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IDP Major Rationale Essay  
Individualized Studies: Environmental Policy  
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### **Introduction**

I have always felt a deep connection with the natural world. From the time I was little growing up in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, I have understood intuitively that there is inherent value in our wild places. Historically, human beings have misunderstood the vital role that every ecosystem has on the larger life systems of the planet. As society emerges from its infancy in environmental justice and conservation, it is up to each new generation to forge ahead, learning from previous generation's triumphs and mistakes. As I have gotten older, I have learned about the need-based value that humans have assigned to nature and its resources. I hope to contribute to a society that not only sees their needs met by the depletion of natural resources, but also meets the needs of the natural world and the incredible diversity of life found throughout it. For most of my adult life, in one way or another, I have been building my knowledge and experience base in the field of earth sciences and environmentalism and plan to continue that study through my undergraduate degree at MSU Denver.

I received my associates degree in Outdoor Recreation Leadership at Colorado Mountain College which has allowed me to work in the field of environmental education as a mountaineering guide. Throughout my twenties, I have worked with nonprofit organizations like the Colorado Mountain Club which were concerned with protecting and enriching the Colorado wilderness through outdoor recreation. After enrolling in classes again and entertaining the idea of becoming an environmental engineer, I realized that with my work experience and education up to this point, I might better serve the field of environmental justice by working with policy

and policy makers. With a curated selection of courses ranging from life and earth sciences to policy, economics, and political theory, I have crafted an individualized major that I propose to be named Environmental Policy.

### **IDP Title**

Environmental Policy is the merging of science and environmentalism, and political science with regard to creating policy. My coursework, which has many parallels to the environmental science degree but is distinct in that I have taken and will take courses specifically based on politics, policy making, and economics surrounding environmental issues. My goals with this degree are to focus on specific issues such as climate change, bio-diversity loss, the switch to sustainable energy, and mankind's' relationship with their environment to create solutions through the mechanism of public and private sector policies. This degree will not just be a general political science degree, but a specialized study of the current issues in environmentalism. I hope to work specifically with public administrations, NGOs, or private companies to build policies that serve the environment and create lasting solutions to human relationships with the planet and its resources.

### **IDP Content and Learning Outcomes**

#### **Sciences Cluster**

This cluster of courses consisted of the science curriculum aspect of my degree. Included in this cluster are Ecology for Non-Majors: BIO 1010, General Chemistry 1 with Lab: CHE 1800-1801, and General Chemistry 2 with Lab: CHE 1810-1811. These courses laid the framework for which my understanding of environmental science would take place. In order to have a real grasp of the environmental issues facing the planet and humanity today, these courses were integral. Understanding the deep science of each of these subjects was important in my

degree so I could have a solid foundation from which to form an unbiased, logic-based approach to environmental policy. This cluster of courses allowed me to use **integrative and applied learning** in formulating my scientific approach to what would become my major in environmental policy. By connecting policy ideas to my experiences and knowledge from these courses, I have formed a stronger approach to creating solutions to environmental problems.

- Ecology BIO 1010, was a in depth look at the interactions between organisms and their environment. Already having taken Biology, this class allowed me to deep dive into the incredible level of intricate connectedness between the smallest organisms, their direct ecosystem, scaled all the way out to planet sized life systems.
- Chemistry 1 and 2, CHE 1800-1801 with their respective labs, CHE 1810-181 were the heart of the scientific portion of my major. Chemistry is often referred to as the “central science” and indeed, it was the backbone of my studies in physical sciences. In these courses, students were able to learn about chemicals, chemical reactions, the organization and disorganization of matter, and the flow of energy. Without chemistry there is no science of climate or climate change, no understanding of the intricate effects that the atomic realm has on the rest of physical reality. Some of the most interesting and applicable parts of chemistry 1 and 2 in relation to environmental science are the studies of thermodynamics and nuclear energy. These two subjects are directly related to the production of energy for mankind and the proper or improper application of either can have beneficial or disastrous consequences.

### **Political Science and Economics Cluster**

This cluster of courses were the upper division courses which took a tac from the physical sciences and began my path in political science and economics. The cluster consisted of

Public Policy: PSC 3220, Political Theory: PSC 3050, Global Economics and International Trade: ECO 3550, and Global Corporate Social Responsibility: BUS 3040. The implementation of these courses into my degree functioned as a way to begin exploring political theory and methodology by which I could ultimately address real environmental issues in a practical way. The application of these courses in the framework of my degree would consist of learning the intricacies of government, public administration, and economic policy. **Ethical reasoning** was a major theme in each of these classes.

