

Evergreen State College MES Application Statement of Purpose

While my life has been pulled in multiple directions and locations, the one constant through it all has been water. My first memories were on lapping waves along the Oahu coastline. There, I skipped in the sand and watched as critters and creatures crawled in the tidepools. My first introduction to water, and the next four years living near the ocean, sparked a lifelong fascination that influenced my educational and professional trajectories.

Eventually, my family had to leave the West Coast for a landlocked state in the Midwest. While this decision was difficult for many reasons, my younger self was most disappointed at our newfound distance from the ocean. During these formative years, however, I discovered the beauty and bounty of lakes. Through these explorations, I learned about catfish, bass, and bluegills, and became intrigued with what lived underneath the surface.

By highschool, I worked as a lifeguard at the local pool. This experience showed me a different relationship between people and water. Where there was normally sand, was now concrete. Instead of a dock, there were diving boards. Without salt or algae, my nostrils flared with the smell of chlorine. This work experience made me question the interaction between our environment and economy.

After graduating in the top 10 of my class, I moved to Indiana for college. Ultimately, I found a way to work in all my interests through a multidisciplinary bachelors degree at Valparaiso University. During these studies, I learned about the intersectionality of economics, environment, language, and policy. To name a few examples, I conducted a research project on the difference between market and regulatory policies in reducing nutrient pollution in a Pennsylvania case study, analyzed thirty years of echo parakeet conservation efforts, and developed my French language and cultural skills. Additionally, I wrote a fifty page senior thesis on the potential environmental and economic impacts of conservation efforts, specifically the Great Green Wall, in the Sahel region of Africa. Through studying multiple disciplines, I learned

that there is not one solution for every issue, especially when it pertains to our environment. An ever evolving and interconnected matter such as climate change requires an adaptive and interdisciplinary approach.

When I wasn't studying, I would sit in between the towering sand dunes and watch the sun drift behind the orange waves of Mishigami (Lake Michigan). A lake that felt as vast and deep as an ocean inspired me to explore.

During my third year of undergrad, I studied abroad in South Africa and Namibia. While South Africa introduced me to the Atlantic and Indian oceans, Namibia introduced me to the desert. Living and studying in an area where most of the rainfall evaporates before it reaches land, in a nation that was experiencing its worst drought in ninety years, I learned to appreciate water in a completely new context. During my time, I conducted a research project on water conservation which involved interviewing members of the Namibian Ministry of Agriculture, Water, and Forestry. At the end of those five months, I presented my research at the United States Cultural Center. This experience highlighted the importance of water to me in a new light. Water became much more than a swimming hole or a pleasing view, it became a necessity, a right, and a responsibility.

After graduating during the pandemic and losing job prospects due to financial constraints and lockdowns, I needed to pivot. This change of course led me to Duluth, Minnesota, home to the second largest lake in the world Gichigami (Lake Superior). There, I worked for a nonprofit in their food justice and environmental conservation programs. During those two years, I worked directly with communities to address food scarcity and vulnerability during unprecedented times. Our team developed a mobile grocery store and an urban farm with a deep winter greenhouse to supply fresh food even with snow falling outside. A year later, I wrote and designed a fourteen page report analyzing the impacts of this project on our local community. Additionally, I learned how to spot the difference between native and non-native phragmites, remove thick bunches of buckthorn, plant hundreds of drought resistant native

trees, track records, develop maps, update government databases, and led a workshop educating the public on issues with invasive knotweed.

Outside of work, I volunteered as a scuba diver for the Great Lakes Aquarium where I interacted with trout, lake sturgeon, burbot, and more. This opportunity allowed me to better understand the significance of conserving aquatic life and educating the public on their importance. (And I got to carve a pumpkin underwater)!

While I enjoyed my time in Duluth, part of my heart pulled me back to the West Coast. Now, I live next to an estuary where jellyfish bob, seals play, and crabs scurry. The Salish Sea is a fascinating ecosystem. I work to protect this and many other bodies of water as an Environmental Specialist in the Water Quality Program at Washington State Department of Ecology, where I administer permits that reduce stormwater discharge which runs off into lakes, rivers, and marine waters. This work directly helps reduce pollutants from contaminating our state water bodies. In my free time, I volunteer as an Interpreter and Beach Naturalist for the Puget Sound Estuarium where I help educate others on the ecological importance of the Salish Sea.

My time at Ecology and the Estuarium fortifies my drive to continue my education, specifically in the environmental field. I am applying for a Masters of Environmental Studies to expand my knowledge and understanding of the complexity of environmental issues and potential solutions. Because of my interdisciplinary background and interests, I know I am capable of thinking holistically and asking critical questions- especially about the relationships between our environments, economies, and cultures.

Ultimately, I want to learn more about what I have loved and respected since my earliest days. I want to learn about what not only supports all life on earth, but what has had a fundamental impact on mine- water.