

### ENSU Reflective Essay

For as long as I can remember I've had a feeling of connection to the natural world. I attribute this feeling to being exposed to nature from a very young age. My mom would take me out camping, backpacking, hiking, kayaking, and skiing. My dad's family has a cabin out at Sylvan Lake, Alberta where we would fish, swim, and explore the poplar forest around the cabin. I feel that if I had not gotten the opportunity to have these experiences from a young age, that I wouldn't have the passion for the natural world and sustainability that I do today. When I was younger, I didn't have any knowledge of exactly what environmental sustainability was, but I did have views that are connected to environmental sustainability. For example, I cared about protecting animals, plants, and their habitats as I thought anything that would possibly disturb them was unacceptable. I had first thought that I would grow up to become a veterinarian, so I could directly take care of the animals that I had learned to respect. But as I grew older, that connection that I had felt moved from animals to their habitats, as I started to learn about the ways that humans impact our environment. As I learned more and more, I got exposed to the concept of environmental sustainability, and I realized I wanted to be part of the movement to change our ways and create less impact on our Earth. In high school, while researching university programs that I was interested in, I came across Thompson Rivers University (TRU) and the Natural Resource Science (NRSC) bachelor's degree. The more I looked into this program, the more I realized this was what I wanted to study, and that this degree would allow me to follow my goal of being able to make a difference. But in the beginning, I had no idea how much this degree would open my eyes, and how it would be the most valuable learning experience that I have had so far throughout my life.

While studying at TRU my idea of what field I would go into changed many times. In my first year taking dendrology and forest ecology and silvics I thought I would go into the forestry industry so I could be a part of the implementation of more sustainable forestry practices. As I continued my studies, I took ichthyology, watershed management, and limnology and realized that this type of field was what I was really interested in. The more I learned about topics like watersheds, the fishing industry, and conservation issues I knew that this was an industry that I wanted to make a career in so I could play a part in furthering sustainable practices. Most of my knowledge from TRU has been very technical or applied, such as learning monitoring techniques, field data collection techniques, and the science behind aquatic ecosystems. Although this is all valuable knowledge, I didn't quite feel that connection to the natural world that I had experienced growing up. It wasn't until I went to Haida Gwaii for a semester abroad that I started to feel this connection again and see how important environmental sustainability really is.

Haida Gwaii is a small archipelago of the coast of northern British Columbia. To get there you take an eight-hour ferry from Prince Rupert to the main island, called Graham Island. During the natural resource science semester I took through the University of British Columbia at the Haida Gwaii Institute I lived in the town of Queen Charlotte. Of the five courses I took while living on the island my favourite course was on the biophysical dynamics of the marine-terrestrial interface. During this course we did a three-week study of how the salmon that come from the ocean back into their native streams to spawn effect the terrestrial environment. To give a short explanation, the black bears of Haida Gwaii fish for the salmon and leave what they don't eat all throughout the forest, which allows the transfer of marine nutrients into the

terrestrial environment for plants and other wildlife and insects. Doing this study, it really opened my eyes to exactly how much the natural world is connected and how important environmental sustainability really is. It enforced the idea that sustainable practices need to be implemented in every aspect of industry in natural resources as they are all heavily connected.

I also gained a spiritual connection to nature during my time at Haida Gwaii. We learned about how the aboriginal people of Haida Gwaii uses the resources found on the island and how much they respect everything that the land offers. This experience taught me to see all aspects of the natural world in this spiritual way and it allowed that connection that I had felt when I was younger to return. Once you start to see the world in this way, it is very easy to be able to see how important sustainable practices is as we are the caretakers of this Earth and it is our duty to preserve it for the future generations.

Once I graduate from the NRSC degree and move into my career I hope to bring the science and spiritual aspects I have learned into the job that I end up in. I want to work towards preserving our Earth for future generations and I hope that by being part of the implementation of environmentally sustainable practices that I can achieve this. I want to be able to give people the experiences that I have had, so they too can feel the connection to our natural world that I feel. I will take this knowledge with me through my life to better the industries around natural resources and my life as well. I am excited about continuing my journey into learning and implementing environmental sustainability in daily life and am hopeful that our future is bright.