**﻿﻿Desiree Andersen**

*Brooks Statement:*

Not required – AmeriCorps Alum

*Merit Essay:*

During my time as a graduate student in the MES program at Evergreen, I have experienced great personal and professional growth which I believe will help me reach my goals in the field of environmental science. My focus has always been very science-oriented, so I feel the MES program is helping me achieve my career goals by giving me different perspectives in environmental studies. In fall quarter, I wrote a research paper on the ecological effects of prescribed fire on prairie ecosystems in the Pacific Northwest. I also researched and wrote a paper on the reforestation and forestry practices in South Korea. In the future, I hope to study ecology in South Korea, so writing this paper helped me further my understanding of the country’s history and policy regarding the forested environment. This quarter, I am continuing my research of South Korean ecological studies by focusing my candidacy paper on the country’s protected natural areas system. I feel confident in my research and writing on this topic, and I feel it will further contribute to my career goals. As part of my research interests, I applied for a grant program (EAPSI) through the National Science Foundation. I recently found out that I have been accepted, which is a huge accomplishment for me personally and professionally. This grant will allow me to complete my thesis research, and it will help me build professional connections in South Korea in the field of ecology.

**Paige Anderson**

*Brooks Statement:*

In 2014, I was diagnosed with severe anxiety disorder. For me, regular life is stressful. During my time at MES it has been more so. With very limited income (only 30 hours a week between my husband and I) and only loans for financial aid, I have struggled to make ends meet. For the first time in our lives we have had to go on food stamps. I want to believe that being an environmental educator will be worth the personal struggles. I have recently sought professional counseling to deal with these issues.

*Merit Essay:*

The MES program has given me the opportunity to explore the topic that interests me most deeply, forest management in dry coniferous forests. I have become very knowledgeable about forest management in the interior west through the development of an interdisciplinary group project on fire management in gCORE, and my candidacy paper on restoration of inland west ponderosa pine stands. In addition to focusing on fire regime forests, I took an elective on Water Management. In this course, I focused my individual research on community outreach and riparian restoration. I also have been interning for the City of Olympia’s Environmental Services team. My position with the city is as a Stormwater Outreach and Education Intern. The goal of my internship is to bridge scientific knowledge about non-point pollution with community outreach through events and publications. This has been a valuable experience that has developed community interest skills vital to my career goal of making public lands more accessible to all citizens for recreation and education. Another step towards this goal is the upcoming training to be a certified interpretive guide. I believe that climate policy of the future will be influenced by grassroots movements and community environmental education. During my time at Evergreen I have worked tirelessly towards my goal of working in forest management with community and climate change in mind. Scholarship would greatly help my ability to continue courses next year and carry out a meaningful thesis project.

**Lesley Braden**

*Brooks Statement:*

The decision to return to school as a non-traditional student at the age of 37 was not easy because of the potential debt. I was happily accepted to the MES program, but did not receive any non-load awards for the 2015-16 school year. Thus, I have continued to work part-time as a barista in Seattle, driving down to Olympia to attend school part-time. I use my loans for tuition, in addition to many living expenses. My hope is to be able to go to school full-time next year so that I may complete the program in Summer or Fall 2017.

*Merit Essay (>250 words):*

I must admit that I did not come into MES with a lot of confidence. I knew that I was going to be different from the majority of the other students in the program, coming to graduate school later in life than most, and with a scholarly background that was not related to Environmental Studies. However, the format of the program quickly made me realize that my situation gives me some advantages, and I'm extremely grateful to Evergreen for recognizing the potential in non-traditional students. However, my background has, in some ways, made the work especially challenging for me. In addition to learning the subject matter, I also devoted much time learning how to be in graduate school. I discovered how to navigate online databases of research material, how to read research papers that were in fields that I knew nothing of, and, most of all, how to see problems through multiple viewpoints. My confidence skyrocketed when I was asked by a faculty member if my first essay could be used as an example for future students. This boost reminded me that I do have many of the skills needed to do well in MES, and that I was capable of acquiring those that I did not immediately have. I met all of my assignment deadlines on time and my feedback and evaluations indicate that I am a valuable student in the program. I appreciate that my own worldviews have been challenged and I am able to conceptualize issues as part of complex systems, understanding that nothing is “black and white.” These are exactly the challenges I welcome because my goal upon graduation is to apply myself to catalyze change through working with people.

