

**A Journey Through Prescott College's Master of Science in
Environmental Studies (MSES) Program**

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Abstract

This reflective essay explores Galen R. Lee's academic journey through the Master of Science in Environmental Studies (MSES) program at Prescott College. With a foundational background in Environmental Science and Adventure Education, Lee's graduate studies have deepened his understanding of environmental issues, sustainability, and the application of interdisciplinary approaches to environmental challenges. Through a combination of coursework, hands-on field experiences, and internships, Lee has explored various aspects of environmental studies, including climate change, conservation biology, and sustainable investing. Notably, projects such as his research project, *Returning Rapids Western Grand Canyon*, and *Climate Change and Sustainable Investing Specialization* internship have been pivotal in integrating theoretical knowledge with practical application. This essay not only chronicles Lee's educational progression but also underscores the importance of community, hands-on experiences, and the integration of diverse educational backgrounds in shaping effective environmental advocates and professionals. Future studies at the University of Southern Norway promise to further expand Lee's perspective on global environmental conservation challenges. Through reflection on past experiences and anticipation of future studies, Lee illustrates the dynamic and interconnected nature of environmental studies, advocating for a holistic and inclusive approach to tackling environmental challenges.

Keywords: Environmental Studies, Sustainability, Adventure Education, Climate Change, Conservation Biology, Interdisciplinary Approaches, Hands-on Experience, Community Engagement, Prescott College, Global Environmental Conservation.

Introduction

My journey through Prescott College's Master of Science in Environmental Studies (MSES) program was an empowering and influential step in my academic career. Building on the knowledge gained during my undergraduate studies in Environmental Studies and Adventure Education, this graduate program has allowed me to immerse my mind in the deeper intricacies of environmental studies while incorporating my own unique perspective on environmental issues. This perspective has been honed through hands-on experiences and a profound appreciation for the natural world – greatly influenced by my adventure education background. This reflective essay will chronicle my academic journey, elucidating my diverse educational background's integral role in shaping my approach to environmental studies and sustainability.

Convergence of Paths

My journey into environmental studies began with dual undergraduate degrees in Environmental Science and Adventure Education between 2019 and 2023. These two fields of study provided me with a unique lens through which to view environmental issues—a lens that combined rigorous scientific analysis with a deep appreciation for experiential learning and the outdoors. This interdisciplinary foundation fueled my passion for ecological stewardship and equipped me with the practical skills and perspectives necessary to engage in field-based research projects.

The decision to join Prescott College's Master of Science in Environmental Studies was driven by a deep desire to continue learning and growing my experience while adding depth to my engagement with environmental issues and an ability to contribute meaningfully to finding solutions for issues impacting our Earth. As I reflect on this journey, it is clear that it has been a

transformative experience marked by intellectual growth, practical challenges, and the formation of lasting relationships within the Prescott College community.

Foundation Building and Field-Based Learning

The summer of 2023 marked the beginning of my graduate studies with the *Critical Foundations of Research & Scholarship* course. This course delved into the intricacies of critical research methodologies, prompting me to question and redefine what research meant in the context of environmental science. The emphasis on creative and emergent research approaches resonated with my experiential education background, where learning is often dynamic and rooted in direct exposure and experiences. This course laid the groundwork for understanding how every research method could be enriched through critical analysis, enhancing my perspective on environmental issues.

Additionally, this course underscored the importance of systems thinking, a concept that resonated with my background in Environmental Science and my experience in Adventure Education. For the final project in this course, I completed a formal research proposal titled [*Research Proposal: Returning Rapids Western Grand Canyon*](#) (Lee, 2023a). This project was the first step in a journey that would go on to be the culmination of my undergraduate studies and became a pivotal component of my graduate studies.

Parallel to the theoretical exploration provided in *Critical Foundations of Research & Scholarship* was my *Mentored Study: Climate Change and Sustainable Investing Specialization*. Interning at R.W. Baird in the summer of 2023, I navigated the complex interplay between climate change, economy, and finance. My undergraduate studies profoundly shaped this experience, where Environmental Science provided the analytical lens to assess climate risks. Adventure Education instilled the risk management mindset, incorporating the adaptability and

hands-on approach necessary for real-world problem-solving. This mentored study was not just an internship but an application of my academic foundation in a setting that demanded critical thinking, practical engagement, and a professional approach.

