

The high quality undergraduate education in the biological sciences that I received at Humboldt State University undoubtedly prepared me for the intellectual rigors that have come with graduate school. However, it was the research experiences from several field internships and assistantships that generated my interests in ecological research and pursuing a PhD at the University of Tennessee.

In 2003, I was a research assistant for Dr. Mike Kaspari, a community ecologist, on a project at La Selva Biological Research Station in Costa Rica. During these few months in a lowland tropical rainforest, I was instilled with an enthusiasm for novel species interactions in communities and was taught new skills and techniques for testing ecological theories. I learned first-hand the trials of field research and data collection and the stress involved when things don't work quite as they are supposed to. Most importantly, during this summer spent living and working alongside graduate students and professional scientists, I realized that I thoroughly enjoyed doing research in an academic environment.

In 2004, I obtained research assistantship with Dr. Jessica Hellmann studying the effects of global climate change on the population biology of several butterfly species at their northern range limit. This work addressed environmental issues using research techniques and ecological theory. It was clear to me that more researchers were needed if science was going to tackle the ever-increasing threats to the integrity of ecosystems, such as global climate change or the loss of biological diversity.

In conclusion, my desire to pursue advanced scientific study in ecology was strengthened by the realizations that I truly enjoyed doing research and pursuing scientific questions, along with the sense of urgency of solving environmental problems we are globally facing. I chose the ecology group at the University of Tennessee not only because it provides a strong quantitative foundation in ecology, but also because UTK supports a diverse community of biologists who are excellent resources for discussing new ideas and the frontiers of ecological research.