

Application Related Information

Application: Application Verified
Grad Program Applying To: MES

Iteration Name: 202510_GR_G
Program Name: MES

Recommendation Information

Recommended By: Courtney Leisner
Recommenders Institution: Virginia Tech
Waive Access to Recommendation Ltrs: I choose to waive my right to review this recommendation.
Recommendation Form Submitted: ✓

Recommenders Title: Dr.
Contact Name: Morgan Shelton
Recommendation Waiver Choice:
Recommendation Status: Received

Received Date: 10/10/2023 12:15 PM
Recommendation Type: General
Recommendation Entity ID: 1024000110586461

Recommender Assessment: I recommend this applicant.
Recommender Form: Letter of Recommendation
Recommendation Owner: Josephine Bernier

Recommender Form Questions

How long have you known applicant:	Applicant ability as self-directed learner:
Time since last contact with applicant:	Applicant as productive member of group:
Relationship with Applicant:	Applicant most significant strengths:
Ability to complete rigorous grad program:	Responsibility/reliability:
Communication Skills - Oral:	Communication skills - written:
Service Orientation-sensitivity/empathy:	Ability to work independently:
Ability to handle stress:	Ability to think critically:
Ability to analyze/problem solve:	Ability to think creatively:
Openness to feedback:	Potential for leadership:
Ability to work in a team:	Personal/professional reflection:

Description Information

Description:

Form URL: <https://evergreenstatecollege.radiu>

Other Information

Created Time: 09/18/2023 07:27 PM
Modified Time: 10/10/2023 12:15 PM

Created By: Josephine Bernier
Modified By: Josephine Bernier



COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES
SCHOOL OF PLANT AND
ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES
VIRGINIA TECH.

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter in support of McKenzie Shelton for admission to The Evergreen State College Master of Environmental Studies Program. McKenzie was an undergraduate researcher in my laboratory at Auburn University. She graduated from Auburn as a University Honors Scholar and was on the College of Sciences and Mathematics Dean's List for two semesters. I was a faculty member in the Department of Biological Sciences at Auburn University from 2018-2023. In August of 2023 I moved my research program to the School of Plant and Environmental Sciences at Virginia Tech. My lab works on genomics-enabled plant physiology to understand climate change impacts on plant production and nutritional quality. Our group works mostly in fruit and vegetable crops, with a current emphasis on blueberries, peppers, and potatoes. Currently, my group consists of one research scientists and three graduate students.

McKenzie entered my group in August of 2019 and has been a positive member of the lab since joining. At the onset of becoming part of the lab McKenzie asked to complete an Honor's project. This shows a level of maturity rarely seen in an undergraduate student. She worked on developing her own research project, while simultaneously working on existing projects in the lab. One project our lab works on is understanding biosynthesis of secondary metabolites in blueberry with potential human health benefits. We examine the role of the iridoid compound monotropein in blueberry physiology and downstream human health benefits. McKenzie worked on cloning a key gene in the monotropein biosynthetic pathway (iridoid synthase, ISY). McKenzie pursued her own project by cloning the gene in flower tissue, as we hoped this would prove more successful than previous work cloning the gene in blueberry fruit. While fruit is an accessible and abundant tissue it is more recalcitrant to RNA extraction. McKenzie has an extreme attention to detail and an ability to maintain multiple aspects of this project at the same time. During her time in the laboratory, she worked directly with the postdoctoral researcher in the lab, taking day-to-day direction, as well as mentoring and advising other undergraduates in the lab. During this time McKenzie developed a level of confidence and independence that allowed me to give her the responsibility of training new undergraduates in the laboratory.

McKenzie's dedication to pursuing post-graduate work in science is also evidenced by her application to the Fulbright U.S. Student program. McKenzie pursued the application to the Fulbright program all on her own. This included establishing a collaboration with the Organization for Tropical Studies. While her application to this competitive program was not selected, I was impressed with her imitative and dedication to the program and application. Since graduating from Auburn University in 2021, McKenzie has pursued her personal and professional goals by moving to Honolulu, Hawai'i. During her time there she has taken a job at a local co-op to interact and assist vendors from O'ahu farms and familiarize herself with local

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fruit and vegetable varieties. This speaks to her dedication and commitment to pursuing her interests in environmental science and conservation. I think her research background at Auburn, exposure to graduate students while in my laboratory, and experiences in Hawai'i make her the perfect candidate for a graduate program at The Evergreen State College. The biggest accolade I can give is that if McKenzie were interested in joining my laboratory as a graduate student, I would happily offer her a position in my research group. I think she is highly deserving of the opportunity to pursue a graduate degree in environmental science.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Courtney Leisner". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Dr. Courtney Leisner
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