

Justin Patterson
Statement of Purpose

My journey to The Evergreen State College has been an irregular one, but has bestowed a rare appreciation for education and public service. I was raised in a lower middle class neighborhood in a small, rural town in Texas. My youth was spent outside running through creeks and climbing trees or devouring books and playing chess. I loved learning about the broader world. Education became my way of connection with that world. I graduated high school at the age of sixteen with a full year of college credit completed through night school at my local community college. Upon graduation, I was offered numerous scholarships and opportunities, from which I chose to attend Texas A&M University, a prestigious school in my home state. I had a knack for literature, debate, and physical sciences throughout my academic career and found myself gravitating towards discussion of environmental policy. Texas A&M is a wonderful school with talented educators, however, diversity in opinion was lacking and left me searching for more than the school was able to provide. Concurrently, my family life was deteriorating and leaving my younger brother in a tumultuous situation. I spent much of this period navigating personal and family troubles. I was seventeen, a sophomore at a major university, on my own mentally, physically, and financially, and constantly working to take care of my brother. I had lost the momentum of my educational journey. I was rudderless. I left college that year.

Leaving school left me with few options. I bounced around from job to job, looking for financial stability. After seeing peers secure salaried positions in the corporate technology industry, I sought out books about computer programming. I have consistently returned to literature as an introduction to new concepts. I spent many nights teaching myself to write basic code, enough to secure an interview and attain an entry level position at a software company.

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Here, I thrived. My thirst for knowledge, work ethic, resilience, and willingness to listen and adapt my behaviors helped propel me to several promotions. Within a few years of beginning this career, I managed a small team of developers and was responsible for the technical success of highly complex projects. After building an impressive resume and a solid reputation as someone who could “get things done,” I rose through the ranks. I was fortunate to have talented and compassionate mentors throughout these experiences. After a decade of hard work, I found myself as a global leader within a billion-dollar software firm. I had found monetary success, yet it did not provide purpose, direction, or satisfaction. Other than a paycheck, there was no “why” to what I did. I was once again rudderless.

I decided to leave my career and start my own business. I had dreamed of owning a small restaurant, with a goal to employ individuals who needed financial opportunity. The doors opened in February 2019. It was challenging, yet extremely rewarding. Shortly after celebrating my one year anniversary of business, the world stopped due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. The exit from my career, and subsequent loss of my business, once again left me looking for direction. At that point, I returned to my roots. I sold my house, sold or stored most of my possessions, then spent two months hiking in the backcountry. During this journey, I reconnected with the natural world. I once again found a “why” for my education. I decided to enroll back in school to help fight for the earth with which I am deeply connected. In classes, my focus has been on environmental justice, urban planning, and public policy. I have been able to integrate my previous experiences with new knowledge. This marriage of operational excellence and environmental studies provides me with a unique perspective on how to effectively create change for good.

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I am interested in pursuing a specialization around Urban Planning and Sustainable Development within the Master of Environmental Studies program. Having lived in a wide range of areas- rural, urban, suburban- all with various approaches to planning and development, I have seen successes and failures of multitudinous programs. I have seen firsthand the benefits to individuals, communities, and local businesses provided through sustainably-focused and thoughtful urban and regional planning. I have seen social lift and equitable solutions delivered through business development under an environmental justice lens. As I have spent most of my free time outdoors, I understand the interconnectedness of the natural world to human emotion. I am also aware that the climate crisis is the greatest challenge of our time. All of these issues are directly connected to each other and intersect within the practices of Urban Planning and Sustainable Development. I desire the opportunity to apply my experience, knowledge, and talents to these efforts.

I have worked with diverse groups to achieve lofty targets. Within my corporate career, I became a talented project manager and people manager. I bring operational excellence, organizational skills, and collaborative spirit to every pursuit. I have no doubt in my ability to translate my wide array of knowledge to a career in sustainability. Also, I understand the nuance required to bring disparate parties together to achieve a singular goal. Having volunteered with scores of non-profit organizations, I have a heart to help. I know that this path will allow me to truly excel and bring a wealth of experience to the urgent climate crisis.

The interdisciplinary approach to education is extremely valuable and effective. I have attended numerous colleges throughout my life which exposed me to different pedagogical philosophies. I understand that everything in our world is connected. Environmental science, public policy, political economy, sociology, public health, economics, and psychology, amongst

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other practices, are all related to our current challenges. I desire the opportunity to further explore these intersections and this is what brings me to the Master of Environmental Studies program at The Evergreen State College. I believe the curriculum is well planned and allows for deeper understanding of these principles.

Within this curriculum, I see the study of sustainable land practices, public policy, social and environmental justice, and political economy as deeply connected. I plan to focus my studies through the lens of urban planning on these core topics. I hope to research and understand effective policy measures to maximize benefits to humans, animals, and the greater natural world. I thank you for your time and consideration and I genuinely hope to gain acceptance to Evergreen's Master of Environmental Studies program.