

# EarthLab Storytelling For Social Change Internship

**My Summer Experience**

Brianna Blanchard (She/Her)



## Some Major Thanks To.....

- Allie Long
  - Constance McBaron
  - Ben Packard
  - Jessica Peyla-Nagtalon
  - Anastasia Ramey
  - Lissan Tibebe
  - Gabriela Palma-Orantes
- 
- All of the wonderful interns in the 2024 cohort!



# About Me!

- I am a rising junior
- Grew up in a bilingual household with an immigrant parent, so I've always been passionate about communication and connection
- For the first half of my undergraduate experience, I was studying environmental engineering
- Towards the end of my sophomore year, I decided I wanted to switch my major to environmental public health
  - More opportunities to connect with people
  - Wanted to study a more life sciences route
  - I still hope to go back to engineering for graduate school, but this was a VERY scary decision! It was the first major turning point where I pivoted my professional goals



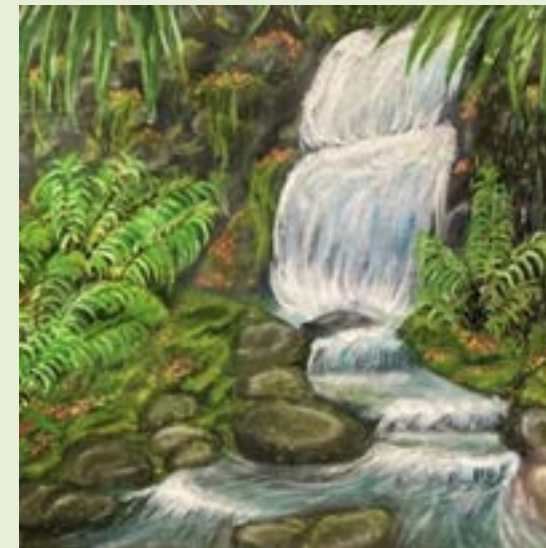


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Passionate about the arts and painting



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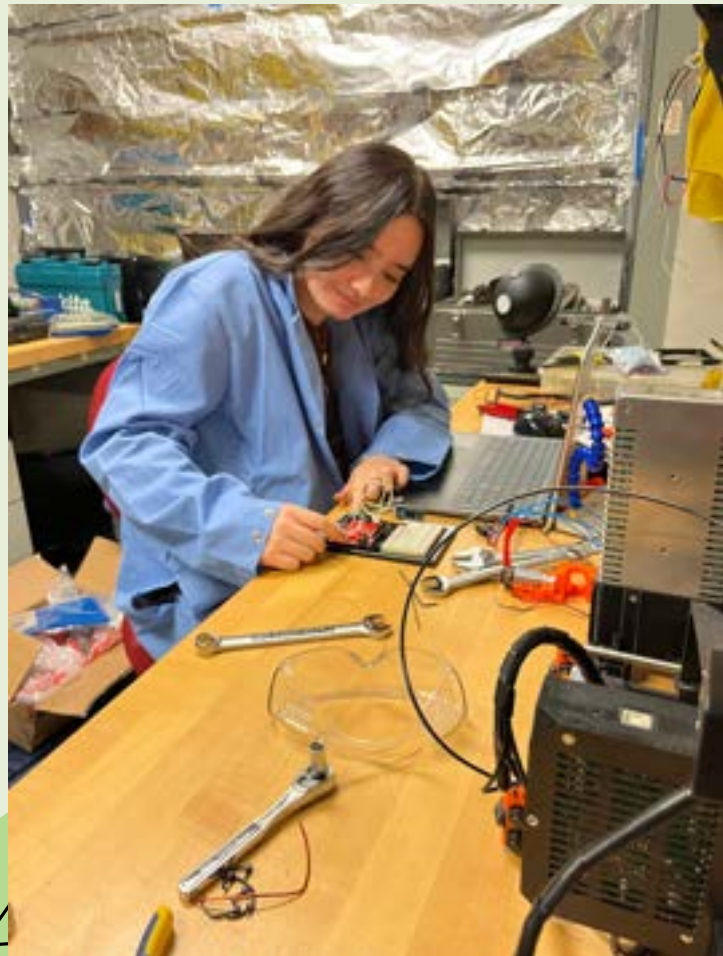


