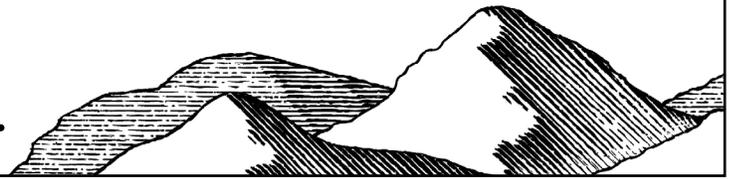


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THE EVERGREEN STATE COLLEGE WRITING CENTER
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EDITORS' NOTE

In April, Nathan Schurr wrote the winning essay chosen by a group of faculty and staff in what the College hopes will be an annual writing contest. We are honored to publish Nathan's essay in its entirety as he wrote it, and we congratulate him on his graduation.

Beginning with students entering in Fall 2013, the minimum requirement for the Bachelor of Arts or the Bachelor of Science degree is 180 credits and an academic statement of up to 750 words. In the statement, students summarize and reflect carefully on their liberal arts education. Students begin work on the statement when they first enroll, then develop and revise it annually under the guidance of faculty. The final version becomes an important part of each student's transcript.

ACADEMIC STATEMENT

NATHAN SCHUUR

I chose the first program I took at Evergreen without even reading the course description. The program I wanted to take was full, I did not have a plan B, and my lunch break was about to end, so I took the suggestion of an academic advisor and signed up for *Political Economy and Social Movements*. Like many of the decisions I made at that time in my life, making a choice about what I would do for the next two quarters without even looking at the catalog was not a responsible one, but it may be the luckiest irresponsible choice I ever made.

During those two quarters, we focused on topics I had hardly even thought about. Learning about racism and imperialism and the ways they interact with economics changed the way I look at the world and both directed the other classes I would select at Evergreen and the choice I ended up making about what to do after college. After taking *Political Economy and Social Movements*, I see power dynamics everywhere I look. I understand that "free" choices are often far from free and I know how important it is to work actively against inequality. I know how crucial it is to have an understanding of power and discrimination if I expect to learn anything about the rest of the world.

Next, I took *Democracy and Free Speech*, where I learned a great deal about the ways the First Amendment has been applied (or misapplied) to various situations and how important effective and vigorous legal advocacy is to effecting change in this country. We live in a country where the

laws are often unfairly applied and in *Democracy and Free Speech* I saw how people working within the justice system can still have a huge impact in ameliorating that unfairness. I had been toying with the idea of law school for some time, but by the end of the class, I was sure that becoming a lawyer would be the right decision for me.

Once I knew what my goal was, choosing classes became much easier. I took classes that would help me develop a better understanding of power, economics, and history. I took a program studying the history of capitalism, studied economics in depth, wrote a contract examining the histories of underrepresented groups, and wrote a contract to do research on foreign relations using mapping software. Throughout, I learned more about the ways various groups have experienced colonization and globalization and began to develop an understanding of how to reform the world for the better to help right these wrongs. I tried to understand how the ways in which certain countries, classes, or races of people were treated in the past influences the way they interact with the world today.

The skills I gained at Evergreen will be valuable both in my professional life and in my personal life. I learned plenty of facts, but what I learned more is a sense of empathy. When I enter law school next year, I will be prepared both to see the law and to see the human accused of breaking it. I will be equipped to help people and to do so with appreciation of their struggles. In my personal life as well, I will not be stagnant. The same compassion for others that will make me a good lawyer will help (and has already helped) me develop close personal relationships based on understanding and respect.

My education is far more than the sum of its parts. Most of my classes have centered on political economy, but I have stepped outside of that discipline and also studied history, philosophy, computer science, geography, law, and art. I am happy to have learned to weave together what I have learned in various classes to gain a fuller understanding of the world around me and my place in it. At its core, the study of liberal arts is the study of how to be alive. In all my classes, I learned specific skills that were often only narrowly applicable to specific types of problems—I learned how to *do*. But I also learned to bring together threads from different courses, to guide my own studies, to work across gaps of race, class, and gender, and to identify power dynamics, which taught me something much more important—how to *be*.