

Since childhood I have had a love for the natural world and a desire to understand it better, and pursuing a career studying animals and environmental conservation has always been a long term goal of mine. During my time as a high school student I chose to volunteer at the Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium as a youth guide because of my interests. During my time volunteering, I was able to inform visitors about exhibits and the threats facing animals in the wild. We educated visitors on current topics such as how climate change affects polar bears and how ocean acidification weakens calcium carbonate shells. We also provided visitors of the Zoo with education on how they can reduce their impact on the environment starting with small manageable steps. After two summers of volunteer work I was inspired to work towards a position in conservation after gaining a passion for educating others. Having experience interacting with the public and getting visitors excited about different organisms and ecosystems that they came from furthered my resolve to apply to an undergraduate school to study sciences related to the environment. After finishing my high school education I knew that The Evergreen State College was the right learning environment for me to pursue a Bachelor of Science degree. The independent form of education that focuses on a student's interests drew me to apply for my undergraduate degree to pursue studying various sciences and learn about what areas I am most interested in.

During my first year at the college I chose to explore Marine Biology, a topic I have great interest in especially in relation to the Pacific Northwest region. Before transferring to Evergreen I completed one year at the Tacoma Community College where I took my first Marine Biology related class and came to appreciate the field. Learning about the Pacific Northwest's marine climate and organisms greatly impacted my decision to continue expanding my knowledge on the subject by joining a Marine Biology class at Evergreen. This class taught me various field techniques such as surveying, creating and operating a plankton net, and testing for water visibility. I conducted these techniques on the Evergreen beach and Boston Harbor and this

inspired me to follow the steps to becoming a scientist that participates in forms of field work as I find it to be a very gratifying experience.

My second year at Evergreen cemented my passion for field work and in understanding the Pacific Northwest as a whole. Joining a class about climate change and how it affects the Pacific Northwest motivated me to gain a new understanding of climate change and how it influences various ecosystems. Climate change is a vital topic that has an impact in all forms of natural science we currently conduct. Gaining an understanding around the topic of climate change is very important to my eventual goal of conducting conservation work, as the global climate is continuing to change dramatically. The MES program in particular caught my interest because of its focus on climate change and environmental policy, which led me to research the program.

My last year at Evergreen had me fully committed to applying for a Masters in Environmental Science. After learning and practicing more field work techniques related to old growth temperate rainforests in the area I drew a connection between the health of the land, sea, and human populations. Climate change and human led environmental destruction are a major factor in species disappearance and the loss of ecosystem diversity. I understood that in some form I wished to contribute to the effort of reducing this destruction and applying for a masters degree is the next step in continuing my education and pursuing my future career.

In my final class as a senior I created my own research project and conducted a survey on *Neotrypaea californiensis* symbionts at Evergreen beach. This project involved the use of statistics and microscopy images to convey information in a research paper. Conducting this final piece of research in my undergraduate degree has given me the drive to continue my graduate education at Evergreen, as I am confident in my scientific writing as well as my statistical analysis abilities which I have gained over three years of Evergreen education.

Overall, the Evergreen learning environment is not only a place that I am able to thrive in, but also gives me the ability to fine tune my focus on the environment and continue to learn.

My intent as a graduate student is to explore various fields relating to environmental sciences as a way to pinpoint the exact field I wish to study. In conclusion, becoming a MES student is the subsequent step for me to achieve my goals of conducting scientific field work that can aid in the conservation of our planet and its diverse ecosystems.