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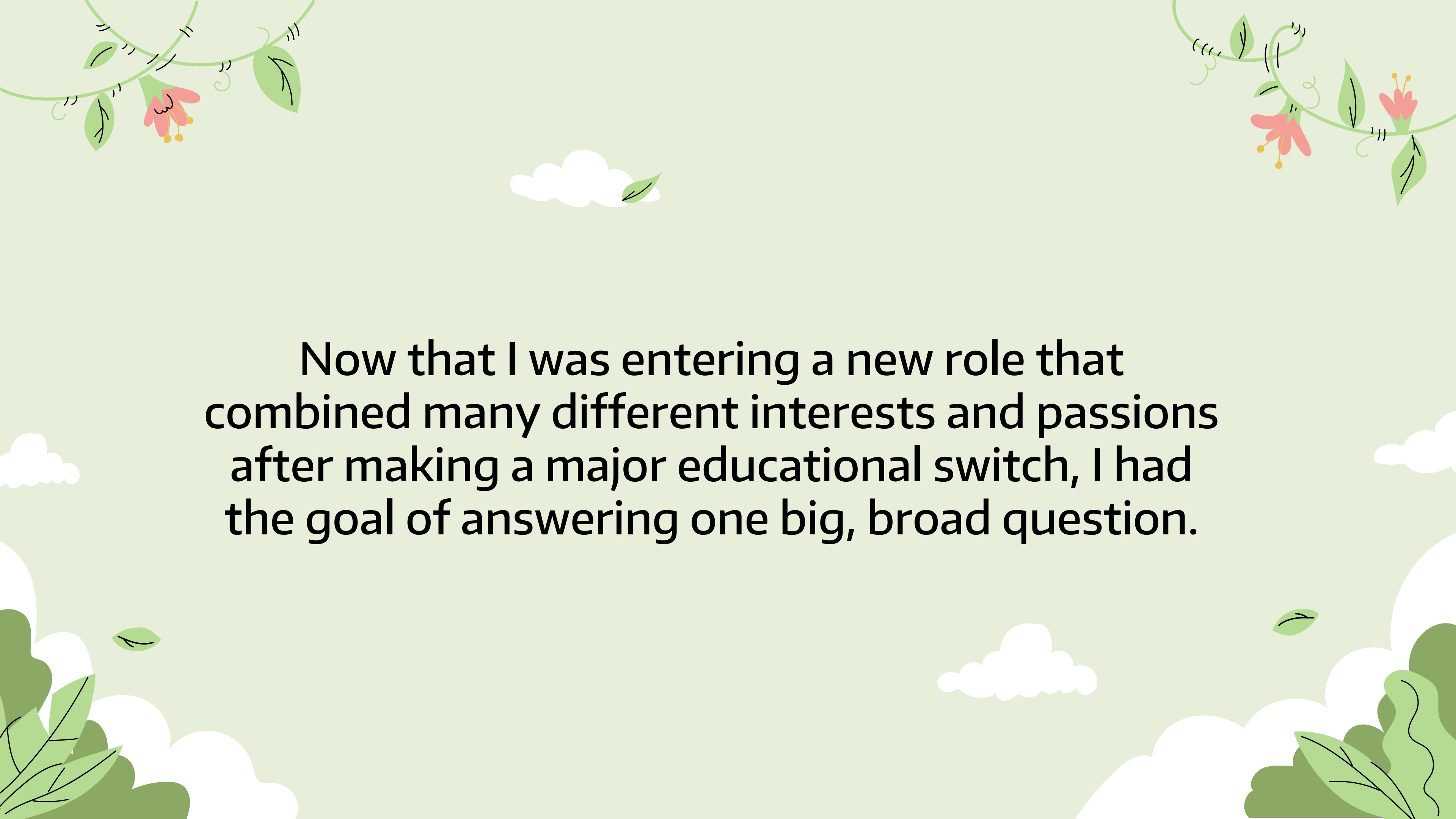


