

Supporting Essay #2

NSF Graduate Research Fellowship

As an American Indian and a social scientist in the field of environmental management, I believe my work will bring valuable insight to academia and society as a whole through the fostering of underrepresented cultural and academic perspectives that can greatly contribute to a subject of critical importance: the state of our natural environment. American Indians are perhaps the least represented voice in academia today. My work as a graduate student not only brings a unique and apparently much-needed perspective to the field of environmental management, but also is devoted to benefiting American Indian communities. Furthermore, throughout my academic career I have noticed that social science (and in particular, anthropology) is often marginalized by other scientists in the environmental sciences. My graduate work will hopefully contribute to understanding the role of social science in environmental management and could stimulate more interdisciplinary approaches in research design. Throughout my education and continuing on in my profession, I hope to bring these valuable alternative perspectives to the forefront.

Currently I am engaging in activities that promote minority representation in the environmental fields. I am a member of a new student group within my department – Students of Color in Environmental Science, Policy, and Management (SOC ESPM) – and with this group I plan to provide encouragement for minority students interested in the department. My efforts have already entailed participating in college-wide diversity workshops, advising potential students in a department-wide diversity recruitment day, and representing SOC ESPM in departmental student governance meetings. My future efforts will include developing a SOC website as a link on my department website to provide support, advice, and contact information for prospective students, as well as participating in efforts of faculty diversity recruitment.

My proposed research has the potential to contribute to community education, both environmental and cultural. Because my research is linked to local environmental knowledge, I foresee a cyclical relationship between research and education. From this perspective, local knowledge informs the research and the research perpetuates the use and teaching of local knowledge. This relationship has broad implications for the resilience of traditional knowledge in American Indian communities. By engaging traditional knowledge in current discourse (i.e. environmental policy) we can solidify more areas of social space that allow for the continued use of our knowledge.

In an academic setting, my work could easily fit within the subjects of anthropology, environmental management, and American Indian studies. My previous and current involvement in each of these disciplines provides me with the tools to address research questions from different perspectives and through diverse theoretical angles. Therefore, many venues exist for the dissemination of my research as well as for collaboration across disciplines. On a societal level, my work is also related to the subject of environmental justice, which focuses on the minority voice in the environmental decision-making process. In my professional career – as a professor or natural resource manager – I will emphasize equal representation in environmental decision-making and promote education of environmental rights and public involvement.