



Project Dragonfly Alumni Survey Results

Thanks to all our
Dragonfly alumni for your
responses! We appreciate
your feedback!

2012-2022



PROJECT DRAGONFLY

About Project Dragonfly



Since 2009, Miami University has offered two one-of-a-kind master's degrees (an M.A. in Biology and a M.A.T. in the Biological Sciences) that are designed for working professionals located all over the country and the globe. Many of the over 2000 alumni from this program are continuing to actively work to improve ecological and social communities in innovative ways.

Over the years, Project Dragonfly has grown - as of 2023, the program operates 15 international field courses and has multi-year agreements with 10 major zoos and botanical gardens across the United States. Project Dragonfly is Miami's largest graduate program and the largest graduate degree programs in the world devoted to ecological and social change.

The purpose of this report is to reflect on how Dragonfly alumni have experienced the program. We are grateful to all the Dragonfly alumni who contributed to this program over the years and we appreciate their candid responses on the positive elements of the program, as well as where we can improve.

The Dragonfly Learning Network

Project Dragonfly's Advanced Inquiry Program (AIP) zoo/botanical garden sites and global and local partners are a diverse and stellar collective at the forefront of community-driven social and ecological change worldwide. We are proud to work with these organizations to offer these unique graduate programs.

AIP Sites

CZS/Brookfield Zoo • Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden • Cleveland Metroparks Zoo • Denver Zoo • Detroit Zoological Society • Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens • Missouri Botanical Garden • San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance • WCS/Bronx Zoo • Woodland Park Zoo

Global and Local Partners

Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF), India • Associação Mico-Leão Dourado (AMLD), Brazil • Association of Zoos & Aquariums • Audubon Miami Valley, U.S. • The Belize Zoo and Tropical Education Center • Centro de Educacion, Ciencia y Conservacion Tambopata (CECCOT), Amazon • Cheetah Conservation Fund, Namibia • Danau Girang Field Centre, Borneo • Fundación ECOS Galápagos Islands • Geo Expediciones, Costa Rica • Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Australia • Irbis Mongolian Center • Iwokrama Centre, Guyana • HUTAN/Kinabatangan Orang-utan Conservation Project, Borneo • Mahidol University, Thailand • Para La Tierra, Paraguay • José I. Pareja and Wendy P. Tori • Science & Perspective, The Bahamas • SORALO, Kenya • Vermilion Sea Institute, Baja • T.K. Wilson and Hardy Eshbaugh



Table of Contents

04	Survey Overview	10	Professional Outcomes
05	Survey Participants	11	Skills Gained
07	Key Findings	12	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
08	Overall Impressions	13	Post-graduate Connections
09	Financing Studies	14	Additional Quotes



Alisha Singleton '21

**Advanced Inquiry Program
Cincinnati, Ohio**

"I was a busy career- and family-focused woman that rarely spent time doing something solely for myself. Project Dragonfly gave me the opportunity to be selfish - to learn and grow and expand on the topics that I chose to investigate but for the most unselfish of reasons including my community's wellbeing, the local environment, and the creatures in my backyard. I got to do something for me that made a positive impact on the world around me."



Anna Pepper '19

**Global Field Program
Orlando, Florida**

"...Understanding how to write and analyze peer-reviewed content is a skill that I will benefit from indefinitely!"



Rob Schultz '21

**Global Field Program
Fridley, Minnesota**

"I talk a lot with young professionals about what a positive experience this was for me ... it helped me to grow in ways that I never would have imagined. The opportunity to participate in Earth Expeditions is what attracted me to the program, but the coursework and studies have helped me immensely in my ability to lead a conservation organization."



Survey Overview

To evaluate programmatic alumni outcomes, Project Dragonfly conducted a survey of students who have graduated from the Advanced Inquiry Program (AIP) and Global Field Program (GFP) from December 2012 to May 2022.

The Alumni Survey contained 26 questions, including 12 fixed choice questions, 5 Likert scale (1-5) questions, and 9 open-ended questions on the following topical areas:

- Overall Impression of the Program
- Financing Studies
- Professional Outcomes
- Skills Gained
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Post-graduation Engagement

This report summarizes survey results and is divided into three sections: **survey participants**, **key findings**, **overall impression**, and **quotes**. The key findings portion is further divided into four parts:



Data



Quotes



Alumni
Recommendations



Goals and Actions

Report data compiled by Kevin Matteson and Karen Plucinski, with input from Project Dragonfly staff. For questions/feedback, contact Kevin Matteson at matteskcc@miamioh.edu.

Survey Participants

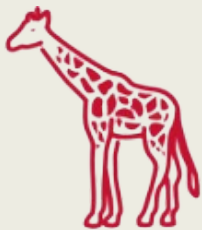
Who responded to the survey?

