**Jeannie Dodds:**

*Brooks Statement:*

My father passed away from terminal illness 4 months before I started earning MES credits; I took a one-year deferral to serve as a caretaker for him. Besides mentally and emotionally coping with this devastating loss, I endured extreme stress during the first quarter of MES, resulting from the emergency intensive care hospitalization and near death of my mother following major surgery. Over winter break, I suffered another loss: a dear friend since infancy (also a college roommate and classmate), passed away. My situation requires that I live in both Seattle and Olympia, a complex, challenging financial and logistical experience.

*Merit Essay:*

Entering the MES program from a visual arts background, familiar with paradigms and systems which function differently than many within social or natural science, presents the opportunity for my understanding of ecological concepts from a unique perspective. For both my candidacy paper and Restoration Ecology literature review, I selected interdisciplinary topics which bridge visual art and science. In doing so, I have begun to accomplish primary goals for participating in this program: to better understand relationships, similarities, and distinctions between these disciplines. In professional work after earning a Master’s degree, I hope to work on socially divisive ecological problems and use the common language of art and science to increase communication and visibility of critical environmental issues. This is relevant within my present job as an Environmental Educator and consultant for the Endangered Species Coalition. In this work, I develop integrated curriculum and advocate for the use of visual imagery within lessons as a tool for social engagement in environmental problems. In my second job as a Conservation Nursery Coordinator with Sustainability in Prisons Project, I have created and presented scientific illustration lectures at three prison facilities. The goal of these lectures is to engage underserved populations in the kinds of integrated arts and science learning which is foundational to my work in MES. Lastly, I have endeavored to extend myself beyond expectations of a first year student, applying to present a poster based on the work in my candidacy paper at the International Society for Conservation Biology conference.

**Pam Ronsen:**

*Brooks Statement:*

Becoming an MES student demands self-refinement. Aware of this, a gentle sifting process has gradually confirmed my commitment to Evergreen, to MES, and, ultimately, to myself. Sacrifices included letting go of a job I loved, a field I knew, and diverse ethnic social circles. Yet, slowly, I’ve embraced each challenge; over six months, I’ve experienced more internal fine tuning than I could have ever imagined or wanted. Owning my title as an ethnic minority female scientist took time; the decision to honor myself meant listening to the voice within, pushing me to go beyond what I thought possible.

*Merit Essay*

 As an MES student, I’ve achieved incremental goals to create a meaningful graduate program experience. Working ahead of schedule, I’ve initiated steps to conduct preliminary research for my thesis, including sample collecting, lab work, and data analysis this spring. Additionally, becoming a member of the newly-formed group, Women in Science at Evergreen (WISE), has positively challenged my identity and reinforced my commitment to lead other ethnic minority female scientists. Moreover, I’ve worked hard to take ownership of my learning. I’ve opened my mind to consider new perspectives about the “slow violence” occurring in our environment, about our anthropogenic impacts on the global carbon cycle, and about the importance of conserving and restoring biodiversity – otherwise, we risk losing answers to questions we may never get to ask. Each quarter, what remains constant is my ability to actively seek out new learning opportunities, rather than wait for them to appear. My personal growth informs my success in the program. Upon self-reflection, I’ve pushed myself in ways I never thought possible. For example, I now consider myself a writer. My ability to write well is the greatest weapon I have as a minority female scientist. Furthermore, sharper critical thinking skills helped me accept the challenge of writing an NSF grant for my fall elective’s final paper. Armed with tools and confidence, I now consider a PhD a serious professional goal. One day, I intend to work with an interdisciplinary research team to build upon the work accomplished through my Master’s thesis at Evergreen.

