
I would like to participate in the Liberal Arts Research Collaborative (LARC) because working in an interdisciplinary setting will lend relevance to my future studies and vocations. Before Willamette my academic focus was in science. I came to university with the intention of majoring in biology, but I began to think that the scope of what I would do as a biologist was very limited. I looked to environmental science as a way of linking greater natural processes with our human impacts. Participating in LARC will allow me to work not only with Professor Chambers whose research focuses on human-environment interactions but also Professor Ybarra and students who have primarily studied the social and political aspects of our environment. My hope is that this will incubate idea exchange, deepening my knowledge of the social and political components of the landscapes in which we live.

In addition, spending the summer as part of a LARC research community will provide a meaningful conclusion to the work I am currently doing with Professor Chambers. We intend to examine how the communities in the Rio Sonora Valley that harvest chiltepins differ socioeconomically from those who do not. After nine months of technical work compiling data, I will, with the input of our research community, begin to understand the landscape in which these differences occur. LARC is also a great opportunity for me to learn how to research and write a paper collaboratively. Brayton Noll, Professor Chambers, and I have been working together loosely all year, and having the summer to collate our separate knowledge bases will improve all of our understandings of the subject as well as the final product.

The skills I gain from LARC will serve me in the next few years at Willamette and in my career beyond university. Right now there are many different directions I could choose to go in terms of my career, but human-environment interactions will be a key part of my focus. We hope to attend the Association of American Geographers annual conference in April 2011, where I will gain exposure to professionals who make their living looking at cultural and physical interactions. My hope is that the experience will inspire me to choose one of their professions as my own.

I want my future vocation to be positive for the environment, but I also want it to be useful to people. Though I would love to be able to study our natural world for its own sake, and though that kind of research would have intrinsic value, the knowledge gained would be irrelevant if I could not connect it in some way to the human experience. Outside of the context of our created landscapes, comprehension of the natural environment has little application to our human behavior. My goal is, through the LARC process, to learn how to begin to merge the political, cultural, and environmental aspects of a landscape in my mind and articulate this idea to others.