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Future Learning Goals

As mentioned, my goals have taken quite the unexpected trajectory since starting the MAED. I can only hope my aspirations will continue to outgrow me as my career goes on. I am specifically very interested in making wildlife conservation more accessible to everyone, especially those in underserved communities. I am also interested (hesitant, but interested!) in incorporating more technology into my teaching. Additionally, though this is quite specific to me, I would like to sharpen my knowledge of native Michigan wildlife. While of course I have many different professional goals, these three are the ones that have become more and more prominent during my time in the MAED.

During one of my last semesters, I took a course called Teaching Science for Understanding, which included an entire module on recognizing and conquering some of the inequities in science. “Confronting the Lies I Tell Myself” by Rebecca Berlin and Robert Q. Berry III was an excellent resource in reminding me of my own privilege, where that puts me in my role as an educator, and how I can use it to better serve my communities. I know that students of color, non-native English speakers, students of different socioeconomic status, and girls often participate less in science, and I’m motivated to do my part to change those statistics, even if it means taking small first steps. Potter Park Zoo has a program called [Zoo in Your Neighborhood](#), where education staff travels to various partnering locations throughout the state to deliver free education programs in underserved areas. I’m very interested in looking deeper into this program, how it is funded, and the impact it has made thus far, and using what I’ve learned to implement similar programs at zoos I am presently involved with, or may be involved with in the future. Zoo in Your Neighborhood has won the Angela Peterson Excellence in Diversity Award, so I know it will be a great tool in developing more programs to make conservation more accessible.

Technology in teaching has been a common theme in many of my courses throughout the MAED. This was extremely awkward to me at first because most of what I teach at the zoo is to “unplug.” We want our students and community members to connect with the natural world around them—so naturally, it seemed taboo to incorporate such an opposing force into my teaching. While it is admittedly something I’m still getting used to, I no longer see technology as the enemy (or I’m trying not to at least). I’m warming up to the idea of not entirely shutting technology out of conservation, but finding ways to help it further my mission statement. For example, I have been working with a program called [ZooMonitor](#), which is an efficient way of tracking animal behaviors and locations. Through this data, we gain immense knowledge of specific animals and can use it to increase animal welfare within the zoo. This is something that staff members can do on the clock, but also something that guests can do in their own backyard. I’m trying to keep reminding myself that by embracing technology rather than rejecting it, we can actually magnify our efforts to make the world a better place for animals.

Social media is also an instrumental tool in spreading awareness for conservation. Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium, in my opinion, has some of the most informative, yet fiercely entertaining online content. Though I've never been to Tacoma, Washington myself, I have learned so much from their [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) alone, and that's a reach you simply can't ignore. Though it's scary, I'm getting better at integrating myself into the world of technology.

Lastly, and possibly most simply, I know I need to expand my knowledge of local wildlife. It's beneficial to me regardless to have more knowledge of more animals, but knowing more native wildlife will help me make more my programs more accessible—kids can be a part on conservation in their own backyard! [Exploring Nature](#) has some great, easy-to-use information on different habitats and animals throughout the state. Additionally, Michigan State University has a [great page](#) for rare Michigan animals as well. I think because zoos often have such extravagant exotic animals, chimpanzees, tigers, kangaroos, etc., we often forget about the exciting world of animals we can find in our own backyard! Going forward, it's something I know I need to stop overlooking.

Every time I think I am in reach of my goals, they get bigger, more in depth, and far more exciting. I hope they never stop outgrowing me! I'm immeasurably lucky to have so many resources available to me, and I hope that I can contribute resources to others on my journey as well.