

As simple as it would make it, being a leader in environmental sustainability is not about having a certificate that says so. While recognition can go a long way in terms of motivating oneself and others, true luminaries of sustainability know that their actions speak louder than words or affirmations. Much as the environment grows, adapts and continuously cycles, being a leader in environmental sustainability is a never-ending process that requires deep appreciation, ongoing education and knowledge sharing capabilities. In this essay, I will explain my own growth when it comes to sustainability and how I plan to leverage my appreciation and education to leave this planet better than I found it.

Engagement with nature at a young age is what first fosters environmental awareness and appreciation and this was especially true in my childhood. Whether it was the two dog walks per day or ‘time outs’ spent on the trampoline rather than a corner of the room, my parents ensured that my exposure to nature was plentiful. We always practiced the 3 R’s, never left a light switch on and spent almost every free moment we had outside. They even packed up their lives in the UK and immigrated our family to Canada in hopes that it would bring my sister and I a greener, wilder and more nature-based life.

Upon my high school graduation, my love for being outdoors inspired me to go on a backpacking trip around Southeast Asia where I spent my months hiking, swimming and taking in the big beautiful world around me. Upon my return, I had a new found desire to attend post-secondary and do whatever it takes to secure myself a job where I could travel and see the world every day. Based on this, I can admit that my decision to study tourism was initially hedonistic. To sum it up, I wanted to jet around and play in nature. Thanks to my time at TRU, I now realize how extractive this type of traveling and desire was. My degree has not only shifted my attitudes but my understanding of environmental issues has expanded immensely.

Due to the initiative and passions of my professors, many of my courses at TRU have included sustainability in their curriculums. One class that really stood out for me was *TMGT 2610 - Environmental Issues in the Tourism Industry*. In this course, we looked at how the rapid growth of tourism has resulted in significant negative environmental and cultural

impacts. We also identified the challenges that I as a future tourism professional will face when developing tourism policies or owning and operating tourism businesses. Additionally, we used Banff National Park as a case study to understand how conservation and tourism management has been conducted in our country's past. This lesson was extremely valuable to me because I had lived and worked in the park just the summer prior and still had rose-tinted glasses due to its natural beauty. However, the lessons I learnt about the history and issues the destination has, opened my eyes and impacted how I interact with destinations like National Parks even today. This course created a foundational understanding for the rest of my degree and forever taught me to look more critically at tourism's environmental impacts.

Another course that has significantly shaped my comprehension of sustainability is *TMGT 4040 - Tourism and Sustainable Development*. While TMGT 2610 focused on identifying and introducing environmental issues, this course provided me with theoretical approaches and practical, up-to-date tools that I can use to combat said issues. This course has been critical in my own development as I now possess both the educational foundation and every day methods to help me lead a more sustainable life and career. One framework that we focused on was Regenerative Travel. I learnt about how sustainable tourism, which involves mitigating impacts, is no longer enough to maintain our planet and that we must move to a more regenerative approach. This means leaving a destination better than it was found. I can safely say that this framework has shaped how I will be thinking and behaving when it comes to sustainability for the rest of my life.

Thanks to the skills and knowledge I have acquired from my education at TRU, I currently work part time for a destination marketing and travel content company called Eco Escape Travel. My role is to produce ecotourism, sustainable travel and adventure content, as well as offer destination marketing services to clients around British Columbia. Prior to starting, I was weary of getting into marketing because I have seen first hand the damage that social media promotion can have on tourism destinations. However, by working at Eco Escape Travel, I have learnt how social media and effective storytelling can be used to educate an audience about the environment and responsible travel. In order to do this, our company is guided by four pillars: environmental stewardship, community empowerment,

ecological connection and cross-cultural engagement. We adhere to these principles in all aspects of our work. So whether I am writing an article about the Leave No Trace principles or organizing a campaign to inspire travellers to visit less-crowded attractions, sustainability is always at the forefront. This position is a dream come true for me as I get the opportunity to use what I have learnt at TRU and create impactful tourism content that not only contributes to protecting the planet but strengthens local communities.

When I meet people and tell them I am graduating from a tourism program in 2021, they often ask if I am worried due to the detrimental impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the industry. While it no doubt has been catastrophic, I am actually excited. As I learned in my courses at TRU, the tourism industry was not operating in a sustainable manner prior to 2020. As I enter the industry now, it is somewhat of a clean slate and I have a career full of opportunity to help rebuild and change the sector for the better. Short term, my goal upon graduation is to continue working for Eco Escape Travel and hone in my writing and storytelling skills. Additionally, I would love to create my own blog and contract out my writing services in order to continue sharing sustainability related articles and stories. Long term, however, I hope to use everything I have learned along my sustainability journey to either start an environmental non-profit or business that helps to regenerate tourism destinations impacted by overtourism.

Despite my inherited respect and appreciation for the environment, prior to TRU I was lacking the education and knowledge sharing components that are key to being a leader in sustainability. The phrase 'loving to death' described me perfectly; I was spending lots of time enjoying nature but I was not taking into account how much my usage was contributing to its degradation. From my experiences at TRU as well as my work experiences, I have recognized that in order for future generations to enjoy our planet, I must do my part to improve it. This does not mean that I will stop seeking out experiences in nature, it just means that I have the education and tools to be a part of the Regenerative Travel movement. My desire to receive TRU's Leadership in Environmental Sustainability certificate is to inspire me to continue pursuing my environmental goals and the never-ending journey towards a healthier planet.