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Worked as an assistant with the WA NASA Space Grant doing communications work and research	→	Was excited to get the chance to do more science communication focused projects
Wanted to be an author from when I was 7 until I was 11	→	Storytelling opportunities? Sign me up!
Eager to find more professional connection after the pandemic	→	Thought the weekly cohort model of the program would be a great fit
Changed my major to something more related to humans and the environment	→	Loved the emphasis EarthLab had on promoting environmental justice








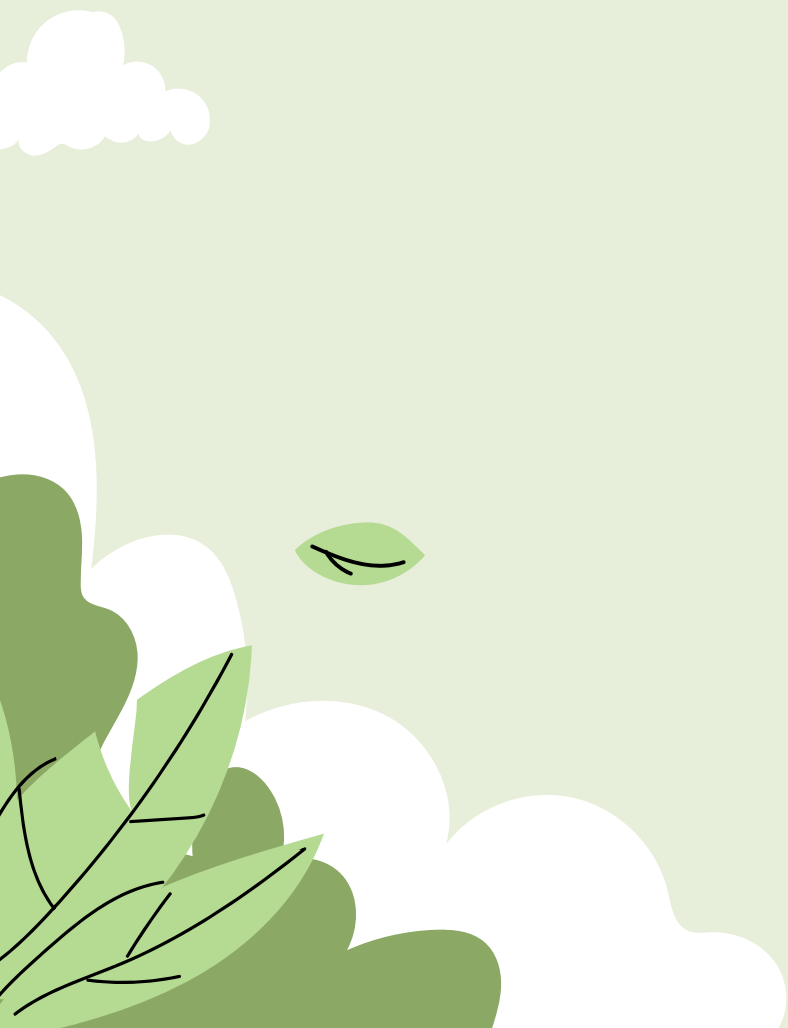
Now that I was entering a new role that combined many different interests and passions after making a major educational switch, I had the goal of answering one big, broad question.



# **My Big, Broad Question:**



Considering my different interests, what do I  
want to do for my future career  
and how will I get there?





