

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Michael Pazen

I want to pursue a master's in environmental studies because I have a deep-seated love and appreciation for the Earth. I want to further my education through Evergreen State College so that I may better understand best practices for taking care of and stewarding our natural spaces. I am passionate about the environmental field, and I am seeking to gain the skills and knowledge that I need in order to empower the next generation of environmental leaders. Through my educational, professional, and community service experiences, I have become inspired to deepen my knowledge and to dedicate myself to giving back to Mother Earth.

My educational experiences influenced my decision to apply for Evergreen's MES program because of my studies concerning the intersections between information and action. I want to use my educational background to synthesize ways to connect others to meaningful environmental work and to get people to care about the current climate crisis. My educational background is in English Literature, but a large part of my work related to how information, misinformation, and disinformation spread, and how language can be a powerful tool to spur people to act. Further, my experiences reading and writing contributed to my developing understanding of how to write for different audiences, tailoring messages to maximize impact. As I continue my education, I am realizing the importance of scientific reasoning and the modes through which scientific findings are communicated to the public. How do we reach people through all the noise? How do we inform? How do we learn?

My decision to seek a graduate degree is influenced by all the time I spent learning about the ecologies of the Pacific Northwest and helping to inspire the next generation of stewards. Through my work with environmental nonprofits, I have gained skills in leadership and have developed my competencies in understanding how to make or keep an ecosystem healthy and resilient. I have worked as a Crew Lead in multiple organizations to help uplift and empower others to perform restoration and conservation based tasks. I have worked to build community with my crews, to confront the climate crisis head on, to learn about and appreciate the land. I have committed myself to supporting emerging leaders and doing what I can to equip them with the tools they need to make meaning, continue to learn about the world, and know that they can make a difference. I have guided others in the quest for answers to questions such as: how did we get here? Where do we go next? Through the MES program, I am seeking to learn more about how to organize, connect with, and support those in the field, those starting out in the field, and those who may feel a lack of connection to the natural world.

The importance of fostering connections with the natural world are evident when considering the effect of the environmental on the human person. My experiences in community work have informed my decision to further my education because of the impact I have observed when helping people. An example of my community work includes volunteering at the Danny Woo community garden in the International District of Seattle. The Danny Woo garden serves elderly Asian immigrants, enabling them to grow culturally significant crops, find community, and exist in a safe and green space in the heart of the city. My work with the farmers and the other volunteers has consisted of preparing garden plots, removing invasive species, and tending to the

garden's infrastructure. In doing so, I have seen the value that community and connecting to natural spaces has had on underserved populations, especially in the context of environmental injustice and the barriers that BIPOC people face in fostering relationships with nature. Through this work, I have interfaced with the various communities that reside in the International District, and I have learned from them how meaningful it is to be able to carry parts of home with them.

All creatures orient towards home. Whether home is the land that has held you for generations, or home is a far off place awaiting, all of us rely on home for safety, community, and love. The Earth is our one and only chance at finding home. She has given us everything. To engage in a truly reciprocal relationship with the Earth, where she is as grateful to us as we are to her, we need to radically rethink our systems and the impacts that they are having on a global scale. I want to pursue a master's in environmental studies so that I may better understand, better care, better give. I want to learn all I can about stewardship, public interface, and the complex webs that make up our everyday lives. Environmental policy, climate justice, and restoration ecology are all areas of study that I want to engage with so that I can learn about how these intersections enable us to better care for the Earth.

We are inseparable from this planet. We must take care of the planet, of ourselves, of life. In the sixth mass extinction, at the dawn of the Anthropocene, we must ask ourselves: what will our legacy be? What will we leave to our children, to our children's children, to the Seventh Generation? How can we live in harmony, how can we live sustainably? In earning a master's degree at Evergreen, I want to take an interdisciplinary approach to searching for methods to address these questions. I want to further my education so that I may enter into the world of environmentalism, not with all the answers, but with the strategies we need to begin asking the right questions. The answers are already here. We need only learn how to listen.