



## Post Fellowship Reporting - Project Summary

**Report Title:** opportuniKEY of a Lifetime      **Name:** Amanda Pittenger  
**Other Team Members:**  
**Program:** Oklahoma Program  
**Trip Dates:** 11/30/-0001 - 11/30/-0001      **Location Visited:** Florida Keys  
**Post Fellowship Reporting Template:** PFR Template 02

**Project Summary:** Team OpportuniKEY traveled to the Florida Keys to gain first-hand knowledge about the endangered world of marine life. Our goal was to study various marine networks, marine organisms, and explore the environmental effects of weather on marine ecosystems. We visited various state parks, nature preserves, and research centers which allowed us to learn from experts in the fields of marine science, marine biology, medicine, meteorology, engineering, and environmental science.

Team OpportuniKEY was inspired to propose the fellowship in a grand effort to engage apathetic students by using ecologically and environmentally charged subject matter that is applicable to both their lives as students as well as their responsibilities as citizens. Our fellowship allowed us to observe and experience some of America's most valuable and magnificent natural resources. Because our proposal required incredible detail, we were able to extensively research the areas to which we were set to travel, which allowed us to make the best use of our limited time and generous resources.

On our journey through the Upper, Middle, and Lower Keys, we visited many landmark sites such as the Dolphin Research Center, The Turtle Hospital, Fort Jefferson on Dry Tortugas, and The USS Mohawk- a WWII Coast Guard Cutter currently being preserved as a museum and tribute to those who sailed on her during the war. We also had the opportunity to visit some not so landmark sites, such as a stop into the Mote Marine Laboratory satellite facility where we talked with resident scientists about their research on local corals. We were afforded the privilege to rent a boat and explore the area by water- even caught some native fish in the Gulf of Mexico as well as the Atlantic Ocean. We also learned about the geography and history of the Keys by exploring the islands and talking with local residents. Our experience was limited only by our own enthusiasm and curiosity.

**Career Impact:** The fellowship challenged me to look at my surroundings with a different eye, or purpose. Instead of looking out at a vast expanse of ocean water and taking in solely its beauty, I was able to look at the body of water and question its past and its future. I began to internally investigate my purpose not only as a human, but as an educator- I realized that I have not just a responsibility to teach people about the beauty and serenity of our surroundings, but an obligation to teach them how to preserve and protect them. It is as though through this fellowship I have unleashed a new passion for my life and for my time on this planet- to educate others- not based on test scores, curriculum maps, and API indexes, but based on what is due and just for the future of humanity.

**Classroom/Community Impact:** Participating in the activities afforded through the fellowship journey to the Keys, I was able to obtain unique educational materials and experiences that can be shared with students and colleagues. I gained first-hand knowledge, personal experiences, and educational materials necessary to address the following questions:

What impact do humans have on marine ecosystems in the United States?

What career and educational opportunities are available to students interested in preserving our Nation's marine ecosystems and organisms?

As educators, how do we encourage young learners to pursue higher education as well as careers in math and science related fields?

What is an average person's responsibility to their surroundings?

Students will benefit from my journey and personal experiences through the exciting lesson plans, innovative activities, and creative laboratory assignments. Students will have an energized teacher with both rekindled and newfound passions that will be visible in the manner by which I conduct my classes. Students will be exposed to multi-disciplinary subject matter in somewhat of an unconventional manner, but in ways that can increase interest in certain subjects that may otherwise have been disregarded by some students.

I will be successful in fulfilling my objectives as an educator by utilizing and drawing from experiences gained throughout the fellowship process. My experiences are already represented in my classroom by photographs, posters, attitudes, and energy. Each time students see a picture from this journey they are reminded that learning can and does take place outside school walls and they discover that a person does not necessarily have to be a student to be a learner. Students in my classroom understand that learning is a verb- a fun, lifelong process that should be taken advantage of whenever possible.

The fellowship to the Keys has allowed me to share cross-curricular resources with other educators throughout my school district as well as with other colleagues across the state. This fellowship has become an avenue for me to use to create energetic, enriched lessons that can be used in many grade levels and subjects. The blog created by Team OpportuniKEYS has been visited by educators and non-educators from all over the world- it has been the single most effective communication tool that we have utilized

thus far. Soon, we will post lesson plans created with materials from our journey for others to use in their own classrooms. Because of technology, educators spanning the globe will be able to benefit from our fellowship made possible by Fund for Teachers.

**Open Response:** Team OpportuniKEY has provided for the integration of enthusiastic teaching methods into my lessons that help to foster a love of learning in students, and has even inspired other teachers along the way. I have a greatly heightened interest in the world's environmental issues and have made it a point to "start locally" by working to pilot a major green campaign on my campus. Students will soon be joining me in the efforts to spread the message of reduce, reuse, and recycle to the school and surrounding community. We have been working on many student-driven projects and contests to ensure increased involvement and ultimate success of preserving our surroundings. As a result of the fellowship- if the only impact made is on a handful of students, then I feel that has been money, time, and energy well spent.

**Quote:** I began to internally investigate my purpose not only as a human, but as an educator- I realized that I have not just a responsibility to teach people about the beauty and serenity of our surroundings, but an obligation to teach them how to preserve

Photos:



The "End of the Road" for some- the beginning for us.



Team OpportuniKEY- Jennifer left, Amanda right



The southernmost point of the continental US



The ferry to Dry Tortugas and Fort Jefferson



A baby horseshoe crab at Sandspur Beach



Leatherback Turtle shell at the Turtle Kraals Museum



The Turtle Hospital In Marathon



Poinciana Tree