

# In Their Own Words:

## Student Profiles



Riel LaPlant  
of the Blackfeet Nation  
Secondary Biology

"I was born on the Blackfeet Indian reservation in Browning, Mont. I would express the plight of my home situation through disengagement with school, running away from home, and a laissez-faire attitude toward my future. Under my grandmother's patronage I learned my indigenous language, attended ceremonies, developed a love of running, grew as a reader, enhanced my storytelling skills, and fell in love with school. I went from failing every class in middle school to acing every assignment in high school. I was accepted to Stanford University on a full-ride scholarship where I did a Naive American honors thesis in education and started to envision creating my own school. After graduating I came to a crossroad in deciding how to reach my goal and decided on The Evergreen State College's Master in Teaching, because most importantly I had seen numerous alumni help students transform their lives on their own terms. The Evergreen MiT program makes social justice a focal point in their curriculum. I think social justice within education is essential for students of color, mine especially, because it teaches them the root causes of dysfunction in the communities. Once students are able to understand the root of their community's problems, they are better prepared to not only uproot systems of oppression from their own lives, but the lives of others around them. While in the program I noticed a disconnect between my practicum site teachers and urban Native youth and decided on creating a cultural bridge between them. I applied for the Billy Mill's Dreamstarter grant and won \$10,000 to make this idea a reality.

I hope to teach for a number of years, acquire a doctorate of education, be involved in national native politics, and eventually start my own school for native youth. I want my school to be an incubator for social change, like how in my own life, my grandmother was a catalyst for critical thinking."



Michelle Tate  
Elementary Education

In her twenties, Michelle earned a degree in interior design, while she was eight months pregnant. She went to work in that field for several years before being laid off in the economic downturn of 2008. "As it turned out, what some consider a tragedy became my fortune—all of the money that job paid never quite left me fulfilled."

Working with children wasn't what she had in mind when she was suddenly thrown into a volunteer position. "It didn't take long for me to realize that paid or not, this was something I would do no matter what—both for myself and the kids. For eight years I've inched my way from an Associate's Degree toward nearing the end of my first year in the MiT program. I offer this glimpse of context to you, it's unique to anyone who's never known someone to stick undeterred to a goal as a single mom and a mountain of student loan debt just to be a teacher!" Michelle spent three years as a childcare school site director for the YMCA and gained experience working with school-aged children while finishing her bachelor's degree. She describes upon completing MiT and taking her first position "Before the day begins, I remind myself why I am there. This classroom will be a safe sanctuary where I will remain vigilant to the harms of bullying, ridicule, and racism. All languages and ethnicities are encouraged to be embraced and appreciated. I will strive to build a space for open-minded and empathetic thinkers to flourish and grow in wisdom. There will be no empty stomachs or hunger or arguments left unresolved, no insecurities ignored."

In order to become that teacher I envision, and to endure the challenges ahead as our country faces turbulent times in public education, I need Evergreen's Master in Teaching program to immerse myself in the social justice framework that I pledge to fight for."



Kyla Stelling  
Secondary English Language Arts

Kyla's high school lunch hours were spent in her favorite English teacher's classroom where a small group of students congregated for discussions of literature and philosophy. After an English degree from UW, experience as a copywriter and writing tutor to teens, and retail manager, she recognized the common thread of the person she was as a teenager and who she is today. "I love to listen to people and find ways to empower them. My energy and creativity skyrocket when there is an opportunity to assist and inspire someone to reach their goals." I had considered being a teacher for many years, because of its mentorship role, but also because it involves work with youth. As a long-time nanny, I've loved working with kids—I find their energetic, inquisitive, and brutally honest nature refreshing. I've worked with kids who incessantly push boundaries or strictly adhere to the rules; have oodles of confidence or are stifled by their own shyness; struggle or excel in academics; and come from broken or supportive homes. I've enjoyed every single kid I've worked with—they're all gems, some just need a little extra support in discovering their worth. It would be an honor to be in a position where I can help kids reach their goals through academics, as I feel knowledge is the greatest tool one can have." Kyla said she was befuddled by the social inequality she witnessed while living in Seattle and Los Angeles. She prepared to apply to certification programs by doing observations in schools, including one known for its low-income community. One class of third graders at that school took time each morning to go over civil rights and the Bill of Rights, where children recited the information with exuberance.

"The community nature of the classroom and the instructor's guidance ensured a community culture of acceptance. That teacher, Mr. Ryan Reilly MiT '07, attributes much of his technique to Evergreen. Based on what I've seen, I believe Evergreen's in-depth two-year program will thoroughly prepare me to step into a classroom and be ready to effectively serve."



James Jarnagin  
Secondary Physics and Chemistry

"The first time I realized my passion for teaching came about when I tutored geometry in high school James said." From the beginning it was always about eliciting the knowledge the individual had and trying to keep it as inquiry-based as possible. It is not the answer that is important, it is the process to get to that answer that is essential to learning. That brief moment of understanding something is why I want to teach. Comprehension leads to confidence, the confidence guides the student to better decisions, and those better decisions improve both the individual and the community around them."

James began his college education studying traditional sciences at Louisiana State University, but finished at Evergreen for its "unique blend of content integration and instruction engaging with as many viewpoints as possible. This integration of ideas is what helped with my success. The methods used for my learning experience are similar to how I would have wanted to have been taught in high school."

James balanced a workload as a Target store supervisor with his BS coursework and AVID tutoring in a local high school prior to entry into MiT. His specific focus will be for both physics and chemistry. "This will allow me to bridge gaps between the two and explain the deeper connections of the mechanics of matter—making those seemingly hard concepts less daunting."

"I chose Evergreen because I wanted to break the habit of traditional science classrooms and create an environment that inspires science in all disciplines. Evergreen's interdisciplinary approach, along with the critical focus of social justice, will help me be the best teacher for every student I have because everyone deserves to learn."



Ryan Campeau  
Theatre Arts + Elementary

"For as long as I can remember, I said that I would be a teacher or an actor, and throughout high school and college. I pursued the theater arts as well as volunteer teaching. While I was studying abroad I taught English to French students. I found the act of teaching so rewarding that it became my sole goal after college. I recognized my need for a solid foundation in the philosophy and methods of a transformative educator, so I began to look for teacher-preparation programs in Washington state that had a strong foundation in social justice pedagogy. I dreamed of blending theater into my work with elementary and middle school youth in an interdisciplinary way. While I considered completing an online program so that I might live at home to support my family, I knew from prior experiences with online classes that I could gain so much from struggling through ideas with a cohort and professors. After two quarters of the Evergreen MiT program, I feel more convinced than ever of the rightness of my choice.

The program has shown me the importance of recognizing my positionality and that of my students, of learning about their cultural backgrounds, language, community, and cultural values in order to serve them. It has made me into a better person as well as teacher in forcing me to consider more deeply my role in society, the privilege that has shaped me, and how I too am complicit in maintaining systems of social injustice.

I look forward to a career in which I will serve key [Latinx] communities in my home state through education, the best means for social and personal transformation."

For alumni stories see page 23.