**Jessica Olmstead:**

*Merit Essay:*

It is incredible how empowered I feel after graduating with my bachelor’s degree, working four years at a government agency, and finishing my first quarter of graduate school. I want to use that power to make a difference in the world by helping to restore water quality and mitigate human impact on our changing climate. The beauty of this program exists in the diversity of perspectives from my fellow cohort and faculty members. In the past, I have preferred to observe and reflect, especially in large groups where there are many voices to be heard. Through this program, I have improved in my ability to communicate and participate. I’ve asked many questions and shared my opinion freely. My writing style and voice has thrived from peer review and collaborative writing. I have benefited from collaborating with members of varying expertise towards solutions that address environmental, societal, cultural, and political needs. As I gain more experience, understanding, and self-assurance, I realize more and more the need to be a strong female voice in environmental and social justice. I need to be able and willing to have difficult conversations and be in the position to make decisions in management. This program has provided awareness to the power that comes from integrating policy, science, and societal values into ecosystem-based management. The dual knowledge I have learned as a student and as a state employee has been exceedingly beneficial in my comprehension, practical application, and abilities as an environmental advocate.

**Tara Newman:**

*Merit Essay:*

The MES program has allowed me to develop skills in a multitude of areas, and has opened my mind to new ways of thinking about the environmental issues I have chosen to focus my career on solving. Coming into the MES program, I had a strong undergraduate background in ecology and natural resource science. However, most of my previous education was science-based and technical, so it has been interesting and enlightening to expand my knowledge in an interdisciplinary capacity that integrates concepts from the social sciences. Subjects such as philosophy of science, discourse analysis, and sociopolitical systems presented me with a lens through which to view and draw connections between environmental problems that I had never had the opportunity to use before. In addition to expanding my modes of thinking and analysis, it has been refreshing to get back into the process of using writing to explore ideas, build arguments, and synthesize information in ways that are less common in the professional environment. Seminar discussions and presentations have allowed me to learn from my peers and develop skills in public speaking and articulation of ideas. I have also enjoyed building my ecological knowledge, and the interdisciplinary nature of the program has allowed me to explore systems and points of view that will be invaluable to me as I move into a more interdisciplinary resource management career. As I have learned in MES, it is impossible to adequately address natural resource problems without considering both the ecological and social spheres.

**Esmael Lopez:**

*Brooks Statement:*

This year has been very challenging for me. I’m battling finding my place within the Evergreen MES program and my voice as an indigenous person struggling to represent a perspective that is sometimes left out of the conversation. This combined with a constant threat of violence against many people in my community. I have been very involved with community organizing and providing support to the most vulnerable. All these struggles are my struggles and come at a cost of study time, family time and work time but at the end of the day we all have to take a stand.

*Merit Essay:*

I have successfully completed all of my course work and earned the respect of my peers and educators by continually bringing issues of inclusivity, exclusion, cognitive imperialism and colonialism into the classroom. These issues have always been there are but have not been named. When we name something we are able to describe it and by defining the problem we are one step closer to solving the problem. I have grown so much as a student, scholar and person during my short time here in MES. It was very difficult for me to deal with the racist methodologies that are infused in many of the different aspects of our study. I have grown in my ideas that are leading me closer to my thesis question and my goals as a professional. I have come to realize that there aren't very many Indigenous people studying science and that it is my responsibility to hold space for the ideas and teachings of my ancestors. I realize that I must work to bridge differing opinions and ideologies in order to foster understanding. This is the work I hope to do in the future, bring indigenous teachings, science and culture to the forefront of environmental sustainability.

**Maxwell Calloway:**

*Merit Essay:*

My background in political theory and anthropology always seemed far removed from my professional goals in natural resource management and restoration. The MES curriculum has systematically challenged me to reconcile this divide by considering environmental challenges through an interdisciplinary lens. Having grown up by the ocean, I am interested in nearshore ecology and kelp ecosystems. Marine kelp forests are foundational habitats that are crucial for sustainable fisheries. Over the past two quarters my research has focused on the economic and ecological issues surrounding kelp losses and their impacts to coastal environments. This work has resulted in a draft grant proposal, two literature reviews and upcoming collaborative partnerships with several organizations. This spring, I will explore commercial kelp cultivation’s potential as an economically sustainable means to combat ocean acidification with the Puget Sound Restoration Fund. I will also participate in a workshop with the Northwest Straits Commission aimed at determining the future trajectory of kelp recovery in the Puget Sound. Lastly, for my thesis, I am working to finalize a field monitoring project in partnership with the Washington Department of Natural Resources. My hope is that my research can help inform future restoration monitoring protocols and adaptive management frameworks. The progress and partnerships I have made over the past six months are a direct result of my participation in the MES program. I wholeheartedly believe that my trajectory in the program will result in skills and relationships essential for addressing coastal environmental issues with sustainable solutions.

