

Raised in rural South Carolina by a high school environmental science teacher and a sign language interpreter, my life has been marked not only by an innate sense of both social and environmental justice, but also the ability to adapt and claim for myself a sense of belonging in communities that were either passively indifferent or actively hostile to many of the values I was taught. As a child in a politically progressive and secular home, my childhood in the rural south was spent navigating alienation in the majority white evangelical Christian and conservative community that I was raised and publicly educated in. I mention this not in an attempt to undermine the privilege I received and continue to receive as a white woman, but because I believe this experience is one of the most significant factors shaping how I navigate society as an adult, how I perceive otherness, and how I communicate ideas and understand value systems. I firmly believe that environmental movements of today must be willing to communicate in creative ways, understand what motivates people, and work with empathy in and across many varied and insular communities. I feel that the Evergreen MES graduate program aligns with this belief and prepares students to work in this way.

A deep connection to and respect for the environment was instilled in me at a young age, and this has undoubtedly influenced my decision to pursue a career in environmental justice. My family lived on a small homestead with a large garden that backed up to hundreds of acres of privately owned but unmanaged deciduous forests, and I was free to roam. I was connected to the land in ways that I couldn't fully understand or appreciate at that age—things like knowing exactly when and where I could find the tadpoles in early summer or using visual landmarks to navigate the dense forests to return to my favorite meadows or find my way back home. In college I majored in biology, and in my second year I took Biodiversity, Ecology and

Conservation Biology. This class introduced me to ideas that continue to captivate me: the interconnectivity of human and non-human communities and the cycles of growth and decay that sustain life. I excelled in my undergraduate coursework, and I began to work with my mentor, Dr. Allison Welch, to study the effects of anthropogenic changes to the environment on amphibians.

My undergraduate research experience prepared me exceptionally well for a career in the sciences by honing my analytical skills, scientific writing abilities, and my confidence in public speaking. However, I found that I had difficulty seeing the direct impact of my research. After graduation, I chose not to immediately pursue a graduate degree in biological sciences and instead went abroad to teach ESL with the desire to continue developing my Spanish language skills and travel. This experience was humbling and challenging, and only increased my ability to adapt and communicate in new ways.

In the time since, my ways of supporting myself financially have varied, but my interests and experiences have continued my education (both formal and informal) in environmental studies. To name a few, I taught environmental education to Spanish students in the public school system in Galicia as part of my ESL contract. I learned about sustainable architecture while living with and working for a family building their cobb home in rural Bulgaria. I explored the importance of visual communication in the sciences through my certification in Natural Science Illustration at the University of Washington. I began to understand the complexities of both municipal waste streams and soil biomes in my Master Composter certification through the city of Seattle. In Seattle I struggled to find employment that aligned with my background and passions, and outside of my “day job” I began to use visual art as an outlet. This led me to

participating in a variety of artist residencies at the nexus of the arts and sciences. In these programs I was introduced to contemporary artists, scientists, writers, and activists who built and continue to build the foundations of the intersectional environmental justice movements of today. I am immensely inspired by the work of people such as Robin Wall Kimmerer, Octavia Butler, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, Ursula K. Le Guin, Donna Haraway, Wangari Maathai, and Vandana Shiva.

While my trajectory toward a graduate degree in environmental studies may not appear linear, I believe my varied experiences have uniquely prepared me for the complex challenges that our global environments face today. In a social and political climate that is increasingly fractured and unstable, it becomes crucial to build cross-cultural coalitions and systems that are adaptable, inclusive, diverse, and imaginative. I believe the Evergreen MES program's interdisciplinary approach to environmental studies provides the ideal graduate program for expanding and formalizing my education. I am seeking a graduate degree to pursue a career in environmental justice. I want to apply my undergraduate education in the sciences to a career that aligns with my values. I believe my strengths—communication, adaptability, creativity—can be utilized effectively when paired with things I would gain from this graduate program: a deeper understanding of public policy, a better understanding of ecological systems in the Pacific Northwest, and access to unique internship opportunities and relationships.