through notices in the Federal Register, as one of my responsibilities was keeping tabs on and summarizing the hundreds of public comments submitted by industry, other governments, NGOs, and the general public to the Task Force. I also worked on some of the comments that Oceana submitted for a session and helped analyze responses from an Action Alert petition.

My role varied throughout the summer, which I enjoyed, as I was always busy working on different kinds of tasks. I reported both to Beth Lowell, the campaign director, and Lora Snyder, the Ocean Advocate. After realizing how much I enjoyed following news about potential legislation, Lora had me track dozens of bills related to labeling, food safety, trade, and fishing. From the first week on, I looked up news and called relevant representatives about GMO labeling, the Food Safety Modernization Act, the Magnuson-Stevens Act, Country-of-Origin Labeling, funding for NOAA, funding for FDA, and the TPA/TPP.
One of my favorite activities was going to the Hill to check in on different hearings, markups, or votes that could affect seafood. I went almost every week to a Senate or House building, taking notes and summarizing proceedings for the Ocean Advocate. A hearing that stands out in my memory was for Country-of-Origin-Labeling (COOL), a provision included in the Farm Bill which requires retailers identify the country of origin on all cuts of meat, produce, and seafood. Due to legal issues with the WTO, Canada and Mexico threatened large tariffs against the US if COOL was not repealed. After the House repealed COOL in June, I sat in on a Senate Hearing where every witness came in wearing a cowboy hat. The testimonies were heated, impassioned, and the hearing ended with a rousing call for the freedom of American beef. Needless to say, the Hill was always an experience.

I also worked on a few larger reports that were used by the Seafood Fraud team. For several weeks I researched the International Trade Data System (ITDS), also known as the “single window,” which is an initiative spearheaded by Customs and Border Protection to streamline imports into the US. As 90% of our seafood is imported, the Seafood Fraud team was very interested how the single window will affect seafood imports, and what opportunities it could present for more traceability along the supply chain. I worked with WWF on the report, as it was a large task to contact and research all of the agencies involved with the process. Another report I worked on involved the links between human trafficking and illegal fishing. After stories from the New York Times and The Guardian came out about human rights abuses in the Thai fishery, I researched the topic further. One comparison I made, which was used in one of Oceana’s public comments, was between the EU and US’s approaches to countries with IUU fishing issues.

A long-term project I worked on throughout the summer was the “Brag Book” for the Seafood Fraud campaign. The book, both electronic and a binder, details the timeline and successes of the campaign. Organizing the many reports, press releases, photos, political letters, and news coverage headlines was a time-consuming and rewarding process. The book will be used when team members meet Congressmen, interested celebrities, and possibly donors to show the enormous success of the campaign.

This summer I discovered non-profit work is something I definitely am interested in for the future. Oceana, and similar non-profits, are able to push new policy and draw in public attention in bold ways that I want to learn more about and be a part of after I leave Colby.