

Statement of Purpose

I grew up in a rural expanse of countryside and farmland. Although my brother and I were sometimes reluctant to help my father with the dusty, hot chores to be done around our wheat farm, I can no longer take for granted the time I spent outside, interacting with my environment alongside people I love. That is where I began to appreciate the plants, animals, bugs, and nature around me. That fascination with people, plants, animals, and the natural world has been fueled at every stage of my education, work, and life.

In the two decades I've been alive I have seen my small corner of the world change drastically. Farmers are forced to fight longer and more violent stints of wildfires that burn through crops each summer, followed by less rain to bring their seeds to life. In 2018, the Substation Fire burned right up to our driveway. I had the responsibility, alongside my father and neighbors, to help contain the fire. Although they didn't take our house, the flames did serious damage to my dad's combine, barn, and a third of our crop. Experiences like this have shaped my mentality toward environmentalism.

After graduating Dufur School with the title of Valedictorian, I decided to pursue a Biology Major at Whitman College. After the rough start of an extremely isolating and polarizing pandemic, I was lucky enough to have Professors willing to put in the work to regain the enthusiasm of us burnt out, anxious students.

At Whitman, I quickly realized that although the details discussed in biology and chemistry classes will always interest me, I was intrigued by the effect of humans—our societal structures and history—on the world around us. I began to take classes within the Environmental Studies Department of the college. There, I researched and wrote on topics like environmental justice, ecofeminism, and the effects of colonialism, which allowed me to bring an interdisciplinary approach to environmental issues. I completed research projects, papers, and presentations on several environmental topics. Some of my favorites include: "The Confrontation of Max Liboiron's *Pollution is Colonialism*", a book review exploring connections between colonialism, capitalism, and pollution; a presentation on Eco-Fascism, displaying the historical and current relevance of fascist themes in environmental issues; and a project proposal on wildfire mitigation on Maui where I discussed the cultural, historical, and environmental factors influencing the wildfires on Maui in 2023.

In summer of 2023, I had the opportunity to complete an ecological research internship with Professor Tim Parker, during which we collected data from several ongoing projects at Wallula Gap Biological Research Station. We mapped, counted, and analyzed data from local plant species. For my Senior Thesis, I elected to use data from the project to compare reproductive success of annual and perennial species between two different microclimates on site: cooler, wetter north-facing sites, and hotter, drier south-facing sites. Using the south-facing sites as a proxy for what the local landscapes might look like as temperatures rise with Climate Change, I determined that over time, native perennial plants will diminish with further heat and drought, while annual (often invasive in this case) species will continue to succeed. One of my biggest goals was to give people tangible evidence of Climate Change on a local scale. Presenting my Thesis at the Whitman Undergraduate Conference allowed me to talk about its implications with people who might not be exposed to the reality of the ecological change going on in their backyards.

Along with my research projects, I had opportunities to gain education experience at Whitman as a Lab Assistant for BIO-112 classes, and as a volunteer with Whitman's Science Night outreach program dedicated to bringing science experiences to local elementary schools. Both of these allowed me to build upon my communication skills with different age groups, which inevitably improved my understanding of the subjects, as teaching often does. After graduation last May, I decided to continue to build on my experience with a position at Woodland Park Zoo as a Camp Leader. There, I learned about the zoo's local and global conservation efforts and educated kids on current environmental issues. With environmental disasters continuing to develop rapidly, early education on environmental issues is increasingly important. Although we have a lot of work to do, change is still possible, and I hope that through research, education, and resilience, Earth can heal. Programs like Evergreen's MES can help push the world to a happier, healthier place, in which we can coexist with each other and nature around us for many years to come.

Whitman provided me with the writing, research, field, and lab experience I needed to realize my commitment to both natural science and environmental humanities. One without the other will never tell the complete story and I am lucky to have the opportunity to delve into both with a Masters in Environmental Studies from Evergreen. With a higher education, I hope to become better equipped to help people understand the complex roots of environmental issues which leaders in academia, government, science, and art are all struggling to fight. Through my previous education and work experience I have gleaned an appreciation for a more holistic approach to environmental topics, considering historical influence, scientific research, and social factors, and I hope that by continuing my education, I will be able to dive deeper into topics I have only scratched the surface of so far. I hope Evergreen State's MES program will provide me with more specific knowledge of ecological systems, and enough flexibility to explore environmental topics from new perspectives. While living here, I have fallen in love with the area and the people in the Olympia and Puget sound area, and hope this program will give me the opportunities to get involved with local research and environmental projects.