

Reflective Essay

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April 2023

When I transitioned from high school to university and started learning about ecosystem processes and wildlife conservation, I knew I wanted to be involved in this field of work. Prior to applying and doing my research with the undergraduate research experience award program (UREAP), I was always interested in field research. From doing literature reviews and research proposals for assignments in school, I was always fascinated in an opportunity to do my own. Before my UREAP application process, I did my graduation essay on a literature review where I reviewed 25 peer-reviewed papers. This provided me good base experience working with a supervisor while conducting my own research. Growing up in the Okanagan and hearing that this UREAP opportunity would be located there was exciting and very special because, I was able to provide research and wildlife protection through my job while close to home. The thought of doing UREAP was intriguing because of the value it would contribute to my knowledge and assets as a person and future biologist.

During my application process for UREAP, I learned the importance of animal ethics in the research community and understanding how to conduct research in depth. This was learned through safe handling venomous and non-venomous snakes and collaborating with my supervisor on my research methods. I also, gained a sense of pride and integrity for myself because leading up to this, I always strived for high grades as it was something I valued but,

little did I know that it would allow me to conduct research by being an essential requirement. While working with my colleagues who were master's students, I gained a ton of respect for from witnessing how much time they dedicated to their research. It was inspiring seeing such hard work and commitment! My professionalism in the workplace also improved through dealing with conflict and resolution. Unprecedented events occurred where my supervisor (grad student) and co-worker quit a month before their field season was finished. My research was incorporated with this grad students research, but all the research had to continue. I took this opportunity to step up and run the project with support from the head supervisor for this time. Doing the majority of field work and research myself was difficult but, I knew it would pay off in the end. Although my research experience had its ups and downs, when I reflect on it all I can think of are the good times because even though it was hard, I wouldn't have changed a thing.

While researching for my UREAP literature review I learnt a magnitude of knowledge on snake ecology and conservation management for reptiles and amphibians. The study area is significant because previous research revealed that rattlesnakes will go extinct within 100 years if conservation measures stay stagnant in the White Lake Basin. My research focused on tracking snake home ranges from when they come out of hibernation in the spring, through the summer, and when they go back into hibernation in the fall. The movement of 3 snake species: Western rattlesnake, great basin Gophersnake, and the yellow-bellied racer were tracked (all are blue-listed in BC). The latter 2 species lacked in data in this area and therefore providing movement patterns to help conservation and mitigation work for the future with road eco

passages (culverts). During the snakes summer home range they are threatened by getting killed while crossing the 2 roads that intersect this habitat. Even though there are 8 eco-passages under these roads, road mortality still occurs each year. My data and research report can and will be used by other grad students doing research that will help protect these threatened snake species.

Some basic skills I've learned is data analysis and management, wildlife management techniques, professional writing, and communicating. Learning how to deal with conflict and stepping up to take over the project, has given me knowledge to pull from in future situations. After finishing my paper in fall of 2022, I have made connections with people in the research community. I have helped a past colleague sort data, and they have reached out for advice on research strategies for the 2023 field season. I am also working under a grad student with analyzing data. Most recently, another grad student reached out knowing my experiences for help with snake work in spring 2023. I am looking forward to the skills that I have learned and see how they support me in my future careers.