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Writing Exercise

### Valuable Knowledge to be Gained by the Willing

The conservation biology and leadership skills course offered by Pacific Biodiversity Institute (PBI) has provided me with valuable insight into what it is to be an ecologist or biologist in today's day and age. Before this course I hadn't had much exposure to scientists and workers who are in the field, and I had no idea what kind of opportunities were available to me. I chose to attend this course because I am graduating with my bachelor's degree soon and I wanted to find out more about my own personal interests; whether or not I like ecology or physiology more (my degree is biology with a biomedical emphasis), and this course gave me so much more than what I expected. I learned about the ecology of the Pacific Northwest, field research techniques, and the different paths one can take after finishing their undergraduate career.

The North Cascades of Washington provide an excellent area for this type of course. This part of Washington is lower in human population, meaning there is more wildlife around, and it provides many different areas of study. The diversity available for study allowed this course to teach subjects that would fulfill each student's area of interest. The location of the North Cascades Basecamp meant we were living right in the center of everything, constantly surrounded by the beautiful plant life and obnoxious squirrels. Just walking through the property offered opportunities to see different wildlife, including pileated woodpeckers, and a newly born fawn, not to mention all the wildlife seen on field trips. The balance of the ecosystem here is so interesting and the knowledge gained about this area can be easily generalized and applied to any other area.

I have never had exposure to any field research before this course, so I am greatly appreciative of the chance to learn about it and then repeatedly be able to put it into practice. Setting up plots for data collection seems to be the most difficult part; I was glad for the chance to practice my compass skills. I also learned to use new tools, such as a clinometer, which is used to measure the incredibly tall Ponderosa pines. My group project was to collect data on small mammals around the Basecamp, so choosing that specific study on my part allowed me to learn handling techniques of wild small mammals, which could prove valuable if I am ever given the opportunity to again work with mammals in the field. Helping PBI set up their western gray squirrel plots was important in teaching me the correlation of field work with conservation. The plots are being used to see if there are gray squirrels in areas affected by the major wildfire complexes in the area. Then, by determining the effect of those on the gray squirrels they can determine if conservation efforts are needed to help out the squirrel population and gain information about whether the fire caused the squirrels to move.

The most important things I learned were not about science specifically. As a soon-to-be graduate I have been quite stressed about what I am going to do. Hearing about the different paths people have taken after they finished their bachelor's has given me a lot of reassurance that it will all work out alright. I learned so much about the different opportunities there are for a recent college graduate to explore. I feel reassured that it is okay that I do not go to graduate school right away; all of the people I have talked to took at least a year off from school before continuing their education. They volunteered, traveled, and got internships to figure out more specifically what they were interested in so they knew that what they were going to study was something they were passionate about. This is exactly what I want to do. I have always heard that when people take time off from school they hardly ever go back, and I have been nervous

that would happen to me. Now I know, if you are passionate enough you can do anything, and you will find the right path for yourself. I am excited now to graduate so I can explore and learn and adventure so I can find my passion in life.

This course was exactly what I needed. It was an experience, a new way of learning, and an adventure. At this point in my life that is all I crave. I want to expand my knowledge of the world and I want to go explore, to go on adventures. New experiences are valuable, and this was completely new. I met some of the most interesting and coolest people--not just the people who came and taught, but my colleagues. Each person I have met here has taught me something, provided me with new perspectives and had a unique personality, and I cannot express my appreciation for that enough. Each unique personality among my peers allowed me to be a part of this great, interesting group of people; the way we melded together was perfect for me, becoming almost like a family during this four week experience. I am so glad I got to meet and know each one of them. This course is something I will not forget, and I in no way regret taking the chance of coming here. Even though we ran into some disagreements and annoyances, the advantages given and knowledge and experience gained completely negated those problems.