1,905
Alumni



568 **30%**
Survey Participants

Program Graduates of
the AIP and the GFP



53% AIP



47% GFP

Careers

35% Educator*

65% Non-Educator

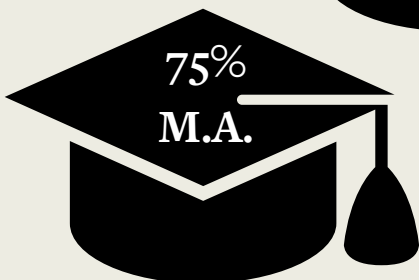


*Survey participants identified themselves as an educator in a school setting.

Expectations Met

93% reported the program
met or exceeded expectations.

Degree
Earned



Grad Year

~50%
2017 and
earlier

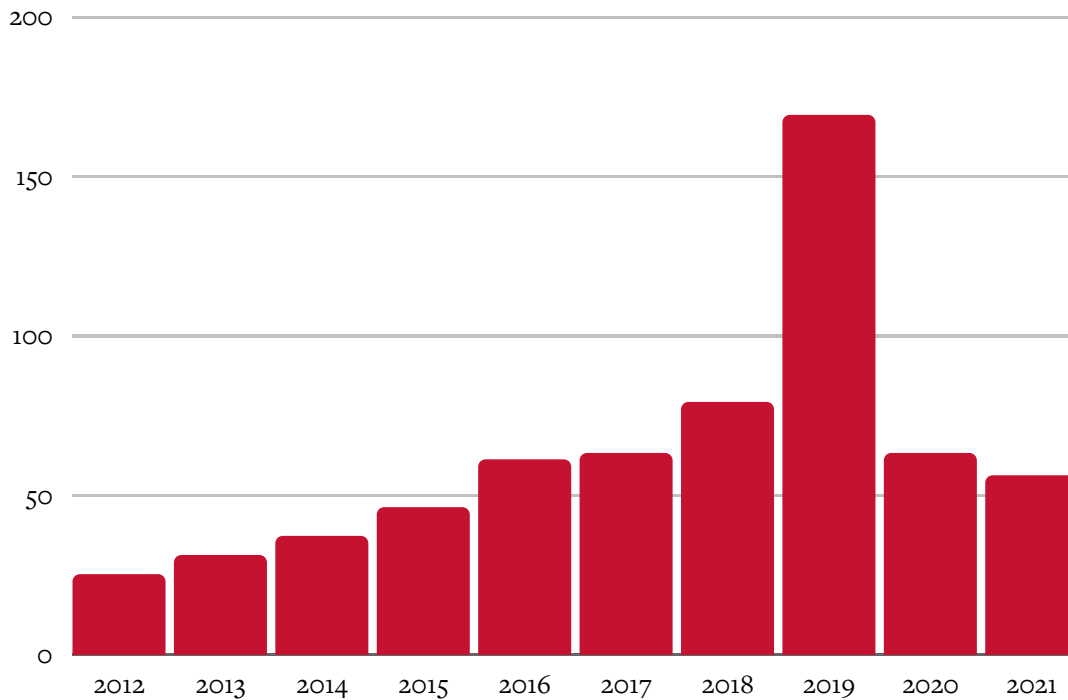


~50%
2018 and
beyond

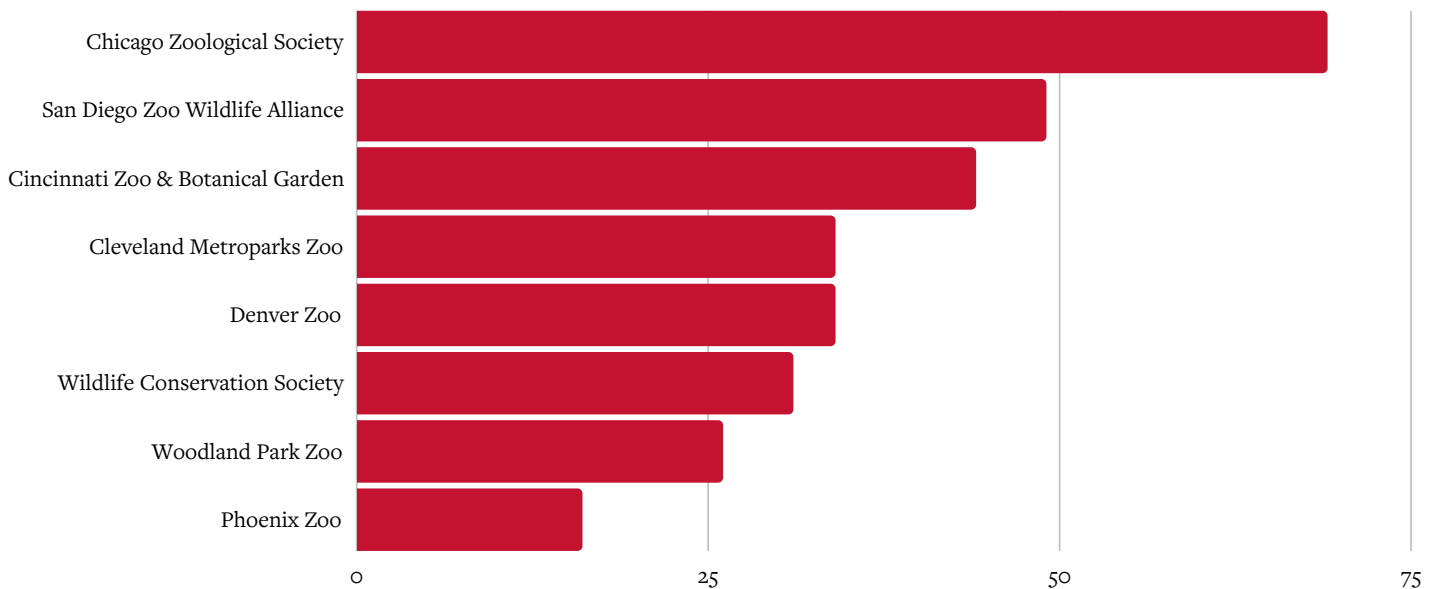
Survey Participants



Number of Alumni Surveyed and Their Year of Graduation



AIP Site Affiliation: Numbers based on total of 302 AIP graduate surveyed*



*Note: There were no graduates from our AIP sites in Detroit, Jacksonville, and St. Louis at the time of this survey and report.

Key Findings



Overall Impression of the Program

- The program met or exceeded the expectations for **93%** of graduates.
- 41% shared that it “Exceeded their expectations and was life changing.”



Financing Studies



92% indicated being able to primarily self-finance the program through full-time work, part-time work, savings, or borrowing money from others/family.

- 19% indicated using federal or private loans.
- 18% indicated receiving workplace reimbursement.

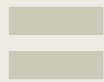
Professional Outcomes



74% reported professional advancement, such as a new position, promotion, professional recognition, or additional volunteer or part-time leadership positions.

- Many students cited personal growth as their most valued outcome.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



16% experienced the program uniquely, identifying as LGBTQ+, neurodiverse, older students, different body types, religions, or economic status.

8% identified as ethnic or racial minority students, sharing how this affected their program experience.

Skills Gained



88% reported community engagement as a main skill gained.

The single most frequent skill reported by alumni was inquiry-based learning:

78%

Post-graduate Connections



80% reported maintaining contact with program colleagues.

Overall Impressions



Data:

- The program met or exceeded the expectations for 93% of graduates; 41% felt it "Exceeded their expectations and was life-changing."
- Many alumni talked about the positive impacts of their time at the zoo/garden or international travel via Earth Expeditions. The opportunity to meet inspiring people (peers, instructors, facilitators, and international partners) through these experiences was a strong recurrent theme.
- Alumni appreciated the structural flexibility of the program and how that enabled them to keep working full-time or care for a family.
- Some suggestions for improvement included increasing staff/student diversity, providing ongoing career advising, and elevating some areas of academic content (more details are provided in subsequent sections).



Quotes:

"Having a master's degree tied to a zoo was amazing. The hands-on learning was invaluable."

