

Statement of Purpose

Ingrid Zaragoza | Evergreen College | June 14th, 2024

I have always considered myself cognizant of the lack of environmental justices in disadvantaged communities and largely attribute that to my cultural and familial experiences growing up. Being raised in a Mexican household, in a predominantly hispanic city, I recognized the lack of resources, education, and overall environmental disparities in such communities like my own. By obtaining my graduate degree, I hope to continue my education and knowledge in environmental fields to advance within my career and continue to be a resource and advocate for underrepresented communities, and fight for environmental justice.

During my undergraduate career where I majored in plant science, my classes were a blend of horticulture, botany, and agriculture. I selected this major as I knew I could approach environmental issues from a more unfrequented path. I was fortunately selected to partake in multiple research projects during my undergraduate journey. The primary project I was a part of from start to finish was on fava beans in partnership with another university, the project focused on researching whether producing a cover crop for economic value while offering soil health benefits would be more beneficial for farmers in comparison to fallow fields. Partaking in both research projects introduced me to the detrimental effects our current agricultural practices have on our soils leading to the acceleration of climate change and inspired me to further venture into the detrimental effects of agriculture on our planet.

I was initially exposed to environmental injustices prior to my undergraduate journey while employed with The Sam Simon Foundation. The Sam Simon Foundation is a non-profit mobile veterinary clinic that provides free surgeries to pets of low-income families, it is located in Los Angeles, CA. Due to the clinic being mobile, working in low-income communities

throughout Los Angeles County, and at times volunteering in these communities, I saw the dire need these communities were in for a clean environment. The lack of clean parks, clean streets, and clean air is often only present in minority and poor communities. Surrounded by such environments was my first push towards advocating and working to improve the lives of underserved communities through raising awareness and providing education. Though my employment here was not focused around the environment or climate by any means, I quickly realized that environmental justice was in dire need and that I could contribute to bringing such justices through my education and career.

Following my graduation from Cal Poly Pomona, I was employed as a sustainability specialist for CR&R Environmental Services, a waste and recycling company. Due to my being bilingual and past experiences working with primarily hispanic communities, I was assigned to a low-income jurisdiction with a predominantly Spanish speaking community. In my role, I was responsible for getting the jurisdiction to 100% compliance per EPA standards, this required me to host community events, create outreach material, and conduct site visits to speak with business owners. Most of the other cities CR&R oversaw were not low-income or had a large population with people of color, they had compliance numbers of 90% or higher. When I adopted the contract, compliance was at 20%, meaning that only 20% of the residents and businesses were partaking in recycling or composting services leading to higher waste bills and fines for not being a part of the recycling program. These violations to the city's waste laws were a result of poor education by the waste company and lack of outreach from both the waste company and the city. Not only were these communities unaware of why they were being issued citations or why they had such a high bill, but they lived only a few miles from the largest landfill in Los Angeles county. During my employment, prior to moving to Washington, I was able to reach 100%

compliance for the entire jurisdiction. Environmental injustices have historically been observed and continue to be rampant in low-income communities and it is often the most at-risk in society who are affected by environmental injustices. My employment at CR&R further exposed me to such injustices in the waste industry and how often people of color suffer as a result later leading to poor health and living conditions.

As the bilingual licensing and recertification specialist for the Washington State Department of Agriculture, my position includes the creation of exam blueprints, facilitating the translation of exams and their updates into Spanish, auditing and approving recertification courses in Spanish, and acting as liaison between our program and the regulated community and public by providing general interpretation of the federal Certification and Training rule. Working for WSDA, I recognize their growing efforts in expanding accessibility to the Spanish speaking community, who take up a majority of our agricultural workers here in Washington. While employed here I have improved and rewritten exams, created outreach materials, and provided guidance on our Certification and Training rule changes by creating outreach and speaking at events, all in Spanish. In my position I see firsthand the challenges Spanish speaking agricultural workers face, these challenges vary; the state having a limited amount of licensing exams in Spanish, pesticide safety documents being unavailable in any other language other than English, difficulty finding study materials in Spanish, agricultural workers living in rural areas with no access to resources, and so much more.

Our state is striving to expand cultural awareness and address potential language barriers to achieve environmental justice, and I feel fortunate to be a part of such growth, though I am aware more can be done by our governments. I am confident that the graduate program at Evergreen College would both challenge me and encourage me to explore different approaches

to policy changes and environmental issues. I believe I could contribute to bringing people of different backgrounds together and facilitating the growth within our government agencies to achieve better policies, justice, and awareness.