**Bilezikian Fellowship Essays**

**Emily Denton:**

In the past I have worked as an intern for the Muskingum Soil and Water Conservation District. With them I helped to teach children the importance of preservation and conservation in their communities. This was a fulfilling internship because I got to see the hope build in the children when they realized that they could become a part of the solution of helping to protect the environment. During that internship we taught them the importance of habitats, and that we need to respect the animals’ environment because we were the ones intruding. We also taught them to leave no trace because we need to appreciate nature, and help keep it as pristine as possible. The MES program fits into my long-term plans, because it is the next step for me to achieve my goal of working for the National Park Service. I have dreamed of working for NPS for as long as I can remember. Although a B.S. degree could probably get me a job after college, I truly believe that the experience and knowledge that this master program can give me would be invaluable. I hope to find an internship to work at during my time at Evergreen. I also believe the hands on experience of working while also getting my MES could lead to great things for me. My plans upon graduation include finding a job with the National Park Service, and fulfilling my dream of protecting the natural wonders that this great world has. I think that everyone should get to experience the thrill of hiking, swimming, site seeing, and exploring in a national park, and that includes generations to come. My hope is that I get to be a small part in keeping these spectacular places alive and beautiful for anyone and everyone that wants to come and explore.

**Carly Boyd:**

I have had the opportunity to volunteer for and serve many different organizations in many different ways. I am currently finishing up my second time serving for Americorps, first through college helping out at a local animal shelter and local zoo, and currently as a biological intern for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. My term as the Vice President for the Sustainability Awareness Society at my school allowed me to be apart of the movement on banning fracking in western Maryland. I had the opportunity to work for professors at my school on their long-standing research projects including the success of river otter reintroductions and migration patterns on the northern saw-whet owl. I’ve been able to educate kids of all ages about the importance of the environment through tours and fun programs. All of my experiences have allowed me to find what interests me the most, and I’ve worked hard to figure out what I want to do with my life. I want to be a protector of our environment, whether I do that by advancing as a biologist or being an educator, or by speaking out for environmental safety. I applied to Evergreen State College because I believe this program is the next step for me to find what is the best way for me to make a difference with the skills I’ve already gained and the accomplishments I’ll continue to make as a student. My hope is that graduating from this school will allow me to find a career that I can wake up every day and be proud of because I will be working towards change. Whatever that path may be, I believe Evergreen State College is the next step I need to take as I continue to find my way.

**Sarah Croston:**

My long-term goals include continuing to educate myself and others to stand up for the natural world. After graduate school I hope to work at a nonprofit, protecting land, advocating for the environment, and helping others to find their passion in the outdoor world. I love to learn and share my knowledge with others. I believe that completing graduate school will help me to solidify my path in environmental studies and education. I completed my BS in Environmental Science and have used my knowledge to create environmental curriculum and educate the next generation. I want to teach others not only through my words but through my actions. I hope to show others the joys of the natural world and how to tread lightly on our precious earth. As a child I would spend my time outside learning about the world around me, watching the birds that came to my feeder and learning their names as a toddler. I let dragonflies land on me and tried to catch all the frogs I could. These simple joys have always brought me more happiness than fabricated experiences. These always felt genuine to me. By extending my education I hope to learn the best strategies to get individuals to look outside their window, care about nature, and want to protect it. I believe graduate school will give me the tools to succeed to this mission. I also have a lofty goal of opening up a nonprofit with my significant other. We met as environmental educators working at Mount St. Helens. I want summer camp program for kids ages 5-15 and it would mainly revolve around birds. When they are little they would learn the basics of using binoculars, getting comfortable with sitting still, and developing a love for the local birds. As they got older the camps they would attend would focus more on identification and monitoring behavior. I believe that birds are such a great window into the natural world. They teach you how to be patient, they give you something to observe no matter where you are, and you can learn alot about the environment they live in. My goals are to encourage environmental protection in people of all ages, create excitement about the natural world, and continue to advocate for the environment.