**Joseph Burgess**

*Merit Essay:*

My first year of the MES program proved indispensable for my future. The Environmental Justice curriculum illuminated a path that I have sought for years; I hope to contribute to narrowing the resource gap between the global North & South through a focus on sustainable international community development and water resource management. Evergreen’s doctrine of progression & interdisciplinarity enabled me to apply the accomplishments from the first year by allowing a leave of absence to work for an NGO in the Dominican Republic. I was able to compose numerous grant proposals, provide guidance on Monitoring & Evaluation that I learned in an Independent Study Contract with an MPA professor, and encourage a paradigm shift toward sustainable development in the organization. This work would have been near impossible without MES coursework like preparing grant proposals, statistical analysis, and educational opportunities outside of the program. The most advantageous aspect of my growth has been the removal of inhibitions when it comes to seeking information, within and outside of Evergreen & academia. Some of the most advantageous learning took place outside of the classroom via meetings with professors, classmates, faculty and local figures. I learned to use Evergreen as a facilitator for collecting information and resources. This experience has profoundly enhanced my capacity to reach my professional goals, and I am eager to expand this capacity further during my thesis year.

**Liliana Caughman**

*Merit Essay:*

Learning was always the love of my life. A desire for knowledge led me down a path filled with rich experiences and intense study. But then one day I was sitting in a corporate office and the spark was gone. The one-dimensional work was dreary; supposed “success” was nothing but sterilization to me. That’s when I found Evergreen and began to find myself again. Now my life has completely changed; MES has shown me that learning communities of interdisciplinary thinkers can truly prosper. This culture has allowed me to thrive in my classes and receive stellar evaluations from my professors. MES has presented countless opportunities and I try to capitalize on each one. Working at the Sustainability in Prisons Project I am able grow and contribute to society in innovative ways. After a profound experience in Environmental Education, and completion of an ILC, I have been hired as an interdisciplinary math instructor for Nisqually’s tribal college. I also applied for the Evergreen Sustainability Fellowship to support a summer project with students at that site. MES has helped me reconnect with my academic desires. It has unearthed my passion for engaging underserved populations in environmental learning and has given me the tools to be successful at it. Rarely does one experience true revitalization, but in MES I have. Hopefully with a scholarship I can continue this journey, without significantly adding to my incurred student debt. I received no gift funding for my first year and would truly appreciate your financial support.

**Joshua Christy**

*Merit Essay:*

The MES program has helped me improve my writing. Had you read my writing before, one word would have come to mind: boring. As a well-trained biologist, I was an expert in regurgitating large quantities of information from academic journals and calling it a paper. This lack of voice, style, commentary, and argument was quickly fixed here. During GCore, I learned how to make a thesis statement that was more than a summary. My papers became arguments. As I progressed through the program, my writing evolved to make more nuanced arguments and also began to address counter arguments. It took another leap as I learned techniques to improve my sentence structure and how to have the humility to receive feedback. I hope now as you read my writing words other than boring come to your mind. In addition to writing skills, the program has given me the content knowledge that I need to succeed in the environmental field. Before MES, I had never taken a class with the word “environment” in the title. It has introduced me to the seminal works of writers such as Rachel Carson, Garrett Hardin, and Aldo Leopold. During class, I imagined how Elinor Ostrom’s ideas of polycentric governance could be applied, or how I could avoid psuedorepilcation. By developing my writing skills and acquiring content knowledge, I am becoming more prepared to work in higher education. I hope that I can share what I have gained with college students in the future as a professor.

