

Embracing Complexity - Barbara Bevacqua MES Personal Statement

Growing up is to embrace the gray - as a child the world appeared to be black and white. The older I get, the more nuances and contradictions I add to the tapestry of life and existence. I am intensely curious about the patterns that surround me, and I understand that unraveling those patterns often means embracing their complexity. I've spent much of my life exploring applied environmental science and research, and I would be honored to continue that journey at Evergreen by earning a Masters in Environmental Studies. This institution is the perfect space to take an interdisciplinary approach toward serving the intricate communities and landscapes that I am part of. I want to place myself at the intersection of environmental knowledge, stewardship, and community health. There is no better place to calibrate and sharpen my toolset towards this goal than The Evergreen State College.

The privilege of being raised in Hawaiian culture cultivated within me several key tenets - two of which are curiosity and stewardship. I have delighted in exploring and learning about the patterns of nature from a young age. This has been paired with a sense of obligation to the landscape itself; my actions impact the cycles and systems of the environment. Earning a Bachelors of Science from Western Washington University in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology was a natural next step. That degree equipped me with the environmental knowledge and empirical tools necessary to investigate more mysteries. My curiosity prompted me to seek further research opportunities outside of my college classes. I am drawn to questions about how human uses impact local ecology and vice versa so I traveled to Fairbanks AK and led a study on permafrost thawing and carbon cycling in understory vegetation. I also worked with NOAA to explore the impact of aquaculture gear on fish habitat. Meanwhile, I honed my lab skills and attention to detail at an aquatic chemistry lab that monitors local drinking water during the school year. In addition to the formal training from my degree, I left undergrad with a broad foundation of environmental research and work experience under my belt. I had interfaced with environmental systems and the stakeholders embedded within, and got my first peek into how problems in these systems are approached and managed. It was clear to me already that the more pieces of the puzzle I get my hands on, the bigger and blurrier the entire picture gets.

Solutions rooted in statistics, art, and compassionate communication have been monumental in my career and personal development. My motivation to create art and poetry is the same curiosity that propelled me into science. The intersection of art and science has been a powerful nexus in my exploration of complexity. Both disciplines, with their unique methodologies, offer insights into the multifaceted nature of existence. Statistical tools provide a lens through which patterns and complexities can be deciphered and is something I rely on heavily when using science to inform decisions. Art and poetry aid me in outreach and communication by helping me to be more nimble in reframing concepts, thus making complex ideas more palatable to diverse stakeholders. Moreover, my experiences in Olympia's communities have demonstrated the potency of compassion and collective action. The blending of artistic expression, scientific rigor, and community engagement has proven to be a dynamic

approach when addressing complex challenges. An example of how natural this blending is to me in my personal life is my debut trapeze performance. It showcased a fish that grew legs and ran away from the ocean, inspired by the mysterious disappearance of the Cherry Point Herring stock. It was a flexible medium for me to interact with the feelings of an ecological problem from my career while simultaneously endearing folks in Olympia to the plight of forage fish in the Salish Sea. My goal is to use tools like these together in symphony to foster resilience, and drive positive sustainable change around me.

One aspect of the Evergreen experience that I find particularly exciting is the potential to incorporate other curriculums, such as the Masters in Public Administration program. My time in undergrad and in the biology workforce has left me confident in my skills as a researcher. It has also shown me that collecting high quality data is only a piece of the stewardship puzzle. I have observed largely from my tenure at the Washington Department of Natural Resources that the bulk of the impact made by natural resource management and conservation comes about through paperwork, phone calls and collaboration. I am captivated by the inner workings of these mechanisms and find myself daydreaming about ways to make the ones I have experienced more effective. I want to be at the intersection of data and impact - to be someone who optimizes the translation of data into action. I have a robust working knowledge of what goes into making data as actionable as possible, but I crave to better understand the nuances of what happens next.

Evergreen is perfectly suited for the educational partnership I'm seeking. I will explore public administration while expanding the empirical skills I already have a foundation in such as GIS, higher level statistics, and grant writing. Perhaps more crucially, Evergreen is a pillar of the community that I am blanketed in and that I wish to serve. This institution is deeply connected to local phenomena that I hope to address in my career, such as invasive aquatic species, kelp populations, indigenous aquaculture practices, and more. I am an ecologist who chooses to stand in the overlap of ideas. The Evergreen State College and I seem to agree that most things don't fit neatly into boxes, and that we are made stronger by espousing as many ways of knowing as we can. I want to harness what we understand about systems of nature to ease the wounds of our communities and help prepare us for a sustainable future.