Happy Summer!
Summer is here, and the influx of undergraduates to my lab and campus has started. This seasonal transition has got me thinking about undergraduate research experiences: what I wish I had known back then, and what the students I meet now might need from me. One thing that seems to be really important is to clearly outline expectations—both in terms of work hours and output, and also with regards to authorship. As an undergraduate, I was handed a project that was a huge opportunity, but was also a completely unreasonable project to complete in one summer. My advisor did not expect me to finish it in 10 weeks...but I didn’t know that, and I thought I was doing a terrible job.

Another thing I try to keep fresh in my mind is how overwhelming it was to start learning oceanography “on the job.” A newly arrived undergraduate was asking me questions about a paper we were reading for lab meeting, and it was a good reminder that I shouldn’t assume anyone comes in with oceanography knowledge. It was also really good practice in explaining basic concepts clearly and, importantly, without condescension. I’ve got to keep working on that.

So, if you’re a student embarking upon a new research experience, please know that lots of the people you consider successful were also, at some point, scared and overwhelmed and wondered if they were any good at their now-favorite technique. And if you’re a mentor to more junior students, try to think back on some of your early times in labs, and tap into that empathy!

— Chrissy