

Dear MPA Admissions Committee,

I am writing to express my interest in the MPA program at The Evergreen State College beginning fall 2024. As an alum of The Evergreen State College, my academic journey has been focused in the areas of food systems, ethnobotany, and human health, and has been the foundation that has led me to continue my education with a desire to contribute meaningfully to this field.

During my undergraduate years, I expanded my knowledge in the course “Branching Out” where I delved into ethnobotany, herbal medicine, indigenous history, educational garden care and development, community event production, and community herbalism.

I continued with the program “Food, Health, and Sustainability”, which gave me the opportunity to look at our food system through a scientific lens. I was introduced to conventional and sustainable agriculture practices, examined the botany of vegetables, fruits, seed grains, and legumes and studied plant and animal breeding along with molecular biology and genetically modified crops. I explored biochemistry within food and how the body digests and recovers nutrients as well as the complex relationship between diet, disease, and genetics.

Since graduating with my BA from Evergreen, I have been certified as a Holistic Health Coach and have become a Functional Nutrition Counselor. However, while practicing this work of educating individuals on the way food, environment, and lifestyle impacts the health of the body, I have a sense of defeat. While this endeavor is rewarding to see someones vitality improve, I feel the challenge stemming from a food system shrouded by capitalism that has misguided western society into believing that the food produced is in our best interest. People should have the knowledge of growing their own food, or at least a system that produces food and regulates standards in the interest of human health and humanely raised, handled, and slaughtered farm animals.

My personal experience of living on 5 acres outside of Oakville WA. has furthered my awareness of food disparities. I remember learning about “food deserts” in my courses at Evergreen but was ignorant to think we don’t have them in Washington state. Oakville has an espresso stand, a burger joint, a restaurant/bar, a gas station with fried foods, and a Dollar General. I would describe it as a “food swamp” because despite there being food available, the absence of fresh fruits and vegetables has highlighted the need for systemic change.

This realization is why I’m applying for the MPA program at Evergreen. I want to be a part of the change that needs to happen on a policy level within our food system. I want to be an advocate for education on a public level. My education and experience has motivated me to be a part of the paradigm shift where humans become fully aware of the connection to environment and people and the infinite cycle that relies on the health of each other. I believe the MPA program will give me the opportunity to become a part of the solution on a higher level within the work force and within the community.

Thank you for considering my application. I am excited about the opportunity of contributing to positive change and meaningful impact through the MPA program at Evergreen.

Sincerely,  
Athena Ortega