

ILLINOIS STATE
UNIVERSITY



Department of Biological Sciences

210 Julian Hall
Campus Box 4120
Normal, IL 61790-4120
Telephone: (309) 438-3669
Facsimile: (309) 438-3722

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Dear Mykaila,

Thank you for your questions regarding what it took to get my degrees and why I chose to study environmental science. Growing up, I always had an interest in science, math and the natural world. In high school I had the opportunity to take an advanced biology course, which exposed me to various aspects of environmental biology. I developed an interest in understanding how living things work, how they interact with one another, and how human activities impact natural systems. I liked the idea of an interdisciplinary program such as environmental science that drew concepts from several different fields. Specifically, I was interested in learning more about issues related to environmental degradation, habitat loss, water quality, and biodiversity and figuring out ways to solve these complex issues.

A bachelor's degree (B.S.) in Environmental Science requires a strong foundation of knowledge in both math and science, so taking advanced courses in both of these fields in high school will get you off to a good start. Studies in environmental science are inherently interdisciplinary, incorporating science-related fields such as biology, chemistry, math, and geology as well as social and political disciplines. Taking fundamental courses in each of these areas provided me with the foundation of knowledge necessary to resolve very complex environmental issues. I was able to focus my field of study on areas that were of particular interest to me such as conservation biology, plant biology and ecology. Most environmental science programs allow you to tailor your studies to those fields that you find most interesting and are most passionate about and typically require at least four years to complete.

Some careers in environmental science may require that you pursue an advanced degree (M.S. or PhD). Master's degree programs in biology usually take 2-3 years to complete and doctoral degree programs typically take 4-6 years. Graduate programs in biology typically differ somewhat from undergraduate programs in that the primary focus is on research, which can be very exciting and rewarding! I am currently working on my master's degree and would say that it requires a strong desire to learn, discover new things and to problem solve.

There is a wide array of careers that a person with an environmental science degree can choose from. Many of my colleagues went on to get advanced degrees in environmental law, botany, natural resource management, geology, and ecology or work for various environmental agencies. Thanks again for your questions and best of luck to you!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alicia Mullarkey".

Alicia Mullarkey, ISU Biology Graduate Student