**Kenzi Smith:**

*Brooks Statement –* Not Needed, is AmeriCorps Alumnus

*Merit Essay:*

While the MES program has definitely taught me how to speed-read and how to write a huge research paper really fast, there's more to it than that. I came into this program with a lot of strong ideas about how to solve environmental problems, thinking my way was the right way and anyone who disagreed was wrong. By the end of the first quarter I'd been thoroughly disabused of this notion. I used to see all environmental problems as a matter of how to physically, chemically, or biologically solve the issue. I had never seriously considered the social aspect as part of the problem to solve; I didn't care much about people's needs compared to nature's. I used to see a separation between nature and humans; I now know that the divide is artificial. Environmental solutions have to have solutions for people too, because we are part of every ecosystem we touch. I chose the MES program because I thought that getting an interdisciplinary education would be good for me, but it turns out I couldn't really comprehend what 'interdisciplinary' meant until I experienced it for myself. I can't even imagine what kind of thinker and problem-solver I'll be by the time this program lets me loose into the world of gainful employment. I still want to focus more on natural sciences in my career, but MES has prepared me to go into that career with a great deal more thoughtfulness and empathy than I would otherwise have.

**Caitlin Rolhmholdt:**

*Merit Essay:*

a. Although I am a first year MES student currently, I feel as though I have already grown so much since my first day in the program. Perhaps the most personally valuable thing I have learned so far was how to read a text deeply and critically even though it may be difficult or unpleasant. I found I was able to carve out some personal meaning and even enjoyment from texts I disliked through skills I learned in MES. This was an extremely valuable lesson for me, and it opened by eyes to a bias I was unaware that I had. I feel that identifying, confronting, and working to overcome one’s biases is one of the goals of Evergreen, and I am glad that I have already had a chance to begin such work on myself. I look forward to the opportunity to overcome biases and to open my eyes to new learning opportunities. Additionally, I have a full time job with a state government agency and volunteer regularly, which means I attend class after working all day and have reduced time for homework and reading. Despite this, I have maintained excellent attendance (only missing one day due to inclement weather) and have never been tardy to class. I pride myself on achieving a high quality of work, and I believe that my dedication to the MES program will help me achieve my future goals of pursuing a PhD or an environmental law degree.

**Will Golding:**

*Brooks Statement:* Not needed – is AmeriCorps alumnus.

*Merit Essay:*

My MES experience has helped me to continue developing as an environmentally focused advocate for justice as I continue to grow after completing my undergraduate degree at Evergreen in the spring of 2016. I have accomplished personal goals in the program by striving to become a well-respected contributor to the 33rd MES cohort, as well as providing compelling group presentations and technical reports. MES has helped me grow by improving my time management skills while working and attending school. I have also grown in my ability to effectively communicate through written reports providing interdisciplinary assessments on addressing problems of environmental degradation and climate change. I have improved my capabilities to achieve my professional goals of promoting environmental justice through sustainable design of architecture and infrastructure by expanding my interdisciplinary understanding of natural and social sciences on pressing local and global environmental, social, economic, and political issues. This unique perspective helps me to approach solutions to problems in an unconventional fashion while applying strategic actions for effective results. I have been inspired to apply for my first grant, Evergreen Foundation Student Activities Grant, for a group of MES students to attend the International Living Future Institute’s conference this spring to learn about cutting edge sustainable design approaches and how they are working to incorporate a justice focus while also providing an equity critique. My MES experience is changing my life and will provide me with a solid foundation to collaboratively address significant problems facing our world today and in the future.

**Jessica Brown:**

*Brooks Statement:*

As a single mother, I have endured personal struggles throughout my time as a full time student in the MES program. I have had to arrange and pay childcare for my son while attending school late at night. Balancing time with my son as well as school work and a part-time job has been challenging. The financial burden has also been challenging as I do not bring home enough money from a job and financial aid to cover all my expenses. As of March 31, 2017, my PT job will be ending leaving me jobless and without medical benefits.

