Statement of Purpose

As someone largely scientifically-minded, it can be overwhelming and unbelievable to acknowledge my strong spiritual connection to nature. I could spend hours trying to come up with the words to express the scientific benefit or moral obligation associated with environmental research and conservation, but at my core, I find that I believe in protecting our natural ecosystems simply because they deserve to exist unimpeded in all their glory. Headlines in the news and the burgeoning study of environmental sciences demonstrated to me from childhood that our planet is sick with the pollution of humankind. It is only when I witnessed undisturbed wilderness for the first time as a teenager that I understood the magnitude of the issue and faced the reality of what could be lost if our path does not waver. Unprecedented wildfires, ocean acidification, flooding, drought, commercial toxins - these issues engage a palpable fear because of what harm they may bring to ourselves, our loved ones, and our ways of life. Our actions do not exist in a vacuum, however, and the cost will extend to a far greater reach than we can imagine. It takes systematic upheaval and vigorous research - as well as individual accountability - to effect real change to combat these tragedies. I have desired for a decade to become a skilled professional in environmental studies for this reason, and that is exactly what I set out to do when I began my undergraduate degree.

Prior to my pursuance of higher education, I had little idea just how many failures and setbacks one person could experience. My entrance into a Bachelor's program was riddled with doubt, naivety, unfortunate circumstances, and many, many mistakes. Every hitch in enrollment, every unhappy life event, and every financial hardship led me to believe for a very long time that I was not cut out for any of this, and I let that belief degrade the value of my education. I have been aware since the inception of this venture that my path follows environmental studies, but was hesitant to commit because I believed my strengths lay elsewhere. To be candid and fair, I must also mention that I was just a kid at the time and had absolutely no business choosing a major at that age. I did not feel responsible to make the right decision for myself and consequently stumbled through the first few years. I had the opportunity and desire to work a climate justice internship in 2018 but chose a focus of social work instead because I felt intimidated and unworthy. I attempted to attain both a Botany degree and an Environmental Science degree at two different junctures but was unable due to program shortages and lack of faculty support. Since the commencement of my Bachelor's program in 2022, it has become very apparent to me that my biggest roadblock has been myself. Despite this, it is imperative that I acknowledge just how valuable all of these experiences were in the development of my character and the solidification of my commitment to environmental studies.

One of the silver linings to this difficult degree path was finding a mentor in Dr. Roberto Anitori, who helped me discover the fun world of microbiology and facilitated valuable laboratory experience through 6 years of seasonal volunteering. This experience and the completion of my degree led to a job at IEH Laboratories as a microbiology laboratory analyst which has vaulted my confidence in STEM and, unexpectedly, motivated me further to work towards my path in environmental studies. Every day that I work in a job which utilizes single-use plastic materials, dumps potentially hazardous waste down sink drains, and sends perfectly edible food to the garbage is another day that I plan to combat these unfriendly practices with knowledge and application of sustainability and conservation methods.

The direction of the research I hope to be involved in is still to be determined, but the MES department at Evergreen State strikes several chords for me. Dr. Shangrila Joshi's work in climate justice is poignant and of great interest to me as someone who identifies the effects of environmental oppression and the importance of ecological responsibility. On the other hand, Dr. John Kirkpatrick's work in microbial ecology in marine ecosystems is fascinating. My strong background in microbiology could aid my further education in environmental studies - Dr. Anitori advised me to do just that, and I've considered it to be a viable option since. With his encouragement, I conducted a research review and presentation in my undergraduate program about climate change and its impacts on Antarctic microbial communities. Additionally, Dr. Carri Leroy's research in freshwater botany and entomology piques much interest for me. The opportunity to learn more about the ecological implications of plant-plant and plant-animal interactions would serve me well in my endeavors to better understand our ecosystems and work alongside their natural processes to facilitate positive change.

The MES program is a perfect fit for me for exactly this reason - the interdisciplinary model of education offered at Evergreen is ideal for real-world application as it encourages evaluation of environmental issues from multiple angles. Understanding the physical ramifications of climate change as well as the social and philosophical implications is critical, because these facets exist in tandem with one another at all times. I consider my background to be interdisciplinary in a similar fashion, and I do believe that, while the MES program will be a perfect complement to my previous knowledge and experience, it will also reframe and transform my understanding of environmental studies in such a way that my confidence and contributions know no limits.