- Political Theory PSC 3050 was a course which focused on the longstanding tradition of western democracy dating back to classical Greek political thought. The class segmented the benchmarks of democratic philosophy through the ages into the major writings of important authors. Special concern was paid to how these different philosophical camps are demonstrated or rejected by our modern capitalistic democracy.
- In Global Corporate Social Responsibility: BUS 3040, **ethical reasoning** was a particularly big theme. Each module had a case study that demonstrated a specific scenario in a business context to be solved through ethical reasoning. This class studied the philosophy behind ethics in the business world, why it is important, how it is often overlooked, and how to implement it into a company or industry for best practices. Environmental impact was included in the discussion of business ethics.
- Public Policy: PSC 3220 was an analysis of the ongoing development of government policy, covering the main stages of the policy process: agenda building, formulation, authorization, implementation, and evaluation.
- Global Economics and International Trade: ECO 3550 discussed topics including international trade theory, capital movements, international monetary institutions, balance

of payment adjustments, and the impact of trade policies on economic development and growth.

### **Environmental Policy Cluster**

This cluster bridged the gap between studies in environmental science and political theory and policy. Courses in this cluster included Intro to Environmental Science: ENV 1200, Environmental Policy and Planning: ENV 4200, Environmental Politics: PSC 3230, Colorado Water Law: ENV 3250. This cluster of courses had a large focus in **critical thinking and problem-solving skills**. These courses required a scientific method approach to studying environmental policy. I developed skills in taking a question or a problem within the context of modern environmental issues and unpacking it using critical thinking and research.

- Intro to Environmental Science: ENV 1200 focused on gaining an understanding of the scientific methods and techniques needed to understand and analyze environmental issues such as ecology, human population growth, agriculture, urbanization, air pollution, freshwater resources, ocean pollution, climate change, fossil fuels, alternative energy sources, waste disposal, as well as environmental ethics and policy.
- Environmental Politics: PSC 3230 explored the political and administrative issues in the field of environmental politics. Environmental areas reviewed were environmental theory, organizations, political behavior, assessment, law, and decision-making.
- Environmental Policy and Planning: ENV 4200 provided overview of environmental policy and major environmental laws in the U.S. The major statutes were analyzed in terms of purpose, scope, implementation, compliance requirements, and impact on land use. Case studies were also examined in a planning context. For the capstone project of this class, students were asked to write a 10 page white paper report. **Critical thinking**

**and problem solving skills** were needed here to research, using 10 peer reviewed scholarly sources, a current environmental policy issue and to write up a report on the findings. I wrote about China and US public policy regarding the South West Pacific Island Chain and the land reclamation efforts there due to climate change and rising ocean waters. Thorough research, analyzation and policy recommendation were required.

- Colorado Water Law: ENV 3250 focused on the specifics of water law in the state of Colorado. The intricate allocation of water resources throughout the State is the central topic that students learned about. This class went over the climate, geology, and hydrology of the State and how human water demands often dictate the water flow for the region. Students were asked to author a research paper on a water rights issue in the State that was relevant for the current time. Ethical reasoning was implemented in my paper on how tribal water rights play into the politics surrounding water allocation of the Colorado River.

### **Senior Experience**

My chosen senior experience course was Democracy: US and the Third World PSC 402B. The broad goal of this course was to have students integrate and apply the knowledge they have gained thus far in their academic career to major questions in political science as well as provide additional practicum in the field. This course looked at democratic institutions, party systems, gerrymandering, ideological tribes and moral foundations, racial identity politics, and partisan identity. This class has been an excellent practicum of my studies thus far in politics and policy. Through the use of case studies and reports, students were able to demonstrate knowledge learned throughout political science courses previously taken.

### **Conclusion**

Upon graduating from MSU Denver with a degree in Environmental Policy, I will be deciding between schools in both the United States and France to continue my education through a master's program. Because I have already focused my undergraduate degree on environmental policy, I will further hone in my studies for my upper graduate degree. I would like to explore the relationship between economic innovation in the private sector and societal behavior trends relating to sustainable development. My education will focus more on the economics involved with environmentalism. Through my studies up to this point, I believe this mechanism to be the strongest tool to achieve large scale sustainability practices. I hope to work in the public or private sector to consult and to create policy that serves society but also fosters the betterment of the natural world and the life within it. This degree will be the foundation upon which I can propel my education and career in environmental policy going forward.