

Chloe Becker
Goal Reflection

If I'm being absolutely honest, I did not apply to the MAED with my heart in the right place. My initial thought was how great a master's degree would look on my resume—having gone to grad school would surely give me a leg up on my competitors in the insanely selective field that is wildlife conservation, right? Upon applying to the program, I had one goal and one goal only: finish the degree and flaunt it like gold. Of course, I do still maintain this goal (though perhaps I now know better than to dangle it in front of others like a carrot), but I have discovered other goals of mine in the last three years as well. Entering the program, I thought I would use my new skills to be a better educator to the public. Any guest who comes to the zoo would receive topnotch educational programming from yours truly. And again, that's still true as well. But I've also learned to use my skill to become a better supervisor and mentor to my own employees. Using skills and strategies I've absorbed through the MAED, I can create better resources and trainings for my seasonal education staff... I can literally be a better educator to the educators themselves; who've have thought?! While my attention was once only on zoo guests, this program has taught me not to shift, but to expand my focus to those in my own line of work. As much as I'd like to, I can't teach the entire world about conservation on my own. We need wildlife advocates and educators, and it's still my job to make sure they have everything they need to succeed in their teachings.

Along with my new focus on my own employees, this program has inspired me to continue broadening my reach in my community. In my first semesters here, I was creating programming for any guest who might come to the zoo on any given day. However, this was carelessly forgetting those who would love to learn about conservation, but might not have the same opportunity to. Through several courses on diversity and inequities in science, I'm now deeply motivated to create resources and programs for those who might not have the opportunity to come to the zoo. I have started researching different organizations within my community who would benefit from outreach programs from the zoo. Just because you can't come to the zoo doesn't mean you can't be a conservation advocate! I'm now much more mindful of the importance of inclusivity, and hope to only make wildlife more accessible to everyone. Though some bigger programs may take time to develop, the MAED certainly has gotten the gears in my head turning on ways to better serve my community as an educator.