**Michael Levkowitz:**

I am pursuing an MES at Evergreen to “shape the path” for myself to become more like Sara Ann Bilezikian. That is not to say that I am dissatisfied with my accomplishments to date – far from it. Instead, reading about Sara’s accomplishments serves as added inspiration; a case study in the breadth of value a single person can produce. My hope is to focus my studies at Evergreen on the nexus of environmental advocacy and youth education. Long-term, my goal is to establish a youth education non-profit focused upon fostering relationships and encouraging a dialogue across cultural and international borders to tackle global environmental issues.
While pursuing a Master of Public Administration Degree at the University of Washington, I focused my courses and projects on environmental management and communications. I worked as a Teaching Assistant, splitting my time between an International Relations course and an International Human Rights Law class. Since, I’ve gained more professional experience in my declared field, but found myself reflecting on my time teaching more and more. Looking back, I realize that in many ways I’ve never been more satisfied or fulfilled by a job. I can see now that it was a mixture of the subject matter – intractable global issues, social justice questions, unresolved equity debates – along with the opportunity to work with and mentor students, that I found so invigorating.
I took on two capstone projects while pursuing my MPA, the first working with Washington Sea Grant on a project for the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe (JST), and the second for the Environmental Protection Agency’s Region X. Both projects helped further both my experience and interest in working on issues related to the interplay between environmental management and equity.
After graduating, I accepted a Fellowship with the Washington State Department of Ecology. At the agency, I once again found myself drawn to an environmental management issue disproportionally affecting a vulnerable population. One of my responsibilities became working with Pacific County residents and staff to provide planning assistance related to severe shoreline erosion and flooding that is ravaging the community. This involved attending community events to learn about local needs and priorities, participating in coordination meetings with elected officials, local planners and other state agency representatives, and developing and delivering actionable policy recommendations.
I spent the last two years in a position supporting FEMA’s Risk Mapping, Analysis, and Planning (Risk MAP) program, where my work centered upon catalyzing behavior change to increase residential and community preparedness for natural hazard events. In the position, I learned how to tailor communications to fit the needs of the audience and the goals of the entity communicating. This work also helped me understand and appreciate the realities of land-use management, environmental management, and the interplay of local, Tribal, State, Federal, and International planning entities.
Now, I feel ready for the next stage of my career, and my life. I’m eager to carry on Sara’s legacy at Evergreen and beyond.

Thank you for your consideration.
Michael Levkowitz

**Johannes (JJ) Wukasch**

Dear Scholarship committee

I have always had a passion for the environment, especially the ocean, which has only grown over the years. Since moving to the Puget Sound in 2012, I have come to appreciate the deep connection the community has to the environment. My personal motivation for studying Environmental Studies is to be an active part of the social change, and the creation of just and sustainable societies. I have been a Scuba diver and reef hobbyist for many years and have experienced firsthand the degradation of our reefs over time due to human activity. This, combined with the rollback of the current administration on environmental issues, has fueled my passion to be part of the movement to develop sustainable communities. In pursuing this graduate program, I hope to incorporate the knowledge I have gained thus far and apply it to find solutions to current marine ecological problems affecting the Puget Sound.
When I first started my studies, I just wanted to do fieldwork but after my first program at Evergreen, Marine Life, I realized that my skills are better suited for environmental policy and regulation. I have enjoyed the interdisciplinary approach TESC has had to offer and became interested in the tension between the environment and social interests after experiencing some difficulties while working on a research project on microplastics in shellfish in the Puget Sound. Dealing with local aquaculture farms I learned that people may not be cooperative and forthcoming when it negatively affects their interests.
I grew up in South Africa where environmental issues were not always at the forefront of government concerns, which is partly to blame for the current water crisis South Africa finds itself in. As the Pacific Northwest expands and develops, we need to ensure that environmental issues are not ignored or overshadowed by our own needs.
My biggest academic challenge has been attending a college that does not teach in my first language which is Afrikaans. However, I am proud to have almost completed my BSc and I am on a path to become a US citizen. Evergreen State College is a hands-on college, which has made it easier for me to grasp concepts and learn new skills. As a 38-year-old immigrant, I now have an opportunity to become the first person in my family to graduate and apply for graduate school. In 2018 I was awarded the Foundation Scholarship as well as the Dan & Sheryl Tishman Scholarship at Evergreen which affirmed to me that I have what it takes to be successful, especially in the field of environmental studies.
Previously, I was the co-founder and vice president of the Eco Club at Clover Park Technical College. Our focus as a club was to implement proper recycling on campus as well as getting students involved in activities that focused on environmental issues affecting the Puget Sound. This was a very challenging task as we had to battle with staff and departments that were set in their ways and not willing to change. Once we showed the college how easy it was for the college to implement these changes they were on board, and I am proud of this accomplishment.
Currently I am completing an internship with Clearcreek Systems, a company that treats runoff water from construction sites before it is discharged into the environment, which is regulated and monitored by Department of Ecology. This summer I will be completing a Marine Conservation Internship at the Whale Shark and Oceanic Research Centre in Honduras. This internship will focus on scientific dives as well as the human impact on reefs around the island. I hope to bring both experiences in my graduate studies and focus on the impact of pollution on water systems.
I am aware of the highly competitive demands of this master’s program, but I am confident that I have the ability, ambition and motivation to exceed. If selected for this graduate program, I will continue to apply the same diligence to my collegiate studies as I have up to this point, making education and service to others my top priority. I will represent The MES well during my time in college and beyond. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Kind regards,
JJ Wukasch

