



## NEWS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Press Contact:

Julia McHugh 805-569-3303 or [jmchugh@sbzoo.org](mailto:jmchugh@sbzoo.org)  
Dean Noble 805-962-5339 or [d noble@sbzoo.org](mailto:d noble@sbzoo.org)

### SANTA BARBARA ZOO'S AARON MARSHALL RECEIVES PhD IN EDUCATION FROM UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

- Dissertation Examines Long-time Impacts of Experiential Learning, and Relationship to Aristotle's Ideas about Learning and Practical Wisdom

(*Santa Barbara, CA, December 12, 2016*) – Aaron Marshall, the Santa Barbara Zoo's Director of Education, has been awarded a PhD in Education from the University of Edinburgh (Scotland), completing a six-year program he began summer 2010.

For his dissertation, titled “Toward Understanding Perceived Growth in Practical Wisdom: A Retrospective Examination of Class Afloat Program Alumni, 1985-2012,” he interviewed participants of a sailing program to explore connections to Aristotle’s ideas about personal and social learning.

“People say outdoor learning experiences – like expeditions, semester abroad, or sail training – are ‘life changing,’ but there is surprisingly little research to confirm long-term growth or change from these sorts of programs,” he said. “I was able to ask participants to reflect on their life prior to, during, and since their voyage. Then I was able to analyze their life-stories through the lens of Aristotle’s ideas, especially practical wisdom. It was a chance to develop a more robust framework for understanding personal and social development and apply it to test claims of experiential learning.”

Marshall was supervised by Dr. Pete Allison and Prof. Jonathan Hearn. It has been a great pleasure to work with Aaron throughout the research process,” said Dr. Allison. “His hard work and commitment to gaining a better understanding of how virtues can be cultivated through experiential learning is admirable and has resulted in an excellent thesis which he defended brilliantly at the viva voce in late October.”

Marshall plans to turn sections of his dissertation into journal articles, and continue exploring,

through research, how Aristotle's framework can help improve personal and social learning for students in a variety of contexts.

"There have already been opportunities for collaborative writing, publications, book chapters, and conference sessions," added Marshall. "I wish I could hold the degree jointly with my wife, Janay – she was a rock of support through the whole process."

Marshall also holds a Master of Arts in Philosophy from Biola University (2008), a Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies from George Fox University (1998), and has a California Teaching Credential. He has been the Santa Barbara Zoo's Director of Education since 2013.

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*Known as one of the world's most beautiful zoos, the **Santa Barbara Zoo** is located on 30 acres of botanic gardens and is home to nearly 500 individual animals in open, naturalistic habitats. It is accredited by the [Association of Zoos & Aquariums](#) (AZA), representing the highest level of animal care, and participates in AZA endangered species programs for Asian elephant, California condor, Channel Island fox, and Western lowland gorilla, among others. A private nonprofit corporation, the Santa Barbara Zoo depends on community support, not tax dollars, for operations and improvements.*

*The Zoo is open daily from 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.; general admission is \$17 for adults, \$13 for seniors aged 65+, \$10 for children 2-12, and children under 2 are free. Parking is \$7.*

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