**Caroline Collins**

*Brooks Statement:*

During my time as an MES student I have had several personal struggles, which were challenging, but allowed for tremendous personal growth. Three of my immediate family members, including my sister, grandmother, and grandfather, have died in the past year. Also during my time in the program, I have had to move several times. Despite these difficulties, I have worked hard to develop a greater sense of calm and acceptance in the face of change. I am happy to be continuing in the MES program, and I embrace whatever happens next in this life.

*Merit Essay:*

As an MES student, I have achieved many personal and professional accomplishments. In my first year, I attended school full-time while continuing to run my own business as a massage therapist and yoga instructor. After being out of school for nine years, getting through school felt like a major accomplishment. Along with this, my massage business, which is still fairly new, has continued to grow with great success. My academic growth in the program has been substantial; my analytical thinking, writing, public speaking, and communication skills have all vastly improved. Before starting my MES degree, scientific research was somewhat intimidating to me. After completing my first year and following the candidacy paper in particular, I am now much more comfortable and confident in both my research and writing skills. My capacity for learning has also increased, and I have a much greater understanding of current environmental issues and potential solutions. After completing the program, I intend to work for a local nonprofit dedicated to watershed restoration. Up to this point, all my electives have been chosen with this end goal in mind. Considering my previous accomplishments and continued diligent work in the program, I am confident in my ability to reach my professional goals with an MES degree.

**Paula Cracknell**

*Brooks Statement:*

Parenting two small children alone and participating fully in MES is financially challenging.My children look to me to carve a brighter and finacially secure path for the three of us. I am a first generation student in my family, so attending the program is a major feat for someone with my socioeconomic background. I rely on student loans to pay tuition and help with transportation costs yet I admit I worry constantly about how to make ends meet. Internships help ease some financial strain, but financial help from MES would help to soothe my worries considerably while writing my thesis.

*Merit Essay:*

The interdisciplinary approach to learning in the MES program for me facilitates synthesis between the concepts I learn and a broad range of application for those ideas. The methods and technical skills of each discipline are like puzzle pieces. As my understanding of each of the pieces deepens, I progress incrementally from seeing a cartoon drawing of what’s going on to a high-resolution image. The puzzle pieces begin to fit together into a larger picture. If my rate of learning approaches a diminishing returns on my scholarly investment, the connections across disciplines make up for the loss. Rather than burning out, I often feel that I’m running downhill learning. Interning helps me see that the whole puzzle is even bigger. Field research on JBLM prairies, at sea on the Puget Sound observing cetaceans, and analyzing photographic data of in situ animals for real-world applications are like a grounding third camera angle, through which I can see how my scholarly endeavors relate to my eventual career as an environmental planning professional, even while I’m learning. The MES program is uniquely set up to canalize the feedback loops of idea synthesis and interning into a permanent learning process for students, so we become masterful lifelong learners. I know, because I already benefit from the results.

**Seth Dorman**

*Merit Essay:*

I am an out of state student from Virginia that recently obtained a B.S. in biology. Having mostly taken courses in the natural sciences, my first year as an MES student has broadened my knowledge of the political, social and economic facets that underlie complex environmental issues. I am also working for the Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP) on campus as the Taylor’s Checkerspot Butterfly Program Coordinator. With the guidance of WDFW and the Oregon Zoo, I have continued to collaborate with corrections staff and inmates at Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women (MCCCW) to nearly double the rearing capacity for the species, releasing 2,500 butterflies onto South Puget Sound prairies every year. It has been fascinating to work on a conservation project that continues to transform the lives of inmates working as science technicians and also enhance the viability of an endangered species simultaneously. I have already submitted several grant proposals with the guidance of WDFW for my thesis work. I plan to assess the degree of genetic transfer that has occurred between the Taylor’s checkerspot’s population source (Range 76), the brood stock at MCCCW, and reintroduction sites (Range 50) in order to evaluate how well current breeding and release protocols are capturing the genetic diversity in the source population in the wild. Following an MES degree, I plan to pursue a PhD in entomology while working in an integrated pest management lab that seeks to find biological solutions for invasive pests that are ecologically, economically and socially sustainable.