**Erin Stehr:**

I have been a biologist in the Pacific Northwest for over six years. I have collected catch data from salmon fisheries in Washington and ground-fish fisheries in Alaska. My data was used to model fish populations and manage the fisheries to inform sustainable harvests. Not only was I part of resource conservation, I had meaningful conversations with the people who rely on Pacific Northwest fisheries and saw diverse perspectives converge in a shared interest for sustainable fisheries management. As a protected species observer, I monitor in-water construction sites to help mitigate their impact on the natural environment. I’ve conducted marbled murrelet population surveys in Washington and Oregon. Those numbers help assess long term marbled murrelet population trends and therefore the availability of the resources they rely on (old growth forests, forage fish populations, etc.). As a biologist, an intrinsic part of my role is environmental protection and advocacy.

A role that I have chosen for myself is educator. I have volunteered in schools, for fisheries enhancement groups, marine life centers and marine mammal rehabilitation centers. I have worked as a naturalist and an educator. Not only do I enjoy outreach, I feel I can be most effective towards environmental conservation by helping people to understand and appreciate nature. I love biology and the environment with a particular passion for the marine environment. When I share that love and passion I can get people engaged and, hopefully, invested. I particularly enjoy working with children who’s interests so easily spark curiosity and a sense of wonder. As an educator at the Pacific Marine Mammal Center, I was amazed to meet classrooms of children that lived within 20 miles of the coast, but had never been to the beach. I introduced these children to the ocean, making it accessible, exciting and interesting. I got to share my love with them and earnestly hope that something - anything - would stick. While I pursue Evergreens Masters in Environmental Studies to become a better scientist, the more I know the more I can share.

Whether I am collecting the data to inform resource management decisions, monitoring populations to asses the efficacy of conservation efforts or conducting research to better understand the ecosystems and organisms around us; every role I have helps humans to better understand the environment and the impacts our actions have on it. The more we understand the better we can target conservation efforts. The more I understand, the better I can engage in conservation and outreach. I have collected data for years, now I want to be a part of the decision making process and take initiative in the management of the Pacific Northwest marine environment. Whether in commercial fisheries, forage fish, water quality, marine mammals, anthropogenic disturbance... my interests and options are open. I will continue to be a biologist and educator, but a graduate degree on the environment will help me grow. I appreciate any aid that makes my path easier.

**Melissa Sanchez:**

In 2015 I had the opportunity to complete a year of service with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Aquatic Reserves Puget Sound Corps. As part of this team, I conducted scientific baseline surveys via foot and boat in order to track the health and status of habitats throughout Puget Sound. Every project we did was fundamental in providing scientific evidence to serve as a foundation for environmental policy that protects critical habitat, including forage fish spawning grounds, water quality, and eelgrass beds. I am grateful to have had such an incredible year of lab and fieldwork, but in hindsight, I found myself deep within data and had lost touch with the social side of environmentalism.
Following my year with DNR, I had the opportunity to head out on commercial fishing boats in the Bering Sea as a Crab Observer. As I worked tirelessly through the dangerous crabbing season, I began to learn more about the fishing industry through the hard-working fishermen who put their lives at risk in order to provide for their families. They recounted stories of the horrifying incidents and treacherous conditions they encountered at their job and I learned of the sacrifices they made every year. I realized that my thoughts on the environment were often one-sided; I always wanted what was best for the environment but seldom thought about how many people depend on these resources for their livelihood. While still Alaska, the Bairdi crab season closure for 2016 was announced and I got to see first-hand the anger and hopelessness that the fisherman expressed for the loss of this season. This experience opened my eyes and made me more compassionate toward every side of environmental issues and the effect that one policy can have on everything and everyone who depends on its outcome.
After a few months in Alaska, I made my way back to Washington and to a position within DNR’s Nearshore Habitat Program as an Eelgrass Monitoring Technician. I’ve used this opportunity within the agency to go beyond my position duties to explore the state policies and regulations that protect our environment. Recently, I’ve become interested in how the state handles projects that affect the nearshore environment and require mitigation to achieve no net loss of habitat function. I’m curious about the effectiveness of mitigation measures, especially as it pertains to preserving critical salmon habitat in Puget Sound. The fact that the MES program is interdisciplinary makes me ecstatic and hopeful that I can tackle these and other similar questions from multiple angles. I want to reinforce my abilities with a well-rounded education that includes policy, communication and social science in order to become an effective steward of our resources. My ultimate career goal is to make a positive contribution to marine conservation and to help find a balance between how much we should use and how much must be left for others. I believe after completing the MES program I will have the tools to do so.

