

Evergreen State College MPA Statement of Purpose

There are many reasons I am choosing to submit my application to the Evergreen State College in Washington State. I am fortunate enough to be born and raised in or near Olympia, Washington. The community is filled with people who deeply care about the environment and have prioritized the indigenous communities surrounding the Salish Sea. I am a proud member of The Squaxin Island Tribe and feel like attending Evergreen State College would honor that connection to my tribe and others in the region. Curating a program as robust as the Tribal Governance: Master of Public Administration is a primary example of Evergreens commitment to the first peoples, and I envision using what I learn from this unique program to rise into a leadership position within my tribe and make a positive impact in my community. Pursuing my higher education will help me be better prepared when I reach that goal. I aspire to become a Squaxin Island Tribal Council member and sincerely believe this program can help me forge this dream into a reality.

Since childhood, I worked for my tribe in several capacities. I began exercising my treaty rights at eight years old, gathering in our accustomed lands, and received my shellfish license when I was 16 years old. I believe the blend of working for our youth program and actively exercising my treaty rights gave me the background to continue building a fulfilling career helping tribes across the US. In my current occupation, I engage with multiple tribal communities, from rural Alaska to the East Coast. I have successfully communicated with and helped many different tribal organizations, and want to continue for the future generations.

I believe that when you are an actively engaged member, not only with your own community, but other tribal communities as well, you are exposed to the etiquette and understandings of Native Americans as a whole. The ability to connect with tribal people cannot

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be counterfeited or duplicated accurately if you don't grow up or alongside tribal communities. I feel like my experience supports the connections I intend to make as a liaison between tribal governments and the people they govern. With this education, I feel I can offer a steady voice and room for growth in my future endeavors.

My mother and I moved to the Squaxin Island Reservation in Shelton, Washington when I was eight years old. I was raised in a low-income household where making ends meet was a constant challenge. My family experienced the challenges of substance abuse, incarceration, food poverty, racism, and more. During my Junior year in high school my life took a tragic turn when my mother was in a motor vehicle accident where she was critically injured, including a brain injury, and became paralyzed from the waist down. I became her primary caregiver at 16 years old. When I was accepted into my undergraduate program at The University of Washington, I was still her primary caregiver.

It was incredibly challenging being a first-generation college student and being a full-time caretaker of a medically fragile parent. I struggled with my academics, especially in my first couple years as an undergrad, because I was under a lot of stress and didn't yet understand how to manage my time well. This impacted my overall GPA greatly. Although this situation brought me great challenges, it also taught me how to be resilient and just not give up. Since then, my mother has been able to acquire additional assistance for her disability and we have learned how to better balance her care and our lives.

In the last six years, while working with a native-owned consulting business, I have had the opportunity to witness firsthand tribal governments from small rural villages, as far away as tiny Wales in Alaska, to tribal governments as complex and intricate as the much larger Quinault Indian Nation in Washington State. These experiences granted a deep understanding of how

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vastly different tribal communities are, but also how similar they are. I appreciated the intricacies of each tribe and even with all of these experiences, have barely scratched the surface. I have observed how these tribes treat their people, express diplomacy, or prioritize their youth. Behind every system, there are people driving certain motives and those surface in legislative bills, policies, procedures, and contracts. I want to be a part of those exchanges.

Currently, I work alongside a former Wellness Court Judge, admirable advocates for ICW, and people influencing native populations in a progressive way. I work closely with these communities by helping them develop, or advance, their tribal court to ensure they can express tribal sovereignty to govern their own people. I have always been passionate about advancing into leadership, predominantly driven now by this Masters Program directly aligning with my career goals. I would appreciate the opportunity to improve my skillset to better help tribal communities and combine this curriculum and subject-matter expertise with my in-depth experience helping rural Alaskan communities, and other tribes, needing specific guidance and assistance with improving their justice systems.

What do I want for my future?

I have grown to appreciate different cultural customs that directly impact how tribal governments operate, therefore I believe this program will benefit me greatly as I continue working with more tribes and begin assisting with tribal politics, future generations development, environmental advocacy, and the influence of systematic change.