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ENSU 1000: Reflective Essay

My journey through environmental sustainability is not a story of hope or optimism. It is not a story of confidence that we can sink enough greenhouse gases to return our planet and its climate to stability in the future. Instead, it is the story of realism and respect. A journey of understanding the complex ecosystems on Earth and the atmosphere that we breathe in everyday. I would love to say that I feel hopeful for our future, however that is not my story.

I am sure that my path to environmentalism is the same as many others: parents who worked in forestry and natural resources, lots of time spent outdoors, and an appreciation for the environment being instilled from a young age. From this, I have always loved being outdoors going camping, skiing, swimming, and backpacking. My degree, a B.Sc. majoring in Environmental Chemistry, has allowed me to learn about the chemical processes occurring within the environment and how they are impacted by anthropogenic activities, with a focus on atmospheric and aqueous environments. This has been especially interesting to me as most of these chemical processes aren't visible to us. Learning about these important reactions and chemical parameters has changed how I view our daily activities and made me more cognisant of our unseen impacts to the Earth.

I have had two work experiences that have pivotally impacted my perspective of environmental sustainability: the Invasive Species Council of British Columbia (ISCBC) as an Action Team Member and Urban Systems as a Climate Change and Water Resources Planning Student. Prior to working at ISCBC, I had zero interest in plants or biology in any aspect. However, working to manage invasive species to promote native species in areas that I love taught me about biodiversity, and from there I have grown an appreciation for ecology. I used to be solely interested in the planet as a whole, rather than the intricate ecological systems present around us. This perspective promotes an understanding of the needs of all living things, regardless of their size. This has changed how I view the world around me and given me a strong sense of belonging to nature and being a part of the ecosystems around me.

When I started at Urban Systems, I began to analyze temperature and precipitation data to write climate change prediction reports for clients. One of these reports quite literally changed my life, and probably for the worse. This climate change projection was for a small Indigenous community in Northern BC. This community is projected to experience a significant increase in the average daily temperature, as well as an extreme decline in the number of days below -15°C per year, which combined will result in much warmer winters. These findings were especially impactful as the community had requested the climate change projection data as part of the process to legally protect the glaciers in their territory. I will never forget meeting with the project leader once I had finished the report. He started by asking if what I wrote was actually correct, to which I said yes, and he followed up by asking if there was anything the community could do to stop the climate impacts, to which I had to say no; this was one of the most depressing conversations that I have ever had. Since then, thinking of the disproportionate impacts of climate change to small communities who have less resources to handle extreme climatic events never fails to make me cry. I often find myself thinking of that small, Northern

Indigenous community and feeling an immense sense of dread for the future that industrialization has doomed them with.

After researching and learning firsthand what our planet is expected to endure in the future decades, my hope for stopping climate change has completely died. I know that my generation is supposed to be the people who save us from that future. However, I have no optimism that it's even possible to stop. This change in perspective has been the most depressing part of my journey through environmental sustainability. With these opinions, it may seem like I have given up on living a sustainable and environmentally friendly lifestyle, but that is not the case. Through my work at ISCBC and other projects in my current position at Urban Systems, I have grown a deep understanding and respect for the ecosystems that we call home. I have changed from believing that sustainability is crucial to stop climate change, to now believing that sustainability is the least that we can do for our planet.

I often think that we need Earth to live but Earth does not need us, and would frankly be better off without us. The damage that we have caused to this planet through extreme greenhouse gas emissions is, in my mind, likely irreversible. However, the plants and animals that also call Earth home, as well as Earth itself, all deserve the utmost respect from us humans and do not deserve us giving up on protecting them. Because of this, we should all do our best to live in sustainable and environmentally friendly manners, no matter how depressing the projections for the future may be. This perspective is one that I will bring into all of my future work, where it will be critical for me to consider and respect all forms of life that may be impacted by the projects that I work on. Indigenous communities have lived in this province for centuries before colonization, and I believe that incorporating their traditional ecological knowledge and respect for all living things is crucial for a sustainable future. This viewpoint is how I aim to approach environmentalism after graduation and in all my future endeavors.