**Soule Fellowship Essays**

**Melissa Sanchez:**

With the Thurston Conservation District, I helped manage the Clear Choices for Clean Water Program. The goal of this program is to educate the people of Thurston County about the different changes they can easily make in order to improve water quality and their family’s health while also providing tools and incentives to do so. In order to reach as many people as possible, I tabled at different events, designed and mailed postcards, produced an informational brochure, and helped coordinate a local bus tour of past and current water quality projects and affected areas for new and existing program participants.

**Amy Olsen:**

I currently work in the Seattle Aquarium Conservation Programs and Partnerships department. I have been working there for 4 years as a research and laboratory technician. All of our conservation research projects are designed to inform managers of environmental health. I have been trained to measure water quality parameters and microplastics in Elliott Bay, evaluate rockfish populations throughout Puget Sound, and assess nearshore health based on WA sea otter population and diet analysis. We present our results to scientific conferences, managers and policy makers, as well as the public that come visit the Aquarium.

**JJ Wukasch:**

Dear Scholarship committee

I have always had a passion for the environment, especially the ocean, which has only grown over the years. Since moving to the Puget Sound in 2012, I have come to appreciate the deep connection the community has to the environment. My personal motivation for studying Environmental Studies is to be an active part of the social change, and the creation of just and sustainable societies. I have been a Scuba diver and reef hobbyist for many years and have experienced firsthand the degradation of our reefs over time due to human activity. This, combined with the rollback of the current administration on environmental issues, has fueled my passion to be part of the movement to develop sustainable communities. In pursuing this graduate program, I hope to incorporate the knowledge I have gained thus far and apply it to find solutions to current marine ecological problems affecting the Puget Sound.
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Kind regards,
JJ Wukasch

**Michael Levkowitz:**

I was recently selected to serve on the board for the Environmental Science Center (ESC), a non-profit based in South King County that focuses on providing environmental education for underprivileged youth. As a first-year board member, I am still learning about the organization and my role within it. However, while serving as a “station educator” at StormFest, an event for Highline School District students designed and supported by the ESC, I saw firsthand how the organization is giving students an opportunity to get outside and learn about the environment through experiential education, sowing the seeds for future environmental stewards.

**Sarah Croston:**

Value and impact are two important terms that come to mind when I think about my time in the environmental education world. I have been involved in environmental education across the country for the past four years. Getting students outside into the field to take a closer look at the natural world around them, has not only impacted their lives but mine as well. Seeing a student’s eyes light up as they uncover discoveries, ask questions, and get excited about the outdoor world reaffirms my career choice. It gives me hope in this ever changing world we live in.

**Samantha Grant:**

I have been volunteering for the Institute for Environmental Solutions since December 2017. This non-profit organization is devoted to prevent waste and unwanted side effects, provide opportunities to optimize environmental improvements, and reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions through a unique technical, multi-disciplinary approach. I have been working on initiatives at the community level to reduce water pollution and in turn improve environmental and human health by teaching sustainable behavior changes and alternative clean strategies. I am teaching by using platforms of workshops, community outreach, social media and newsletters, and promotional videos.

**Danika Davis:**

My strong passion for environmental stewardship is clearly exampled by my work and volunteer history. I have held multiple positions that have allowed me to gain valuable knowledge and skills in protecting ecological integrity including Noxious Weed management, Natural Resources work, Entomological Pest detection and Endangered Species management. Between these temporary employment periods I have spent hundreds of hours volunteering for the JBLM Fish and Wildlife program engaging in numerous projects from Oak Stand preservation efforts to Oregon Spotted Frog detection. It has been my honor to serve the natural environment and I wish to continue making positive impacts.

**Carly Boyd:**

I’ve been able to try many different things through volunteering. From learning about animal care at the local humane society and a local zoo, to educating kids of all ages about the importance of the environment, to assisting professors with their long-standing research projects. It’s taught me that volunteering and service is the backbone of most organizations, and often so many things could not be accomplished without the help of dedicated volunteers. It’s taught me to value those who offer help and to appreciate these opportunities because they have guided me towards the path I am on now.

**Anna Beebe**

At the University of Washington campus farm, farming fueled my fascination of how to regenerate and restore agroecological systems with consideration social, ecological and economic factors. From that point on, my studies for a Bachelors of Science in public health had an environmental emphasis.
After college, I worked for a non-profit and taught experiential garden education to middle school students. My two years as an AmeriCorps connected my public health background to social justice and environmental work. Currently, my work at King Conservation District helps improve the sustainable use of natural resources through responsible stewardship for better farms and forests.

**Emily Denton:**

Interning with the Muskingum Soil and Water Conservation District gave me invaluable knowledge of how to care for and protect reptiles and amphibians in my community. I also learned ways to preserve and protect environments for animals in my community. I have also helped create a community garden in my hometown to instill knowledge of a healthy lifestyle to children in my community. That garden is know being used to teach middle school children the importance of farm to table living.