

Throughout my entire working life I have been motivated to take positions at community-based nonprofits that support the public with their basic needs. However, I have had several concrete experiences that inspired an interest in studying public administration instead of nonprofit management. I will share one such experience: I worked for a food bank in downtown Seattle for three years, with the COVID-19 pandemic “shutdown” occurring one year into my employment. This catastrophic event, ironically, brought several positive changes to the infrastructure of my workplace. Firstly, a combination of state and city funding brought my position from a part-time position to fulltime, allowing me to move from housing with multiple roommates a 1.5-hour bus commute from my employment, to being able to qualify for a rent-reduced, affordable housing apartment a 15-minute walk away. Secondly, our staffing levels went from one part-time staff overseeing multiple food programs to five personnel, through a mix of AmeriCorps members and several National Guard members deployed to our site. Over the course of a few months, this program improved from a threadbare response to pre-pandemic urban food insecurity to a robust response. This experience left me with many questions: Why did the city of Seattle have to wait until cataclysm to provide non-poverty wages for workers, adequate staffing, and much-needed facilities improvements to its response to food insecurity? What if adequate support for human services was the norm and not an exception for a state of emergency? What is the role of the public sector in addressing basic needs for its citizens? These core questions animate my interest in studying public administration.

Through these experiences and questions, I have developed a personal sense that I belong as a worker in the public sector. In every previous position I held, I longed for a more robust sense of accountability in administering services. I oftentimes worked side-by-side with public sector employees, and admired their systems-level view of social issues and broad knowledge of government programs to address these issues. Working with public sector colleagues has exposed me to the deep history of how society has used democratic governance as a tool to serve the public good. My primary motivation for

pursuing graduate study in public administration at Evergreen is to make this transition from the nonprofit sector to the public sector.

I am motivated to pursue graduate study in order to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to transition from working in the nonprofit sector to the public sector. Graduate study is my chosen avenue for pursuing this goal, because I would like to use academic study to address my gaps in knowledge and skills that I encountered in my working life. For example, I took a Procurement Management course at Evergreen in the summer of 2023. This course illuminated many of the foundations of my nonprofit work – namely, why so many human services programs are administered by nonprofits instead of the public sector. I learned not only crucial history about my sector, but also learned critical skills in government contracting, and how to understand, analyze, and create government contracts. I appreciated the opportunity to take this course, and it inspired me to apply for the Evergreen MPA program.

I would not have been able to take this course if it had not been offered flexibly on a weekend, which underscores a key element of my decision to pursue study at Evergreen: the flexible nature of this program makes it possible for me to attend graduate school. I would not be able to attend any graduate study if this program did not offer exclusively weekend and evening classes. Not only does the structure of this program make it possible for me to attend, but it also emphasizes a fundamental value of Evergreen: people that have to work, and cannot take a break from working, are still worthy of the opportunity of graduate study. The cost of graduate study and the lack of accommodation for adults that have to work full-time to support themselves in the high-cost-of-living environment of Western Washington has been the primary barrier to my ability to participate in further studies. Evergreen has made an obvious commitment to its mission of fairness and equity by making their program accessible to Washingtonians that have to work during their studies, and I highly respect this commitment.

Evergreen's programmatic commitment to offering an in-person cohort model to enact the missional emphasis on working collaboratively is also an important variable in my choice for applying to this program. I believe that the most impactful learning opportunities allow for collaboration with peers. While I appreciate the flexible nature of online learning, and the presence of some online learning opportunities in this program, I also appreciate the opportunity for in-person collaboration with a cohort of learners. The option for both in-person and online learning within a cohort of students that live in the area encapsulates the program's commitment to collaboration as a core element of its mission.

I strongly resonate with the MPA program's mission to advocate powerfully on behalf of the public and imagine new possibilities in order to accomplish positive change in our workplace and in our communities. For me, this means bringing my work experiences in community-based services to advocate for a person-centered and holistic administration of public policy. Too often I have encountered coworkers who make disparaging comments about clients; these remarks illuminate a disconnection between this coworker's role and the dignity of community members that access the organization's services. I hope to use education and experience to combat any dehumanization of the public in workplace and organizational culture, and to embody Evergreen's missional values of advocacy and imagination.

I am inspired to submit my only graduate school application to the Evergreen MPA program due to my work experience in community-based nonprofits, my desire to transition from the nonprofit sector to the public sector, and the unique learning opportunities that Evergreen provides through its commitment to its mission. Please consider my acceptance to this program.