*Merit Essay:*

My time in the MES program as a full-time student thus far has been both challenging and rewarding. I have stepped out of my comfort zone with my writing and in class discussions—growing in ways that I never expected. One of the most beneficial assignments was my group interdisciplinary project focused on protection of Southern Resident Killer Whales. My group’s frequent communication and collaboration on this project was reflected in the quality of work we generated. I was successful with my contribution of a technical report and presentation based on the history and classification of marine protected areas. Throughout this process I learned how to write effectively with an active voice, which is not how I typically wrote in the past. For my Fall elective, Conserving and Restoring Biodiversity, I chose to write my research paper on climate change and its effects on ticks and tick-borne diseases in wildlife. I have been able to apply concepts learned in gCORE and my elective to coursework for Winter term. I have made connections and have expanded upon them in seminar and writing assignments. For my candidacy paper, I am writing about effective strategies for reducing disease in southern sea otters. The feedback I have received thus far has been positive and I’m confident that I will produce a successful paper. With the wide range of knowledge I am gaining, following completion of the MES program, I am certain that a career in any environmental aspect will be suitable.

**Amanda Mintz:**

*Merit Essay:*

Accepting a place with the MES program was a substantial risk, significantly impacting the trajectory of my life. At nearly 40 years old, I quit my full-time teaching job, downsized over half of my belongings, and moved from Seattle to a tiny house in Olympia with two human and three animal roommates. I don’t regret it for one second. I entered the MES program knowing exactly what I wanted from my education: improved communication skills across broad audiences, and additional training in restoration and conservation sciences. My career goals included planning or adult education. I began working with the Sustainability in Prisons Project as the coordinator of the brand-new Emergent Vegetated Mats project, supervising and educating and inmate crew about aquaponics and wetland restoration. I challenged myself to write about unfamiliar topics, starting with marine biology. By the end of the quarter I had been described by faculty as a “conscientious leader” who presents “with great engagement with the audience” and writes with “engaging and fluid prose.” I was succeeding, but confused. Conceptualizing our Regional Environment (gCORE) opened my mind to environmental humanities and political ecology. Rather than enrolling in Restoration Ecology as planned, I took Art as Argument to explore the role of art in presenting environmental problems. I plan to continue exploring these new-to-me concepts, pushing myself outside the realm of my prior knowledge and experience. One quarter complete, and I am transformed. Teaching is still in my future, but with this new perspective, PhD may also be.

**Leslie Carman:**

*Brooks Statement:*

I grew up in a low-income household and am currently living below the poverty line. I’ve had a difficult time finding any job in Olympia that is along the bus line and the only job I have been able to secure is a 5 hour a week stipend position with the Student Activities Board. I have been struggling to balance school work, job applications, paying bills, finding cheaper housing, and affording food. I have been rejected for every job I am qualified for and have been told that I have to volunteer for them before I can be hired.

*Merit Essay:*

Last quarter I did a research paper and presentation on diversity and representation in botany curriculum and did a group project on food security in Olympia where my contribution was social science and asset mapping. This quarter I am doing a paper and presentation on prairie restoration across the United States and am doing my candidacy paper on stomata evolution and climate change. My writing has improved in the MES program and I have been able to synthesize connections between science, social science, and the humanities in this interdisciplinary program. After the MES program I hope to work in botany for an organization that promotes diversity and inclusion. I also hope to go to graduate school to get my PhD. This program has prepared me to do interdisciplinary work and to understand the relationships between science, policy, the arts, and community and individual decisions. This program has also prepared for a graduate work ethic and writing skills required for PhD. I want to use the skills I learned in this program to understand and alter systems oppress communities and individuals through slow violence and environmental racism. I hope to work as a teacher after obtaining my PhD to provide education opportunities that are not available or difficult to have access to for underrepresented groups. I hope to revive the discipline of botany by introducing and promoting diversity and representation in the core curriculum and creating opportunities for individuals that have diverse educational and career interests.