# Weeks 1-3

## Worked on goal-setting with a learning agreement

- Too ambitious initially, ended up with a 12 page document at first
- Narrowed down my goals to be more realistic and specific

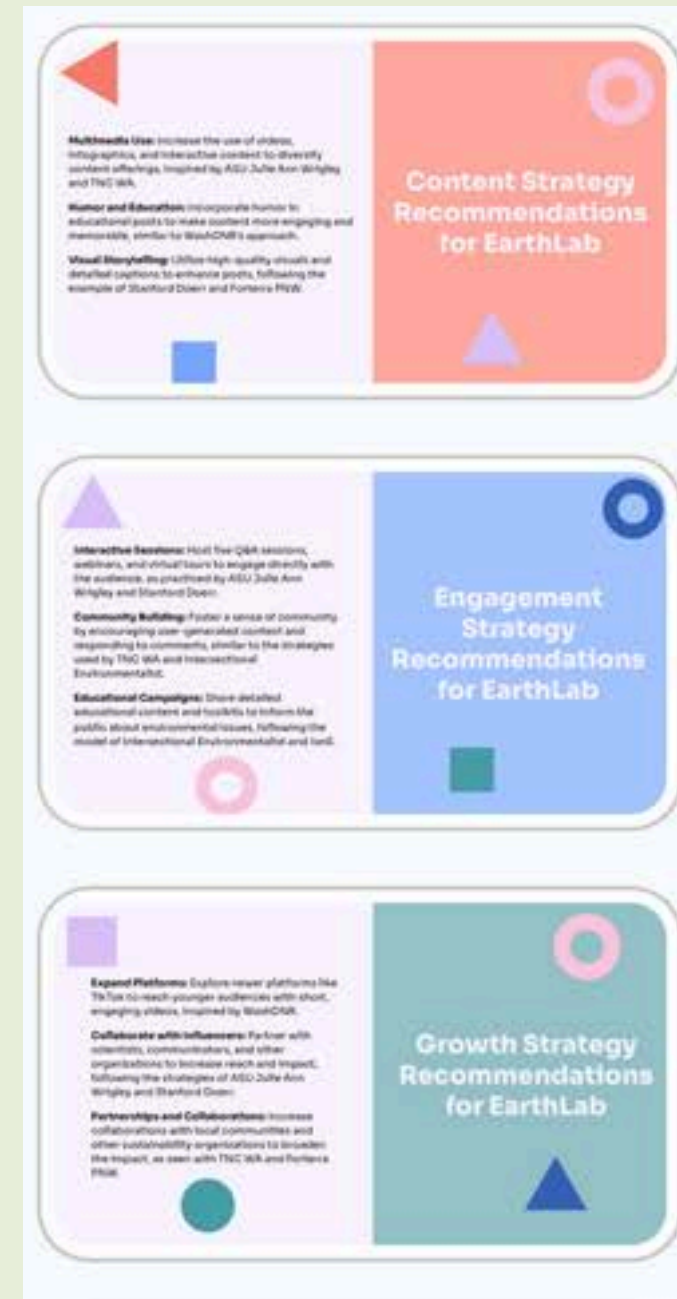
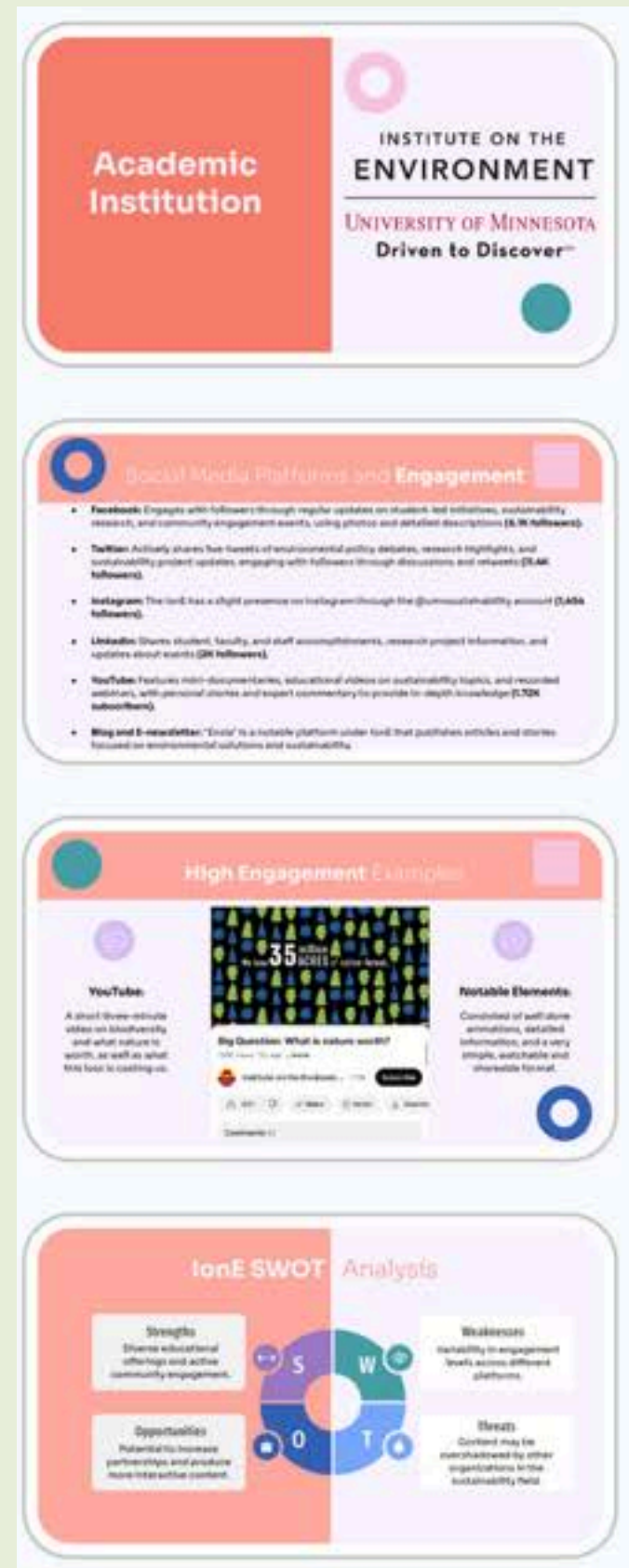
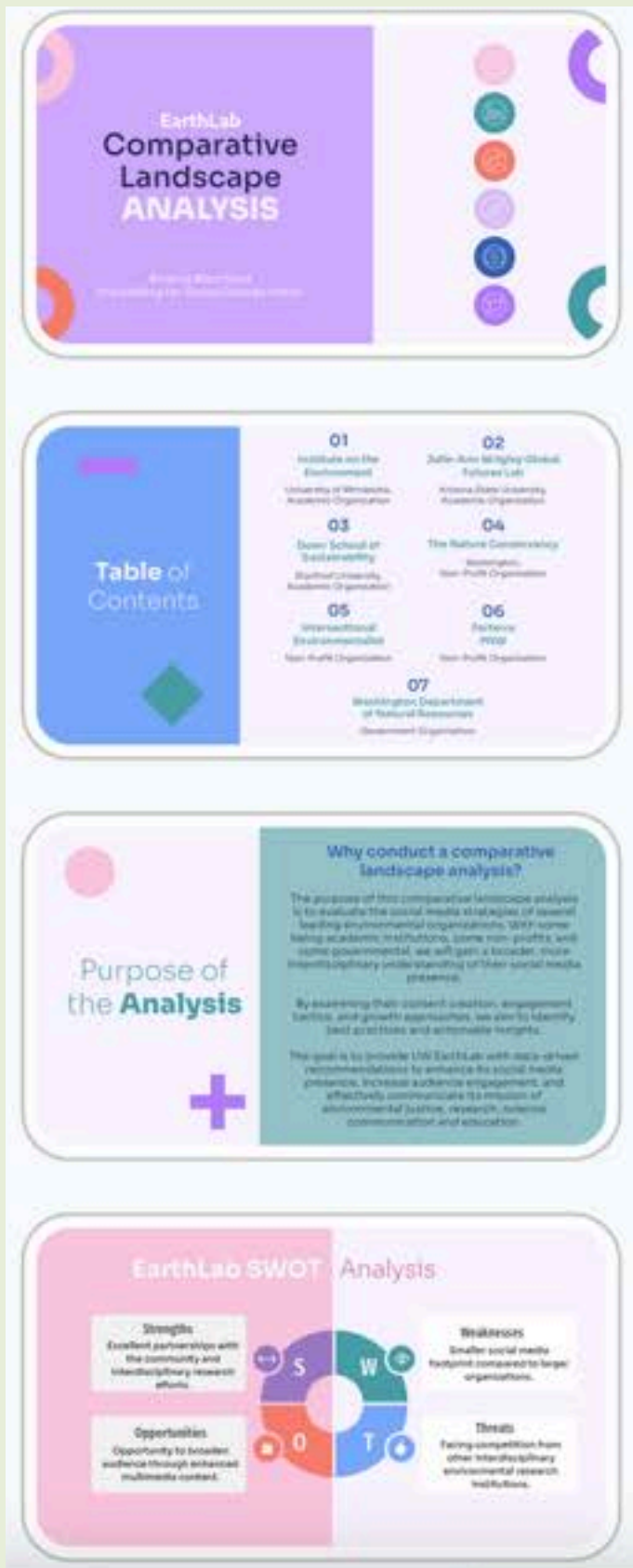
## Learned lots of different design and storytelling curriculum

