

Statement of Purpose _Environmental Studies (MS.)
Ariana M. Sims (arianamsims@gmail.com) Evergreen State College

I am interested in applying to the Environmental Studies Master's Program at Evergreen State College. Currently I am in the process of completing my undergraduate degree in Environmental Studies (May 2025) and would like to further enhance my knowledge and study as a graduate student in the Environmental Studies Program.

My goal as a graduate student is to work with faculty and help conduct research in areas such as habitat conservation management, environmental policy/sustainability, environmental justice and related topics. I also hope that my experience and knowledge gained through this program will pave the way for a career in resource conservation management, specifically as it relates to public lands, managing invasive species, reintroduction of endangered species and supporting indigenous and underserved communities through environmental policy and sustainability. I am particularly drawn to this program due to its strong environmental curriculum. Also, I lived in Washington state until age 6 prior to moving to Maryland. I have fond memories of the Seattle area and long to return to the Pacific Northwest for its natural beauty, diversity and tolerance.

As an undergraduate I majored in Environmental Studies with a minor in Conservation Biology and Environmental Management. During my time as an undergraduate I have had the opportunity to participate in research. In one of my courses, I had to analyze the relationship between access to healthcare and income levels. The research was essential for me to develop necessary skills such as being able to write a literary analysis, use proper citations, and to read and interpret peer reviewed articles. It allowed me to explore the complexities of how research is done, and drawing educated conclusions even when conflicting studies exist. I have also done group research projects. For example, in the lab portion of General Ecology, the assignment was to develop a research question and devise a related experiment. We decided to research the relationship between water temperature and the number of crayfish present. This project gave me experience with group research and hands on experience with biological assessments such as collecting and identifying crayfish numbers. This project was unlike research projects in the past because it challenged us to think "outside the box" by identifying a worthy research project and justification.

Another challenge that I had encountered with research was interpreting the results. The data would not always support the hypothesis my group developed and there were often clear correlations. In addition, working as a group meant we all had to come to a consensus of what the data was revealing. Coming to a consensus was challenging because each of us had a slightly different interpretation of the data. I believe that this research experience will benefit me in graduate studies because it took me through many of the steps and challenges that go along with conducting research. Being able to develop, justify, design and interpret data are all essential parts of conducting research, and ensuring that your experiments can be repeated and used by others.

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I am grateful to have had the opportunity to study a broad range of subjects concerning the environment as an undergraduate. Nevertheless, I do take an interest in some specific environmental related topics. One of these interests being endangered and threatened species as well as environmental policy and justice. My previous experiences have sparked an interest in pursuing these fields. During my time at the University, I minored in Conservation Biology and Environmental Management. This revealed to me the scale at which environmental degradation, and species loss was happening. Interning for the Fish and Wildlife Service at “Seney National Wildlife Refuge” in Michigan for an entire summer helped further cultivate my love for nature and passion for habitat conservation and to preserve endangered species for future generations.

If I were to do research related to this area, the focus would be on endangered species, the reintroduction of those species, population dynamics and developing a species survival plan. As a part of this research, it would be important to initially identify which species would be most vital to conserve. Also, of interest would be work related to the conservation of large mammals, particularly those that are predatory. Considering that there has been a decline in major predators (such as wolves and cougars) and that these larger predators are at greater risk of extinction than smaller more abundant species, this research could tie into other aspects such as the population dynamics in an ecosystem. It would be interesting to discover the impacts of reintroducing large predators and how that would affect the population of other organism as well as the overall impacts to that ecosystem.

An additional research idea that is fascinating to me would be working on habitat restoration, particularly how fragmentation, agriculture and urbanization has impacted the quality and connectedness of habitats. I am particularly interested in wetland preservation because they are crucial for habitat protection. Many wetlands have been drained for agricultural purposes but they provide vital nesting and breeding habitat for a multitude of species. Seeking a solution to this habitat degradation while still ensuring that society’s needs are being met would be interesting yet challenging. In addition, it would be interesting to investigate how urbanization and fragmentation affects biodiversity and ecosystem functions such as nutrient cycling and dispersal patterns. Furthermore, I would be interested in analyzing the effects of invasive species on an ecosystem, and determining whether invasive species removal is worthwhile. Another interest of mine is environmental justice and the disproportionate effects of environmental hazards to the health of certain communities.

I am interested in working with Professor Sarah Hamman regarding her ecological restoration research. Also, Professor Shangrila Joshi’s work with global climate and environmental justice is of particular interest.