

My name is Ian Mann, and I am excited to submit my application to join the 2024 cohort of the MES program at Evergreen State College. Both my academic and professional backgrounds have imbued me with an understanding of the need for critical and interdisciplinary environmental studies, as well as a passion for study in these fields.

At age 18, I entered Cal Poly San Luis Obispo as an Electrical Engineering major. At this time I also began a minor in the Philosophy program. As I continued down both of these tracks, I became increasingly disillusioned with the closed-minded mentality of the engineering program. I found that my fellow students were unwilling to or uninterested in considering the ramifications of the work that they were studying to do, whether this was the social impacts of the tech industry, the ethical considerations of designing weapons and security systems, or the environmental effects of electronics manufacturing. This sense of discomfort was also informed by my interests outside of engineering, and my concurrent study of philosophy and political systems.

After 2 years in the engineering program, and despite academic success, I decided that I needed to switch the direction of my studies, and changed my major to Environmental Earth And Soil Sciences. This change allowed me to focus on topics that I felt were urgently needed in light of the slow descent of our society into environmental degradation and catastrophe. Some examples of topics that I was inspired by were the environmental effects of agriculture in the California Central Valley, the ecological benefits and carbon storage abilities of wetlands, and the human health consequences of denuded soil and water quality. As my studies in philosophy and political science furthered and became more directed, I was able to concurrently focus on the ethics of environmental justice, the geographic and environmental results of colonialism, and the role of capitalist economics in perpetuating and exacerbating these systemic consequences.

I left Cal Poly in March of 2019 a week before the end of my last quarter of studies to work for the contracting firm Tetra Tech on the Camp Fire Cleanup project in Paradise, CA, which is still the largest cleanup effort of its type ever undertaken in the state. I worked 70-hour weeks in the field for 9 months, performing site hazard assessment and soil testing for the debris removal project. This professional experience drove home the consequences of the ways we interact with our environment by immersing me in the apocalyptic landscape of an entire city destroyed by wildfire. Although the results of building a massive residential community in a pine forest ecosystem that naturally undergoes periodic wildfires may seem obvious, the human tragedy of tens of thousands of people being unhoused was unmitigated by the seeming predictability of the disaster. During this time, not only my scientific skills and sense of professional ethics, but also my compassion and care for people who had lost in some cases literally everything, was constantly put to the test.

After this contract period was over, I moved to Olympia in February 2020 out of a sense of love and longing for our rainforests and beautiful landscapes, as well as a desire to participate in the vibrant local culture and arts scene in town. I also hoped to work in either the public or private sector focusing on either ecological restoration or contaminant remediation. When the pandemic became our reality in 2020, these plans were derailed and I had to focus on other personal interests, such as my own music career and becoming familiar with the geography, flora, and fauna of the area. During the summer of 2022, I worked a term with the Washington Conservation Corps, and gained further familiarity with local environmental

challenges, invasive species management, and work in the environmental field in Washington State. These experiences have convinced me that Olympia is the right place for me to live, and reaffirmed my desire to contribute to the protection of our local natural resources and environmental health.

The path my life has taken thus far has led me to see the Evergreen MES program as the ideal place to pursue my academic and professional goals. Evergreen is a unique school in many respects, and particularly appeals to me because of the critical lens and sense of ethics that is an inherent part of its coursework. Examples of this are its academic focus on political economy, indigenous sovereignty, and unique interdisciplinary courses where faculty are given wide latitude to design courses that are both relevant and challenging. My goals in entering this program are to deepen my understanding of what is needed to put our world on a more sustainable course and engage in the work of repairing our society's relationships with the ecological landscape we inhabit. I want to find a job in Olympia that will allow me to take an active part in this larger project. In particular, I would describe myself as passionate about contamination and remediation, which is a critical aspect of environmental justice projects and a pressing issue in the Puget Sound region. I hope to focus my studies on the more structural aspects of addressing these problems, and not just the underlying scientific principles.

My academic and professional experience has shown me the clear need for people in positions of power, whether regulatory or scientific, to engage in critical environmental analysis and take into account the wide-reaching effects of the power they wield. Not only is Evergreen a school that I feel shares my commitment to integrating ethics and environmental justice into practice, its location in Olympia will also allow me to network locally and have much greater control over the path my career here will take after graduating. With my background in the engineering world, the natural sciences, and social and critical analysis, I feel that I am not only qualified, but ideally suited, for the interdisciplinary course of study and personal development that the MES program offers.