

Maren Yeager-O'Daniel's Statement of Purpose

My first professional job was with the Washington State Department of Corrections when I was 19. I worked in the Seattle Metro unit in a Community Corrections Office, which was the reporting office for the Level 3 sex offenders, the dangerously mentally ill offenders, the homeless Seattle population, and more. I loved the job; I loved working with the Community Corrections Officers, and I loved working with the clients. I didn't realize it then, but I had just stepped in the door of public service, where I will likely remain for the rest of my career.

I have moved around within state service, holding different positions while working my way up. I worked alongside mid-level managers, regional leadership, trainers, clients, stakeholders, etc. My favorite role was working directly with the clients in the Community Services Office at the Department of Social and Health Services. I was a Public Benefit Specialist and determined eligibility for cash, food, and medical benefits. I loved working with the clients and being able to help members of my community in their time of need. I moved up to quality assurance and was an auditor for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, completing back-end audits, auditing the call center, and completing in-person site visits of the CSO.

While working full-time, I completed my education. I took advantage of the tuition-free program offered through the Washington Federation of State Employees and completed my Associate of Applied Business degree. I was fortunate enough to receive a generous education supplemental package from my tribe, which allowed me to continue my education with the Northwest Indian College, where I completed my Bachelor of Arts degree in Tribal Governance and Business Management and earned a

certificate in Tribal Entrepreneurship. I recognize and am grateful for the privilege of being able to attend school without enduring extreme financial hardship.

After graduation, I decided it was time to take a risky move and leave state service after putting in 20 long years of dedication. I wanted to stay in the public service realm, but I wanted to work primarily with members of the tribal community. I am a Nuu-Chah-Nulth woman, a First Nation person and Uchucklesaht Tribe citizen. I wanted to work directly with the tribal community and be able to help other natives achieve their goals. I now work for the Nisqually Tribe as a Workforce Development Case Manager. I am so excited to be in my new role; I want to help my clients establish goals and provide encouragement and motivation while holding them accountable. I want that experience of telling someone, "If I can do it, you can do it!" and having it resonate and inspire them.

It saddens me how few Native Americans complete their education. Less than 10% of Natives earn a bachelor's degree, and only 4% earn a graduate degree. Many factors are behind the low numbers, including poverty, inter-generational trauma, limited access to educational opportunities, and racism are a few that immediately come to mind. I have had to overcome these barriers and more to get where I am today, and it was not easy. Continuing to improve, setting ever higher goals, and reaching them is one of my forms of decolonization.

With the support of my friends, family, and community and my newfound confidence from earning my bachelor's degree, my new goal is to earn a Master of Public Administration from the Evergreen State College in Tribal Governance. Evergreen's emphasis on public service, social justice, and its collaborative learning

process aligns perfectly with my values. I look forward to working with the experienced faculty. Still, I am equally eager to learn from my peers and hear firsthand about their lived experiences and how they have navigated their education and career journeys. Their perspectives will strengthen my understanding of public administration in a tribal setting. My long-term goal is to work for my tribe in a leadership position and to serve as a mentor and possibly a role model for other natives. I am deeply grateful for the significant investment my tribe has made in my education, and I am eager to give back and contribute to our continued growth and success.

My public service journey so far has been incredibly rewarding and has reinforced my commitment to advocating for the tribal community. An MPA from Evergreen is the logical next step for my professional development in public administration. I am eager to gain advanced skills in policy analysis, program evaluation, and strategic leadership, which I can utilize to address the unique needs of the tribal community. I am excited to work closely with my peers and others who share my passion for public service in a tribal setting. I am highly determined to contribute to increasing the percentage of natives with graduate degrees. With my completed education, I can be instrumental in shaping new policies in my tribe, which would promote further education, strengthen cultural preservation, and increase economic development. I am forever grateful for the support I have already received, and I look forward to being able to give back to my community. Thank you for considering my application.