- Design lessons
- Storytelling lessons
- Had to ask myself:
  - What does it mean to tell a proper story? To highlight people's voices?
  - What does it look like to be more detail oriented and thoughtful about the intention of my designs?



# Weeks 1-3

## Created a comparative landscape analysis







## Weeks 4-6





- Portfolio brainstorming time
- Began drafting my blog
- Started practicing digital drawing
- Explored post and infographic ideas



## Weeks 7-9



- Project directions changed quite a bit
  - Learned on the job more often than not
  - Had fun connecting back to my earlier interests and passions in design and storytelling
  - Participated in an informational interview with a former NASA Multimedia storyteller
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# Heat Safety Tips Post



- Learned how to better summarize complex scientific information
- Utilized my rusty design and Canva skills
- Practiced understanding the audience of a piece



# Blog: Finding Connection Through EarthLab's Cohort Model

## Finding Connection Through EarthLab's Cohort Model

by Brianna Blanchard

I was a sophomore in high school when the 2020 lockdown happened. Now that I am one month away from starting my junior year at the University of Washington, I've had lots of time to reflect on what the last four years have taught me about isolation, connection, and the importance of community.

During the 2020 school year, I was fortunate to be involved in several community-based activities. I was performing in dance shows, preparing to compete at the DECA WA State Conference, working on a painting to contribute to a NASA science arts gallery, practicing my songs for a musical, and getting ready to play my flute in the Saint Patrick's Day Marching Band Parade in Dublin, Ireland – all events that were suddenly canceled. With this many opportunities for human-focused connection being lost in an instant, the sense of sudden disconnection I felt was profound.

I know my story is one of many: according to [Census data](#), there were 73.1 million children under the age of 18 in the US in 2020. So many of us were hit hard both academically and emotionally by the fact that our once lively classrooms and community spaces were replaced by the quiet, distant world of virtual learning. Perhaps one of the most interesting things about being a teenager during that time was that our isolation felt universal, but the physical, emotional, and mental toll that loneliness took on our own cognitive development was something that we all experienced differently.

## What the Cohort Model Has Meant to Me

For me, the cohort model has meant getting to have a space where I can form a community again, particularly an academic and professional one, free of judgment and full of support. Not only was I provided with amazing academic mentorship from my supervisors, but I was also able to grow emotionally and interpersonally. Being able to consistently meet people with their own unique perspectives and experiences, to then share and interact by having meaningful conversations, allowed me to reconnect with others in a way I haven't experienced in years. It has been a professional and academic space where we can still be vulnerable, share our struggles, and celebrate our brilliant successes together. In simpler terms, I was reminded of the power of connection and the importance of community. Connection has and always will be not just helpful; it will be one of the most essential aspects of any work I do in the future.

