

Statement of Purpose

Environmental education has always been my greatest passion and professional career goal. I currently work part-time as an environmental educator at the Puget Sound Estuarium in Olympia, WA. I lead a variety of different education and outreach at the aquarium such as Tiny Tides Storytime (our children's story hour) and Sensory Hour (our outreach program for neurodivergent youth). However, my lack of relevant, formal education has barred me from obtaining a permanent, full-time position in the field of environmental education despite the fact that I have worked in it for almost three years. Evergreen's Master's in Environmental Studies program would solidify my academic credentials and allow me to pursue full-time work in my field of choice. The interdisciplinary nature of the program also lends itself well to my humanities background and would allow me to utilize some of my other academic abilities in a new context.

I obtained my first position at a saltwater aquarium when I was sixteen years old. I was an intern and Running Start student at the Highline MaST Center Aquarium in Des Moines, WA. As an intern, I received training on animal husbandry and interpretation skills. I took all of the Marine Biology, Oceanography and the Biology 100 series as a Running Start student while I was completing my internship. When I turned 18, I moved to Georgia and attempted to continue this path at my undergraduate institution. As a neurodivergent, queer young adult I was met with hostility and did not receive appropriate support from my institution. The lack of support and hostility was so overwhelming that I changed my major to Spanish and spent a year as an exchange student in Ecuador.

My undergraduate institution counted any two-hundred level or above class that was taken in Spanish toward my degree, so I was able to take a variety of classes abroad as long as they were in Spanish. While I was in Ecuador, I was able to participate in experiential learning classes in the Amazon rainforest and Ecuadorian Andes and engage with the ecosystems and indigenous communities that have traditionally inhabited those regions. My coursework abroad solidified the concept that environmental and political solutions are tightly intertwined and the environmental degradation that is experienced in sensitive biomes throughout the Global South such as the Andean mountains and Amazon rainforest are the direct result of colonization and economic exploitation from countries in the Global North.

After I completed my undergraduate studies, I taught ESL in Turkey for a few years. During the summer (June-August), I would lead environmental education programs for elementary school students near Lake Gölcük. This was my first major experience in a freshwater, temperate forest environment. During the program, we would discuss the ecology of the lake, go bird watching and learn about the local flora and fauna. That region of Turkey is well known for its birds of prey such as the Eastern Imperial Eagle and the Black Vulture. Many of the youth that participated in the program were from Istanbul proper and had never spent a substantial amount of time in a forest before. It was incredibly rewarding to help them engage with nature in a way that was previously unfamiliar to them. When I finished my teaching contracts in Turkey, I chose to pursue an MA in Applied Linguistics and teach adult ESL classes in Atlanta, GA.

In 2022, I returned to the world of environmental education when I became a contract educator at the Puget Sound Estuarium. As a contract educator, I helped teach K-12 outreach programs at local schools and field locations. Our curricula focused on the flora, fauna and ecology of the local estuaries of

the South Puget Sound. Our curricula has and continues to have a strong emphasis on human impacts on the local environment and direct actions that young people can take to improve the health of our local ecosystems. We conducted our teaching at various local elementary, middle and high schools and at field locations throughout Thurston and Mason counties.

After a year as a contract educator, I was promoted to a permanent position on the weekends at the Estuarium. As a lead interpreter, I took on supervisory responsibilities and was responsible for redesigning and implementing a new Tiny Tides program for youth in the community. The new program revamped the literacy element of the program and had Merfolk actors from the Merfolk Pod of Olympia read the educational stories about marine life in the Puget Sound. My version of the program also included more time with the touch tanks and more interactive animal feeding experiences. I also expanded upon our Sensory Hour (neurodivergent youth outreach) program and helped add more tactile elements to help engage youth via educational sensory bins and crafts that related to the broader themes of the aquarium's current exhibits. As a lead interpreter, I am also responsible for training and supervising new volunteers and interns. I introduce them to the content and train them on interpretive techniques. I then help periodically assess them and write references and recommendations for former volunteers and interns. Much of the content knowledge that I have acquired in relation to marine biology and Pacific Northwest ecology I acquired while working at the Estuarium and the Highline Community College MaST center. I have assisted with aquarist tasks and animal husbandry at both aquariums that I have worked at.

Evergreen's Master's in Environmental Studies program would help me solidify my knowledge of environmental science and ecology and improve skills as an environmental educator. It would also help me navigate the job market because I would have appropriate credentials for the types of jobs that I am interested in. I love the field that I am in and I look forward to honing in on my knowledge of Pacific Northwest estuary ecology. This will strengthen my abilities as an instructor and allow me to more effectively guide youth toward environmentally responsible activities.