

Ryan Neese

Statement of Purpose

Throughout my career, I have always been drawn to work that serves others and builds inclusive communities. Whether through my experiences in college, my employment in public and non-profit organizations, or my volunteer work; I have always felt a strong sense of purpose and motivation to advocate for vulnerable populations. These experiences have influenced me to seek a graduate degree in public administration because it will provide me with the knowledge, skills, and tools I need to make a greater impact in my community.

I was drawn to Evergreen's MPA program for several reasons. I recently completed undergraduate studies at Evergreen and enjoyed Evergreen's holistic approach to education, emphasis on collaborative work and discussion, and commitment to critical and creative thinking. It reflected the values I appreciated most from teaching in early learning classrooms for the previous ten years: a focus on meeting students where they're at, creating an inclusive space, and evaluating their work on a spectrum instead of holding them to an arbitrary standard.

Public service is not black and white, and the MPA program's mission includes the skills needed to navigate the complex social and political obstacles graduates will face to create positive change. Embracing diversity consistently creates the best outcomes in all settings. I have seen this over and over again in college and workplace settings learning and working collaboratively with people of all ages, genders, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. In order to challenge ideas and imagine new possibilities in our organizations and communities, we need diverse perspectives. Part of my work as a Student Threat Assessment Coordinator involves facilitating community teams that include law enforcement, juvenile court probation counselors, designated crisis responders, social workers, mental health providers, and educators. This team provides additional recommendations and perspectives to a school working to support and manage potentially threatening student behavior. They consistently

show me how important diverse teams with different specialties and viewpoints create solutions that would be impossible with just two or three school administrators in a room. The MPA program can teach me how to further embrace diversity in my work.

I've always been an advocate for those who need a voice in an effort to create fair, inclusive, and equitable spaces. This started with my work teaching in preschool classrooms that included typically developing children and their peers with developmental delays. This idea of inclusion was new to me, but also felt very familiar growing up in a family that always welcomed others into their home, especially those in need. I advocated for my special needs students to their peers, parents, and the community, explaining how they learn differently and need support to do things their peers do or to communicate effectively. I explained at the same time that despite their disabilities, these children deserve the same opportunities, spaces, and respect as their peers. Since then, I've had many more opportunities in my personal and professional life to advocate for others, most recently as a volunteer Dependency Guardian ad Litem in Thurston County. I think the loudest voices right now are often coming from the people who have the most. But I think the most powerful voices, will consistently come from those who have the least, and I will always advocate to make those voices heard. This program will help strengthen my ability to advocate powerfully for others.

I think about how communication has changed in my lifetime: growing up in the analog 90s, coming to age with the internet, instant messaging, and MySpace in the 2000s; to now having communication devices, information libraries, and overwhelming media content attached to us at all times. Effective communication may be the biggest challenge for public servants as we move forward with everything and everyone competing for our attention and time. As a Student Threat Assessment Coordinator, I've learned the most common factor leading someone to a pathway to violence is disconnection from their community. Building connection begins with authentic and effective communication. Additionally, when a threatening situation occurs, schools must communicate effectively to their community how they are going to keep them safe.

This has shown me that communication skills are vital to create understanding and trust and to motivate change. How to communicate clearly and more effectively is something I hope to learn in this program.

I want to make my community safe, resilient, successful, and inclusive to all. Completing a Master of Public Administration degree at The Evergreen State College will support me in working towards those goals and serving my community. This program can help me strengthen my skills to be an effective communicator, advocate powerfully for the public, and work to build our public institutions with diverse representation that will serve us all. I have demonstrated my commitment to this work my entire career, and would benefit greatly from acceptance to this program.