**Fawn Harris**

*Brooks Statement:*

Just prior to starting my first quarter at MES, I lost my job of over eight years. As the primary provider for my family of four that was financially devastating. Because of the layoff, I had to move my family to Olympia from Kitsap County, which caused a lot of stress on myself and my children. My children have had hard time adapting to new schools and new neighborhoods. The job loss and move at the beginning of the MES program was extremely hard for me and my family, we are still recovering from last year’s change in circumstance.

*Merit Essay:*

I entered the MES program with the intent of expanding my knowledge beyond the natural sciences and this program has done just that. As an aspiring conservation biologist, I knew that I needed to strengthen my background in the social sciences and I feel that this program has really helped me grasp the different social aspects of environmental issues. The MES program has also provided me with the unique opportunity to work for the Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP), where I have been able to actively participate in bringing social and natural sciences together for sustainable futures. My experience with SPP has heightened my awareness of the social dimensions of sustainability while also inspiring me to become more active in environmental justice conversations. The most important theme I have learned in MES, is that cooperation among multiple disciplines, institutions, and structures is essential for environmental sustainability. I decided to attend MES because I knew that an interdisciplinary education would serve my future career as a conservation biologist well. What I didn’t know, was how inspired I would be to study the other disciplines represented throughout MES. My experience in MES is everything I hoped it would be and more. I think that this program has and will continue to provide me with valuable knowledge and skills for a future career working to conserve biological diversity for future generations.

**Hilary McGowan**

*Merit Essay:*

The MES program thus far has drastically expanded my career options and goals, as my entire focus has shifted based on the content of the classes I have taken. I transformed from a prospective conservation biology focus, to one that examines political ecology and the future for urban sustainability. Within the program I have been challenged to improve my academic writing, hone my ability to present professionally, and to digest environmental knowledge in completely new contexts. As a first generation graduate student, and first ever to attend college in my family, the MES program is an honor and a test to be a part of. I anticipate growth in my ability to critically examine environmental issues through innovative methods and strengthening my ability to present these concepts on a professional level. In order to sustain a career in such a developing field, the MES program is providing me with the tools to hone my critical analysis on environmental inequality. I wish to use my degree to continue on as a PhD to further my opportunities for research and to establish myself as specialized in this field. I have been an engaged and active participant in my program, and I plan on continuing this effort into my classes and thesis work. Despite my personal struggles to be a graduate student, I dedicate myself to continuing my efforts to be a committed student within the MES program.

**Trace McKellips**

*Brooks Statement:*

Not required – AmeriCorps Alum

*Merit Essay:*

The MES program has enabled me to build upon my strengths that I developed as a former AmeriCorps and Peace Corps Volunteer. In my first quarter, I strove to promote healthy dialogue and build rapport with my cohort and faculty. Indeed, my evaluation noted that I "was a leader in both small and large group discussion" and "showed genuine interest in the perspectives and insights of other students." One particular area that I am actively working to improve is my ability to deliver compelling arguments. Being able to articulate complex issues in a clear, compelling manner will help me achieve my goal of working in land conservation. The MES program incorporates many of the skills including improved communication, organization, long-term planning, research and analysis that are essential in land conservation. This spring I will also be beginning GIS courses, an invaluable "hard" skill used in land conservation. In addition, I will be working as an intern with the Office of Environmental Policy and Sustainability to put these skills to practice for energy conservation and land use balance within a city government planning office. Overall, I have stood out in this program with my strong academic performance and interpersonal relationships with students and faculty alike. I will continue to fully apply my talents to meet my professional goal of working to balance human and environmental needs within the field of land conservation.

