

Marina Aune

MES at Evergreen

Disabled voices are needed in the world of science, as science impacts those excluded even more disproportionately. By participating in Evergreen's MES program, I will help increase the number of disabled voices in STEM by continuing projects I started in my undergrad, using professional relationships I created here, and contributing knowledge to the field. Looking towards the future, I see myself in the environmental sector doing remote work utilizing GIS, to reduce and and bring awareness to barriers in accessibility.

When I was 15 I took honors classes and was set to do Running Start, then my chronic illness hit and I couldn't even finish high school. Once my disability was more manageable, I went to College at SPSCC, but STEM seemed unreachable. Through TRIO, I saw that while these challenges do not go away, I can use what I've learned to bring awareness and reduce barriers for others.

My pathway of environmental studies and geographical information system (GIS), while having disability rights and accessibility will continue to be my key focus in my studies. My goal is to continue advocating for more accessibility and disability awareness in STEM from the inside, for both visible and invisible conditions. This will be done by using GIS within environmental studies, focusing on access and disabled bodies.

In my upper division science journey at Evergreen, both *Fungal Kingdom* and *Water Quality* programs showed me some of the resources Evergreen has to offer like the Evergreen Ecological Observation Network (EEON) plots and the acres of natural resources around campus. GIS was the lynchpin in connecting my interests in disability

justice and environmental studies by demonstrating how maps and surveys can be used in almost all disciplines to show the public more easily digested information. I will continue in GIS, and environmental studies, as well as learning about ecofeminism and climate justice to further showcase the disparities of access. I also look forward to using LIDAR and drone mapping expanding on my prior research at Evergreen.

Starting as a humanities and social science student, I was nervous to pursue the physical sciences but I did not want my disability to stop me, in fact, I wanted to go into sciences due to the extra barriers I would face so that I could help remove them from the inside. As a disabled student, the MES program will help me showcase resources I wish I had access to years ago such as where benches are on campus when there was no map that Access Services or TRIO Disability Support Services could provide.

Now that my passion has morphed into environmental studies and disability justice, I have utilized GIS to bridge the connection between environmental studies and disability justice to better understand the shortcomings from the inside. Multiple class projects have linked class material to real-world problems of accessibility. In my GIS classes, I collected and showcased the absences in benches around The Evergreen State College, with this data meant to serve as a resource for disabled students to have a much-needed place to sit. Using ArcGIS I field-sourced over 40 benches around Evergreen and found the biggest gap in access to be between the Constantino Recreation Center and on-campus housing. This survey was created with Survey123 and remains accessible for the community to contribute data. I am working in the Winter quarter of 2024 to showcase the benches in 3D and printable map form so that Access and TRIO services can utilize and share the data with students.

During *In Sickness and in Health*, I utilized ethnography through the biopsychosocial lens to explore the construction of health and healthcare on the macro and micro scales (systems and individuals). Within this class, I created a project with other classmates that showed the need for a Disabled Students club to be representatives that would better speak to access needs on and around campus. This group met with Access Services leadership who also saw the benefit for this club. We discovered there have been clubs in the past, but they must be created and maintained by the students. Sadly no one had the capacity (often called “spoons” in the disabled community) to move forward with creating the club, an irony that did not get past us. While it was helpful to know that the club and students would be supported, it showed disabled students could be further supported by reducing the barriers to creating clubs that would serve everyone. Even without the club, I was able to coordinate and consult with Access and TRIO services where I developed ongoing relationships while doing these two projects. I will continue expanding these professional relationships throughout my academic career and work in MES.

My objective is to find the gaps to bridge in the world of accessibility through the lens of MES work. In conversation with Mike Ruth, I was inspired to take further classes in GIS, such as his drone mapping class in the summer of 2025. These courses would allow me to further map out the school and expand my bench project, or pursue a similar project on accessibility.

Regarding internships in MES, I will use GIS while working with the nearby community and Evergreen itself. Being a disabled student provides me the insight to

help fill unmet needs and bridge the gap between students and resources, to reduce their burden so they can focus on their studies.

The MES program will allow me to continue working in these historically disconnected fields of disability and environmental justice through GIS and the focus on intersectionality that is unique to Evergreen. In reality, environmental advocacy and disability advocacy are intertwined in the protection and honoring of life. Disability comes for us all, whether it be an accident, chronic illness, age, or a variety of other causes, being able-bodied is a privilege we could lose at any time, so it is important to make the world more accessible for us all.