

#### Application Related Information

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Application: Application Not Verified  
Grad Program Applying To: MES

Iteration Name: 202410\_GR\_G  
Program Name: MES

#### Recommendation Information

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Recommended By: Matthew Libassi  
Recommenders Institution: Rutgers University  
Waive Access to Recommendation Ltrs: I choose to waive my right to review this recommendation.  
Recommendation Form Submitted: ✓

Recommenders Title: Affiliated Fellow  
Contact Name: Brennen McGinn  
Recommendation Waiver Choice:  
Recommendation Status: Received

Received Date: 03/07/2023 05:29 PM  
Recommendation Type: General  
Recommendation Entity ID: 1024000109264056

Recommender Assessment: I recommend this applicant without reservation.  
Recommender Form: Letter of Recommendation  
Recommendation Owner: Josephine Bernier

#### Recommender Form Questions

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How long have you known applicant:  
Time since last contact with applicant:  
Relationship with Applicant:  
Ability to complete rigorous grad program:  
Communication Skills - Oral:  
Service Orientation-sensitivity/empathy:  
Ability to handle stress:  
Ability to analyze/problem solve:  
Openness to feedback:  
Ability to work in a team:

Applicant ability as self-directed learner:  
Applicant as productive member of group:  
Applicant most significant strengths:  
Responsibility/reliability:  
Communication skills - written:  
Ability to work independently:  
Ability to think critically:  
Ability to think creatively:  
Potential for leadership:  
Personal/professional reflection:

#### Description Information

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Description:

Form URL: <https://evergreenstatecollege.radiu>

#### Other Information

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Created Time: 03/06/2023 02:28 PM  
Modified Time: 03/07/2023 05:29 PM

Created By: Josephine Bernier  
Modified By: Josephine Bernier

March 7, 2023

Dear Evergreen State College Admissions Committee:

I am pleased to write to you on behalf of Brennen McGinn, who is applying for the Masters of Environmental Studies at your institution. I had the pleasure of teaching Brennen in my discussion section for the course “Political Ecology” at UC Berkeley in the spring of 2020. Throughout this experience he demonstrated care in conducting his studies, leadership among his peers, and an eagerness to learn and improve. Following his graduation from UC Berkeley, he has shown a commitment to growing his transdisciplinary knowledge of environmental issues by pursuing courses in quantitative analysis, GIS, and outdoor recreation. Based on this evidence, I strongly recommend Brennen for your program.

Brennen distinguished himself in class through his curiosity, diligence, and collegiality. At UC Berkeley, he majored in Conservation and Resource Studies. His interdisciplinary coursework—ranging from insect biology to environmental philosophy—equipped him to bring a comprehensive approach to the questions and topics we reviewed in class. Moreover, he used this aptitude to facilitate conversations with others, often including students with more traditional disciplinary backgrounds, in our discussions. He was among the most active participants in our discussion section. One of his key strengths was an ability to distill the main argument from our complex readings—such as how an article about the discovery of the Togeian Macaque illustrated that science knowledge can never truly be separated from the social and political context in which it is created. I could always count on Brennen help the class identify these points, as well as to connect them to readings and concepts discussed in previous classes. This analytical thinking would help Brennen succeed in any academic program, but they will be especially relevant in a program focused on the complexities of today’s environmental challenges.

Brennen was particularly attentive to the power dimensions of the environmental questions we discussed in class, inquiring how different histories, institutions, and societal structures shape the ways we manage the environment. He demonstrated this compellingly in his final research paper (for which he received an A). The paper examined the discursive debates, and resulting on-the-ground consequences, over a palm oil plantation called Herakles Farms in southwest Cameroon. In addition to showcasing his strong writing abilities, Brennen’s paper marshalled evidence from multiple sources to argue that the plantation constituted a land grab thinly veiled by rhetoric of “creating jobs and reducing poverty.” He collected data from activist NGO reports, academic articles, journalistic pieces, and international development agencies to determine how narrative strategies were used to silence local Indigenous Peoples’ voices and secure the company’s goals. The paper reflected the kind of critical thinking and reasoning skills that I saw every week in Brennen’s reading responses—where he was both thoughtful in learning from our readings and ambitious in identifying their potential shortcomings.

My experience with Brennen leaves me confident that he will be a valuable addition to the Masters of Environmental Studies program at Evergreen State College. I witnessed his excellent analytical skills and desire to learn at UC Berkeley—skills he has further exercised through entrepreneurship and additional quantitative coursework in the intervening years. Furthermore, I am certain his determination, personality, and curiosity will make him a delightful student, classmate, and team member. Considering all of this, I strongly recommend that Brennen be accepted into your program.

Sincerely,



Matthew Libassi, Ph.D.

Affiliated Fellow, Center for Cultural Analysis, Rutgers University  
Science and Technology Policy Fellow, American Association for the Advancement of Science