Bridging Theory and Practice

In the fall of 2023, I successfully led [*Returning Rapids Western Grand Canyon*](#) (Lee, 2023c), a research project that represented the culmination of my academic and practical experiences up to that point. This project, which aimed to apply conservation biology theories to research the disrupted ecosystems of the Colorado River, was a testament to the skills and knowledge I had acquired through my undergraduate studies. The hands-on, experiential learning opportunities provided by my Adventure Education degree proved instrumental in my ability to participate in and lead this field-based research project, seamlessly integrating theoretical knowledge with practical application while working towards finding solutions for environmental impacts across the drought-stricken Southwestern United States.

Understanding Climate Change further expanded my understanding of environmental issues, offering insights into the scientific and policy dimensions of climate change. The course's emphasis on evaluating and proposing solutions for climate-related issues was complemented by my previous field experiences, including my internship as a River Ranger with the United States Forest Service in the Bob Marshall Wilderness during the summer of 2022, in which I got to see hands-on examples of how policy impacts user groups, agencies, and the land itself. This influential internship allowed me to apply my academic knowledge in a real-world setting, reinforcing the practical significance of my graduate studies.

Expanding Horizons and Embracing Community

Later, in the fall of 2023, the *Ecology, Culture, and Community* course further expanded my horizons. Tasked with understanding my community within a bioregional context, I drew upon my Adventure Education experiences, which had always emphasized the importance of place-based learning. This course encouraged me to explore the natural and cultural histories of regions, an endeavor that felt like a natural extension of the outdoor expeditions integral to adventure education. The skills I developed in this course—mapping, researching, and interpreting—were complemented by my innate understanding of the outdoors, allowing me to engage with the material in a personal way. The culmination of this course was a paper titled [*Deep History Report: Mogollon Highlands of North Central Arizona*](#) (Lee, 2023b), a paper that provided a thorough analysis of local and regional environmental issues and showed a deep understanding of the intricacies and history of the Mogollon Highlands region.

Environmental Law & Policy provided me with an incredibly comprehensive understanding of climate change's challenges and complexities from a scientific, legal, and policy perspective. My background in Environmental Science equipped me with the analytical tools to grasp the scientific underpinnings of climate change. At the same time, my adventure education experiences had already instilled a deep respect for the impacts and flaws of the laws and policies governing natural environments. This course was pivotal in shaping my approach to environmental advocacy, melding scientific knowledge with a keen awareness of the legal frameworks that protect our planet.

International Perspectives and Future Studies

My future studies at the University of Southern Norway in the spring of 2025 will be instrumental in broadening my understanding of environmental conservation on a global scale.

Courses like *Conservation Biology* and *Applied Molecular Genetics* will allow me to explore the intricacies of biodiversity and conservation through new lenses. At the same time, *Applied Conservation Biology*, and *Landscape Analysis and Remote Sensing* will deepen my understanding of the tools and processes used to research and implement positive change within the dynamic challenges of climate change. This international experience will add to my understanding of the global nature of environmental challenges and the importance of interdisciplinary approaches—a lesson that my diverse educational background has already taught me but one that will be expanded upon greatly.

Community and Professional Development

Throughout my journey at Prescott College, the community of friends, mentors, and educators I've been part of has played a crucial role in my academic and personal growth. The support and inspiration I've received from this conscious community have been invaluable, inspiring, and driving me forward even when faced with challenges. My internships were not just professional experiences; they were opportunities to apply my learning in real-world settings, contributing to my development as an environmental professional.

Growth and Discovery

Looking back on my academic journey through the Prescott College MSES program, I am filled with gratitude for the diverse experiences that have shaped my path. My undergraduate studies laid the foundation, my graduate coursework expanded my horizons, and my internships provided valuable professional experiences. Together, these components of my academic career have prepared me for the future with a comprehensive understanding of the challenges ahead and a steadfast commitment to making a difference. As I reflect on this journey, I am reminded of the

power of higher education, the influence of community, and the profound importance of hands-on experiences in shaping the environmental advocates of tomorrow.

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