

Statement of Purpose

Being from the state of Michigan, it did not take long for me to realize that the surroundings people identified themselves with—the Great Lakes, GM and Ford Motor Companies, the lumber and mining industry, the constantly changing weather, tourism, and so forth—influenced the way they perceived and acted in this world. This is a quality that has captivated me in my development as a writer, and I wish to explore more of it in my graduate studies at Iowa State University's environment-focused MFA creative writing program.

During my senior year at Grand Valley State University, my interest in environment was fully embraced when I began to read materials written from authors who paid great attention to their native land—David Means, Jack Driscoll, Sherwood Anderson, and Theodore Roethke, to name a few. Through their writings, it felt as if though the land I grew up in was suddenly cracked open and lain out to be rediscovered and explored all over again. No longer did I write my fiction in a broad, indiscreet setting; instead, I embraced my surroundings and wrote about what I knew—Michigan, the people of Michigan, and how the former influenced the latter in terms of thought, pursuit, and desire. In fact, the influence of environment on human nature has become such a passion of mine that I started an online literary magazine—*The Weathervane: a journal of Great Lakes Writing*—with several colleagues who share the same spirit of the Great Lakes culture as myself.

Yet in my pursuit of environment on human nature, I have recently come to the conclusion that I am pigeonholing my writing by remaining in Michigan. I may have resources here, but I am also not seeing the picture of the world as a whole. Instead I am limiting my writing to a specific Great Lakes audience. This is another reason why I want to pursue my graduate studies at Iowa State University: not only does the program focus directly on environment, but it also allows me to take a step back from my home state in order to fully see how it compares and contrasts to the rest of the world. I want to expand my writing so that it pushes past Michigan barriers and onward to broader regions. The way to do this is to leave the Great Lakes.

While at Iowa State University, I hope to focus heavily on sharpening my fiction writing skills. This not only involves the connection of environment to human nature, but also the craft of my writing itself. Right now, I feel as if though my stories are crafted like a painting or photograph—that is, they go into great detail explaining a specific scene and the people involved in that scene, but have little movement beyond that. I wish to change this, crafting my stories more as a movie—a piece of fiction that moves through the landscape and in the end captures a world for the reader to explore intently. I believe with the program offered at Iowa State University, I can hone in on these goals in my writing. Ultimately, I hope to write a collection of fictional short stories dedicated to the environment and its effect on the human spirit while gaining the confidence I need to submit my work to national publications without hesitation.

In addition to strengthening my personal writing, I hope to further develop my passion for editorial activities at Iowa State University. As an undergraduate, I was an editor for two on-campus literary magazines, *VEIL* and *fishbladder*. Most recently, my post-graduation time has been spent as the contest coordinator and reader for Del Sol Press' Robert Olen Butler Fiction Prize. Through all of these activities, I learned to effectively organize meetings and pick from a large amount of submissions a select few that showed potential of being a complete, unique work. However, I still feel that there is a lot of room to expand and strengthen my skills of editing, especially considering the future of *The Weathervane*. I believe that your literary magazine, *Flyway*, can help me greatly in strengthening and challenging my skills as an editor. While attending your program, I would work intently on *Flyway* and would give you the same passion for editing that I have given other magazines in my past.

Another love of mine that I have yet to discuss is teaching. During my last two years at Grand Valley, I taught others how to write effectively when I worked as a lead writing consultant at the Fred Meijer Center for Writing and Michigan Authors. As a lead consultant, I helped students from all majors on all aspects on their writing, including brainstorming, editing, proofreading, and organization, both in the one-on-one and group setting. My interests in teaching were strengthened every day when I saw the students I helped gain confidence and progress in their academic and creative writing. I also felt that my personal writing was being challenged every day, and that through others' pieces I was able to focus on my personal proofreading and editing skills. Through the assistantships offered at Iowa State, I feel that I can further pursue my goals of teaching, again helping students gain the confidence they need in the academic setting while simultaneously improving my skills and qualities as a writer personally.

Admission to Iowa State University will undoubtedly give me the opportunity to pursue all of my goals and ambitions. I would like to be in the same setting as authors such as Debra Marquart—an Iowa State professor I was able to hear read at a *fishbladder* release party—who embrace the same ideologies of environment to human nature that I admire. In addition, I feel that through your offered assistantship I can help students embrace writing while further strengthening my skills as a writer and desire to teach at a college level. Finally, I believe that my appetite for editorial work can be fulfilled with your literary magazine, *Flyway*. I know that I would be a great fit for the program and would fully utilize all that it has to offer me.