Quite honestly, at the start of the summer I was nervous to enter a program like this one after difficult work experiences in the past. With that being said, I can now say with confidence that this experience has taught me a key lesson, being that the antidote to isolation is connection. The UW EarthLab Summer Internship's cohort model provided a space where we could build relationships, share our experiences, and find a sense of belonging during a time of profound uncertainty. It wasn't just a learning environment, but also a chance to reconnect with others, and, in doing so, reconnect with myself.

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Found it challenging to write a narrative piece, rather than a traditional explanatory or argumentative essay

02

Surveyed all 17 interns on their own experiences with the cohort model and was overjoyed to read the responses

03

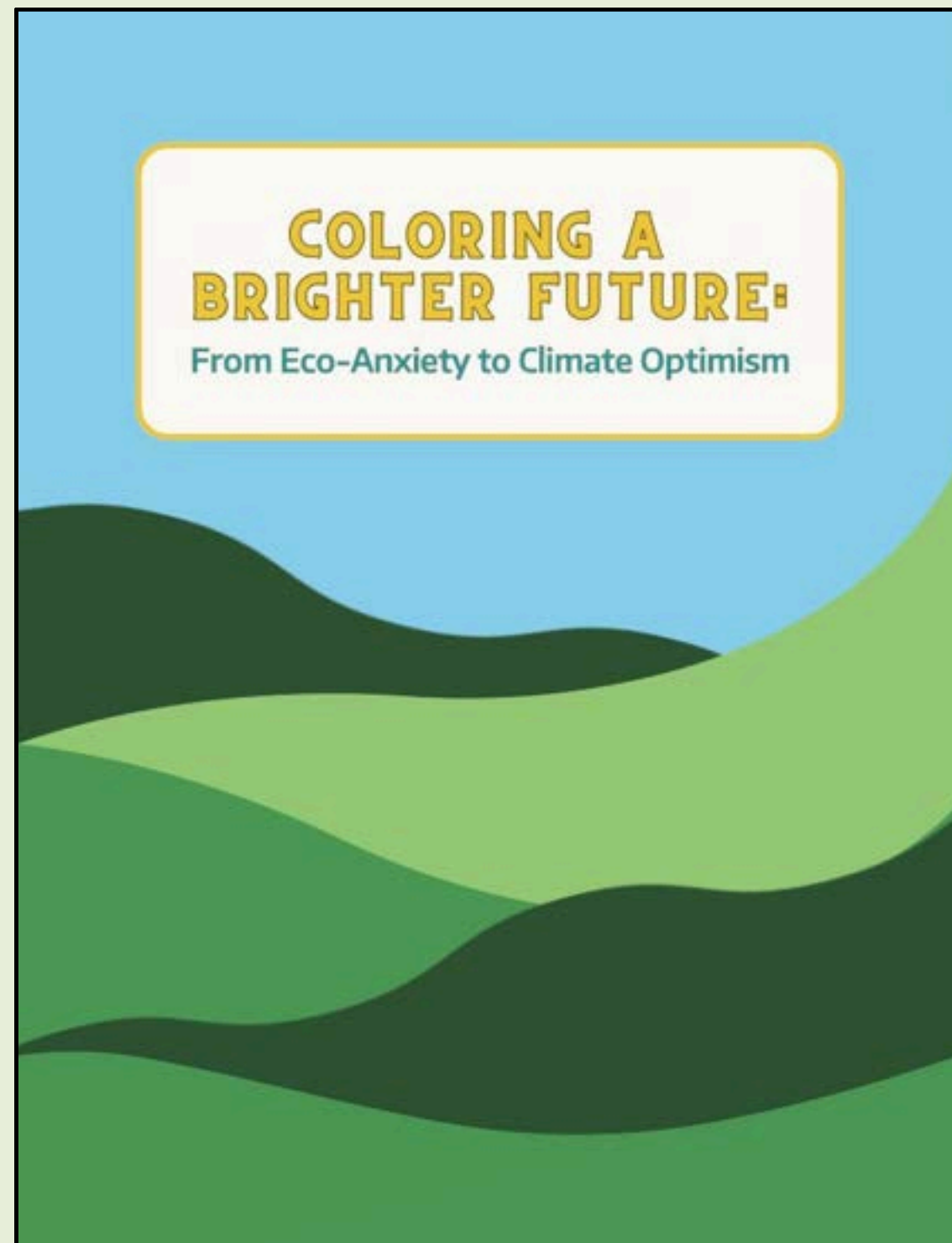
If I could go back in time, I'd tell myself a few weeks ago to just SEND the draft! Nothing is ever perfect after the first write.