**Emily Passarelli**

*Merit Essay (>250 words):*

During my time at Evergreen, I have grown tremendously. When I first entered this program, I had almost no background in earth sciences and was unsure of what I could handle. Once I started the program, I discovered I was able to push myself much further than I had previously imagined. I found myself working hard to understand chemistry (a particular struggle for me). I had never felt prouder than when I understood Professor Martin’s explanation of ocean acidification. MES allowed me to better understand challenging subjects while also helping me recognize areas in which to improve. I have made progress as a student, but I still have much to learn. For instance, I am working to improve my writing skills by attending the Environmental Communication and Rhetoric class which gave me more opportunities to receive feedback and revise my writing. The MES program has allowed me to understand how adaptable I can be. In addition to providing me the tools to learn and improve, MES has given me the confidence that is vital in the professional environment. Through this program, I have had the honor and privilege of working with SPP. I have been able to work in a professional environment, and also have had the opportunity to work directly in the field that interest me most: environmental justice and education. SPP has shown me that this field is truly where I belong and thrive. I look forward to growing and achieving greater things as a student, professional, and an environmentalist.

**Mary Silva**

*Brooks Statement:*

Although I am extremely grateful to be in MES and feel that this program will supply me with the tools I need to achieve my dreams, I have struggled financially most of all. I did receive financial aid, however that has not been enough to cover all of my groceries and transportation expenses. For these charges, I have been forced to ask my parents for help. Additionally, I’ve been offered a summer internship to work with an Oregon endangered butterfly, and I am very concerned how I might keep my Olympia home as well as find housing for the summer.

*Merit Essay (>250 words):*

Despite being apprehensive about the social studies aspect of the MES program, I am very glad that I chose it as my masters program. Coming from a predominately technical background in biology, I have learned the great importance of understanding how social constructs can hinder conservation and how best to respond to those social issues. My greatest success thus far has been learning the challenges of incorporating social needs with ecological needs. Humbly, I do not assume that I’ve achieved exactly how to practically incorporate what often seems to be opposing needs, but I have achieved awareness of such conflicts. Additionally, I have also gained substantial feedback on how to better my written and oral communication, which I value very highly as I find communication quite necessary and enjoyable. Despite being apprehensive about the social studies aspect of the MES program, I am very glad that I chose it as my masters program. Coming from a predominately technical background in biology, I have learned the great importance of understanding how social constructs can hinder conservation and how best to respond to those social issues. My greatest success thus far has been learning the challenges of incorporating social needs with ecological needs. Humbly, I do not assume that I’ve achieved exactly how to practically incorporate what often seems to be opposing needs, but I have achieved awareness of such conflicts. Additionally, I have also gained substantial feedback on how to better my written and oral communication, which I value very highly as I find communication quite necessary and enjoyable. These tools will only serve to further my abilities in academia or research, or in a governmental agency such as the Department of Fish and Wildlife, or the Department of Conservation. I will use these tools both to aid me in achieving a doctorate dissertation in the future, and to better communicate the need for wildlife conservation, particularly of invertebrates, and how these needs directly reflect those of humans and their resources. I have long dreamt of becoming a professor, and also considered using my skills in a governmental role. For these reasons, I feel fortunate to have chosen MES as my masters program and am elated to further my education into my second year.

**Arielle Simmons**

*Brooks Statement (>100 words):*

To best express my personal struggle in MES I will begin with a poem: To what extend does the writing stop and the action begin? The articulation of verbatim information, the drudgery of end times and the sickness felt within the self and the earth. When do we start to correct our actions and change our motives? When do we start to remove ourselves from our spheres of existence and into new conjoining ones? The misanthropic melancholia of dystopia. Gravity is already felt on the hands and knees of the elderly and tired, and so too will it be felt on the hands and knees of the young and vital. The gravity of a sick planet weighs down progress, strips humanity of all its creations, injures our own aesthetic removes us further from all we’ve come to know. To what extent can environmentalism be made optimistic? Be made notable, be made to create and substantiate momentum? This is the point in which I sincerely struggle. People laugh and begrudgingly say that I am attempting to save the planet when I say I am in an environmental master's program. I simply respond "No, I am attempting to discern the best and most effective affective methodology to communicate climate risk to the masses." To prepare people for a life of selflessness, sacrifice, and compassion in a new and unfamiliar world.

