

Master's Student Research Assistantship
Starting Fall 2024

Assessing How Animal Photography can be Used to Activate Empathy and Promote
Conservation Efforts in Addressing Biodiversity Loss

Dr. Cameron T. Whitley (he/they), Associate Professor of Sociology and Affiliate Member of Environmental Studies at Western Washington University, is looking to hire an incoming master's-level research assistant in the Environmental Studies Program. The ideal candidate is an exceptional student who is planning to pursue an Environmental Studies MA starting in Fall 2024. As a research assistant, the student will receive full funding for the first year of their MA degree, including tuition and paid assistantship, with the possibility of continued funding in the second year dependent on satisfactory performance. Although sociological training will be part of the research assistantship, the student will earn an MA degree in Environmental Studies. The selected student will be a part of a research collaboration examining how animal imagery can be used to activate empathy and enhance conservation efforts.

The chosen student will work with Dr. Whitley and elite conservation photographers to run experiments assessing how animal imagery works to engage an emotional response and promote conservation. These experiments will take place in partnership with zoos and aquariums throughout the country both online and in select zoo and aquarium locations. The student will be expected to participate in data collection within the Seattle area. Additional travel out of state for data collection may also occur. The student will help in data collection, analysis, and technical writing. As part of this process, the student will develop a thesis project around empathy for animals.

To be considered for this assistantship, the student should contact Dr. Whitley at whitlec@wwu.edu to discuss whether they are a good fit. **They must also apply and be accepted into the Environmental Studies MA program for Fall of 2024. In the MA application the student should indicate they are interested in the Student Designed MA emphasis and then should discuss their specific interest in and qualifications for this assistantship in their Statement of Purpose.**

Required Qualifications

- 1) Have at least a BA degree by the end of summer 2024
- 2) Possess exceptional writing and communication skills
- 3) Have a strong interest in Environmental Studies with an emphasis in Animal Studies and/or Environmental Sociological approaches
- 4) Successfully apply and be admitted into the WWU Environmental Studies MA program for Fall 2024
- 5) Have a passion for research and commitment to improving research, data analysis and writing skills
- 6) Be interested in mixed-methods (qualitative and quantitative) data gathering and analysis
- 7) Be interested in connecting with community partners and building research networks (specifically zoos, aquariums, and photographers)

- 8) Be willing to communicate by phone, email, memo, and other required communication methods

Preferred Qualifications:

- 1) Previous experience with statistics and qualitative and quantitative data analysis programs a plus, but not necessary
- 2) Previous experience working with community partners a plus, but not necessary
- 3) Previous experience working with zoos or aquariums a plus, but not necessary
- 4) Ability to independently travel to Seattle-based research sites a plus.

The successful applicant will be awarded a full tuition waiver and a paid, 20-hour a week Research Assistantship for 2024-2025. An additional year of funding, including tuition and paid work is available subject to satisfactory performance for 2025-2026.

Interested students should apply to the MA program by the application deadline of **February 1, 2024**. The MA application requires:

- 1) Three letters of reference
- 2) Statement of purpose
- 3) Transcript from undergraduate work
- 4) Application fee (\$100). Requests for application fee waivers due to financial hardship can be sent to WWU Associate Dean Michael Barr at Michael.barr@wwu.edu. In the email, the student should state the program they are applying to and their need for an application waiver.

The instructions and link to the MA application can be found at the bottom of the page on this site: <https://gradschool.wwu.edu/environmental-studies>

About Dr. Whitley: Cameron T. Whitley, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at Western Washington University with expertise in environmental sociology, human-animal studies, and sex and gender. His research is guided by a central question: how do our relationships with others inform our attitudes and behaviors? Substantively, he studies issues concerning the environment (climate change, new energy development, sustainability), science and technology (geoengineering, hydraulic fracturing debates), human-animal relationships (conservation approaches, etc.), and gender and sexuality (LGBTQ+ environmentalism). He has over five dozen publications featured in places like the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *Sociological Inquiry*, *Academic Emergency Medicine*, *Sociological Perspectives*, *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, and *Clinical Chemistry*. He received his Ph.D. in Sociology from Michigan State University with specializations in [Environmental Science and Policy \(ESPP\)](#), [Gender, Justice and Environmental Change \(GJEC\)](#) and [Animal Studies](#). He completed his undergraduate work at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Cameron grew up just outside of Boulder, Colorado; as a result, he loves being outdoors and spends most of his free time hiking, walking along the water or volunteering with environmental, animal and social justice organizations. He is an avid LEGO collector, NASA/space enthusiast, husband, father, non-binary transgender guy, LGBTQIA+ activist and oil painter.

About the University:

Western Washington University, with over 16,000 students in seven colleges and the graduate school, is nationally recognized for its educational programs, students and faculty. The campus is located in Bellingham, Washington, a coastal community of 90,000 overlooking Bellingham Bay, the San Juan Islands and the North Cascades Mountain range. The city lies 90 miles north of Seattle and 60 miles south of Vancouver, British Columbia. Western is the highest-ranking public, master's-granting university in the Pacific Northwest, according to the 2022 U.S. News & World Report rankings.

Western Washington University (WWU) is an equal opportunity and affirmative action employer committed to assembling a diverse, broadly trained faculty and staff. Women, minorities, people with disabilities and veterans are strongly encouraged to apply. In compliance with applicable laws and in furtherance of its commitment to fostering an environment that welcomes and embraces diversity, WWU does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex (including pregnancy and parenting status), disability, age, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status or genetic information in its programs or activities, including employment, admissions, and educational programs. See WWU's Policy on [Ensuring Equal Opportunity and Prohibiting Discrimination and Retaliation](#). Inquiries may be directed to the Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance, Title IX and ADA Coordinator, Western Washington University, Old Main 126 (MS 9021), 516 High Street, Bellingham, WA 98225; 360.650.3307 (voice) or 711 (Washington Relay); crtc@wwu.edu