Nahal Ghoghaie – Bilezikian Fellow 2009-2011 Testimony

As a Sara Bilezikian fellow, my desire to achieve and to give-back was magnified. Not only did I have the encouragement of my family in the U.S. and Iran, I now had a new family devoted to my success.

The Bilezikian Fellow provided major economic assistance, which allowed me to focus on my studies instead of worrying about finances. More importantly, the honor to carry on Sara’s legacy of commitment to environmental advocacy and social justice influenced me on a deeper level and enabled me to surpass my goals. My inner desire to work towards these causes was doubled when I received the award and tripled after meeting Sara’s wonderful parents, Sophie and John. Over my two years in this program, Sara’s passion for the causes she devoted her life to merged with mine, and together they have driven me to devote more energy to environmental projects than I could have alone. I feel an overall enhanced sense of well-being thanks to this fellowship, which is reflected to my friends, family, and community on a daily basis.

I pursued graduate study at The Evergreen State College as I felt the interdisciplinary research model matched my assorted background in the humanities, the sciences, business, spirituality, and language, which I feel are tied together with one connecting thread – the environment. I thus focused my thesis research on a topic that involves aspects from my background and wrote about climate change impacts on Native/ non-Native co-management of freshwater resources. My thesis topic involves many issues I understand to which Sara also devoted her life, and I like to imagine that if she was still with us today, we could work together towards these causes.

I submitted my thesis over one month ago, which was one of the most satisfying experiences of my life. The MES program provided me with the confidence to pursue any path I desire. It also connected me with several local influential environmental leaders and organizations. I am in the process of applying to positions at non-profit organizations in the area, as well as several government agencies and departments here in Olympia. I am confident that I will find a job working towards environmental justice and have a back-up temporary position as a State Senate Session Committee Assistant.

I have been very fortunate to spend two years with MES faculty and classmates at Evergreen, and if there is one thing I can recommend to the next cohort, it would be to choose a thesis topic that you’ve cared about for as long as you can remember. You will be tempted by various intriguing projects, but trust your instincts. Go with your first choice, so you can start researching immediately. You will still have many opportunities to explore other topics and possibly to incorporate them into your thesis somehow, but do not delay. It is with sincerest regards that I wish you luck in your research and hope to work alongside you someday!

