In the summer of 2017 I was given the opportunity to work at the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory. The Savannah River Ecology Laboratory is a research unit of the University of Georgia located on the US Department of Energy Savannah River Site. At the site, students conducted a 10-week long research project in the field and laboratory in areas such as ecotoxicology, ecophysiology, environmental restoration, remediation, risk assessment, ecology, and radioecology.

During my 10 week stay, I worked with my mentor Dean Fletcher, and we were investigating the accumulation of contaminants in stream macroinvertebrates. With this, we also compared among functional feeding groups and between sample location to see which organisms were more susceptible to contaminant accumulation. During this internship, I feel like I now truly understand what it takes to become a researcher in ecology. I learned so many different lab and field techniques while gathering up enough information to present my work in front of my peers.

To start off, we had to be able to collect our study species for contaminant analysis. In order to do this, we used an array of sampling methods in the field in order to collect our study species and bring them back to the lab for analysis. In the lab we then classified our organisms, prepped them for contaminant analysis, and then later compared among functional feeding groups and location to see which organisms accumulated the most!

During all this lab work and field work, we also had to prepare for our final presentations at the end of the summer. This included a power point presentation to which we would present our findings to the laboratory as well as different funding agencies. This also included a poster presentation that took place at the University of South Carolina where we presented our findings to students, families, and other research professionals. Along the way, workshops are provided to perfect and fine tune our presentation skills.
This internship was a truly wonderful experience! Although it was a lot of hard work, I learned so many different skills that will last a lifetime. I was accompanied by so many wonderful people and I learned a whole lot from my mentors. If you are at all thinking about pursuing research in the future, I highly recommend this internship as a first step.