*Merit Essay (>250 words):*

Awe is a rare occurrence. Mundane interaction and expectation can often strip the wonder from life— distort the meaningfulness of life. So many agents around us act to desensitize us, to mute our creativity, choke our intuitive senses, and disconnect us from the environments which sustain our physical, mental, and spiritual selves. Incredible lines of traffic that fill the roadways with vehicles and the air with CO2, a stuffy office space, a boxy cubical, an angry boss, mindless television; a life where the ultimate goal is a paycheck—the guarantee of a better future with money to spend on materials that often just create the illusion of choice and momentary happiness. While I am not opposed to this life, I do not wish to surrender to complacency. Instead, I have chosen a more challenging path. MES has undoubtedly been difficult. As expected, no quest for self-potential is ever easy, just as no easy challenge is ever truly worthwhile. Though I am still unsure about my how experience in this program will influence my progressional career, I am confident that the wealth of knowledge I am accruing, the ideas I am formulating, and the depth in which I am thinking can and will yield incredibly influential and positive outcomes. My participation in MES has meant rooting myself in a culture that is promotional of high intelligence, careful and considerate thinking, and analytical structure building. Seeing the world through this MES kaleidoscope has not only made me a stronger more critical thinker, but continues to prepare me to take on some of the enormous challenges present in our society today. I look forward to a future where creativity, community, and connectedness define humanity, continuously evoking a deeply embedded sense of awe under the domed sky of our beautiful blue planet.

**Kristin Wilmes**

*Brooks Statement:*

I began the MES program when my son was two. The program was beneficial because it allowed me to stay at home with my son during the day while taking classes in the evening. Despite the flexibility that night classes gave me, going to graduate school while attending to the needs of a toddler is one of the biggest challenges of my life. With one year of thesis work still in front of me I am about to have my second son. This will no doubt be the hardest year of my life and I am as ready as ever.

*Merit Essay:*

I started the MES program with a Geology degree, excited to learn more about the sciences. What I was not expecting to learn was the complexity of Earth’s systems and how interconnected issues today are. This program has taught me how to look at problems from different angles, to take everyone’s position on an issue into account before evaluating how to go about solving the problem. Issues like water rights or forestry are not black and white, but have many gray areas. I have learned about the seriousness of the changing climate and the affects it may have on this region. This program has also shed light on the politics and policies behind many of the arising debates today. My geology degree focused mainly on science while skimming past the politics involved in natural systems. I have learned that I want to be a part of the processes involved in making decisions that affect the environment. I do not want to sit back and let others make these decisions for me. The education I have received in the MES program will help me as I continue into to job sector and need to make educated decisions about policies, bills or maybe future restoration projects. My goal is to get a job working for a local government agency, like DNR or Department of Fish and Wildlife, so I can use the science skills and policy knowledge that I have gained to help protect the resources that the Pacific Northwest provides people.

**Yonit Yogev**

*Merit Essay:*

The MES program has sparked an explosion of intellectual excitement, vigor, energy and growth in me, which continue unabated. First quarter’s interdisciplinary project launched me back into research, literature reviews, and writing. Our group project allowed me to investigate the world of grassroots activism and environmental justice, and laid the groundwork for second quarter’s candidacy paper. That endeavor resulted in a well-received scholarly work examining the reasons for the lack of diversity in National Park visitors, and has led to a passionate interest and likely thesis topic. My internship in Mount Rainier’s outreach and volunteer program allowed me to flourish by helping lead volunteers in citizen science, creating connections with community groups in an effort to help the park push forward its goal of greater accessibility, and closely experiencing how NPS functions. The EE elective introduced Community-based Social Marketing to my repertoire. I was able to share this critically valuable concept with colleagues in my current internship in Israel, connecting them with local professionals who will now guide them in incorporating it into their ambitious local sustainability partnership, greatly increasing the chances of its success. I’ve grown tremendously in my ability to make connections, bridge interdisciplinary gaps, and dive into aspects of natural science I did not think were possible. There is utter joy in the connections! The work I accomplished at Mount Rainier, and the tools I continue to learn in MES place me in excellent stead for achieving my long-time goal of working for the National Park System.