# Coloring Book Drawings



Buying secondhand clothing is a popular and sustainable way to reduce our environmental impact. For example, if everyone bought just one secondhand item of clothing instead of a new one this year, it could save enough CO2 to equal taking 76 million cars off the road for a day, conserve the energy used for 37 billion hours of Netflix streaming, and save enough water to provide one person 46 billion days' worth of drinking water.



Tried digitally drawing and experimented outside of my usual art style!



Food in the U.S. travels an average of 1,500 miles to get to your plate. Shopping at your local farmers is a great way to help reduce transportation-related CO2 emissions while also putting money directly back into your community. In Washington state, over 100 farmers markets and farm stands will match SNAP benefits (also known as food stamps) to help consumers stretch their food budgets to include more fruits and vegetables!











# Coming Back to My Big Question

**Considering my different interests, what do I want to do for my future career and how will I get there?**

I attempted to answer my question after:

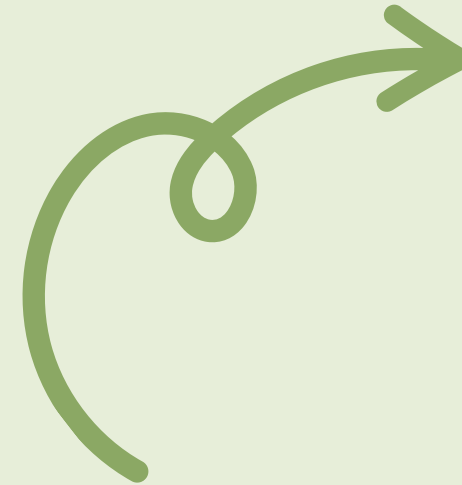
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- Making a major educational switch
  - Exploring more artistic projects incorporating creativity and design
  - Practicing technical skills and breaking down complex, scientific information
  - Learning from at least 12 different guest speakers throughout nine weeks
  - Using narrative elements to craft a story in the form of a blog
  - Meeting 16 other interns and learning about their own paths
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**I don't know!**

**But what I do know is...**

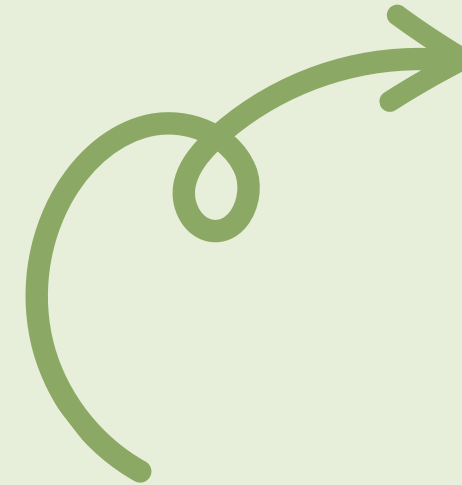


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environmental justice  
needs to be a centered  
concept.**

**I love working on projects that involve art and writing at my desk, but I don't want to leave technical projects behind, and I want to try field work some day!**

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**With any future environmental field I may go into, environmental justice needs to be a centered concept.**



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**But what I do know is...**

**With any future environmental field I may go into, environmental justice needs to be a centered concept.**

**Non-linear pathways are okay. As long as I can do so comfortably, I will strive to chase my passions through my work. It's been great coming full circle!**

**Thank You!**