There is something serene yet powerful about being underwater, floating in the swells and fighting against the waves. It is fascinating to see marine creatures swimming effortlessly against the currents while we humans struggle to move three feet, only to be swept back two. After a field course in Belize, I gained an increased sense of respect and reverence for the graceful nurse sharks sleeping in the nooks of corals and the rays gliding above the turtle-grass. As soon as I slipped into the water at Shark-Ray Alley, the boat and my peers were instantly enveloped by Southern stingrays and Caribbean nurse sharks hoping we were a group of fishermen there to clean our catch. Unlike some of the others, I wasn't afraid of the sharks; on the contrary, I was elated to see so many elasmobranchs on the sandy bottoms and swimming among the corals—a sign of a happy and healthy ocean. This shark-filled experience stood in stark contrast with other areas protected by weaker conservation efforts where populations of large predators are diminished or absent. Even throughout this UNESCO World Heritage Site, marine conservation is lacking, particularly for sharks and rays as many people have been hoodwinked by sensationalist media reports of attacks, negative representations in books and media such as *Jaws*, and their image as fearsome predators. Due to this, public engagement and conservation support for sharks is limited compared to marine creatures viewed as more benign. My overarching goal in life is to tackle these misconceptions and champion the amazing sharks and rays of the world, to instill respect for all marine life in others, and to promote the maintenance and conservation of marine ecosystem resilience and biodiversity.

I have always been interested in marine life, but the educational background in ecology and evolutionary biology that I have gained from Regis University, specifically the classes I've taken in marine biology and biodiversity, conservation, environmental studies, and bioethics have only increased my understanding of the complexity of marine ecology and conservation. From developing a conservation action plan for the dugong to investigating sea turtle conservation on a tropical island, I've learned that working to solve environmental issues and advocating for the protection of marine life is a multifaceted endeavor crucial for the health of the planet.

In my time as an undergraduate student at Regis University, I have cultivated numerous skills in addition to basic biology laboratory and field techniques, including collaboration, resourcefulness, and adaptability. Specifically, my time spent as a teaching assistant for organismic and cellular biology labs has enabled me to develop my abilities to problem-solve, take initiative, and communicate with students who needed help understanding the course material and laboratory procedures. I also participated in a behavioral ecology research project on a previously unstudied herd of Plains Bison (*Bison bison*) for a local conservation group. This project helped me develop skills and knowledge related to current conservation and management practices in relation to the environment, climate, and behavior, as well as data collection, report writing, and study design. I think that many of these skills would be helpful for a graduate program at the University of Washington, as well as in my future career as a marine conservationist.

My objective for graduate-level education is to understand the complexities of marine science and environmental justice in relation to resource management, applied conservation strategies, environmental law and ethics, and policy analysis. I aspire to a career focused on ecological & anthropogenic relationships, ecosystem responses to stressors and change, as well as how human values and perspectives influence and shape marine conservation, management, and policy decisions at marine organizations like Oceana or NOAA. I am chiefly interested in marine conservation through project advocacy, policy, and hands-on work with marine life, and I know that a UW degree will further these goals. I hope that over the long term my career will allow me to communicate with the public and policy makers in ways that foster better choices for the health, resilience, and biodiversity of the planet.

The interdisciplinarity of your program and faculty at the University of Washington and its School of Marine and Environmental Affairs (SMEA) fit well with my educational and career goals. The opportunities to learn in nontraditional settings, such as utilizing the University's partnerships with a variety of marine agencies and NGO's, and the classes involving direct study of the marine environment will be especially beneficial. More specifically, I am most excited for classes in U.S. Coastal and Ocean Law, Environmental Equity and Justice, and Marine Science in the coastal zone. Attending SMEA would provide me with resources and experiences that were more difficult to obtain in Colorado. This program will challenge and inspire me in a way that will provide me the tools for success in my future in marine affairs.

After obtaining my bachelor's degree at a Jesuit institution that prizes the connections between academic disciplines, I believe that further study in an environment that focuses on the application of interdisciplinary collaboration to environmental concerns is the best next step towards a career in marine affairs. The interdisciplinary nature of my undergraduate education has already prepared me for dealing with large problems that require more than a natural science background and has inspired me in much of my coursework. For example, my Honors thesis encompasses the interdisciplinarity of marine ecology and human-ocean interactions by investigating how to balance anthropocentrism with ecocentrism and overcome the tragedy of the commons in light of shark conservation. Put simply, I want to be able to champion the interests of marine life. While it's important to understand the ecology of the marine ecosystems we wish to conserve, it's equally important to understand how every stakeholder—including the average citizen—has a role in their protection and how to mitigate and ameliorate the negative anthropogenic stressors we have inadvertently brought upon the natural world.