"I loved the multidisciplinary nature of the AIP program. I learned so much about both global and locally relevant conservation/climate change issues."

"I appreciated all our Earth Expeditions (EE) teachers, leaders, and partners. I cherished meeting people from around the world and learning from so many places. I loved the ecosystems and cultures I was able to immerse myself in and learn so much from."



Drew Hayward '13

**Global Field Program
Charleston, South Carolina**

"I think it was formative for me ... gave me a better perspective on global conservation problems. I think as this world begins to grapple with the effects of climate change on a global scale, these types of experiences will become even more imperative so we have our minds open to community solutions that work around the world."



Haley Metcalf '15

**Global Field Program
Salem, Illinois**

"I think the most valuable take away that I share with my students is the idea that they should be lifelong learners. That they should constantly be curious about the world and their surroundings and do their own inquiry every day ... the overlying message is one of curiosity and wonder."



Salena Ausonio '21

**Advanced Inquiry Program
San Diego, California**

"Seeing sea turtle conservation in Costa Rica."

Financing Studies



Data:

- 92% of graduates indicated being able to primarily self-finance the program through full-time work, part-time work, savings, or borrowing money from others/family.
- Many graduates appreciated the program's affordability, mentioning it was a major selling point for them.
- 19% indicated using federal or private loans, and a few individuals indicated using credit cards when they did not qualify for federal loans.
- 18% indicated receiving some workplace reimbursement, an opportunity that seemed most available for teachers and zoo employees.



Quotes:

"Providing more grant and scholarship opportunities would have been nice, but overall, the program is very affordable, which was one of the many selling points for me."

"The AIP was very affordable. It was one reason I was attracted to this program."

"It would be great for the program to enhance its support of students in locating and applying for grants or creative solutions to fund their participation and projects."



Alumni suggestions included:

- More support for finding scholarships.
- Help with travel costs.
- Exploring funding for reduced tuition for veterans and other groups.



Actions in progress:

- Adding additional financial support options to our web pages so applicants/students are more aware of possibilities.
- Continuing support of small scholarships.
- Working to keep tuition affordable into the future.
- Increasing advising of incoming and current students on how to locate funds to partially offset degree costs.

Professional Outcomes



Data:

- Overall, 74% of graduates reported some sort of professional advancement, whether it be a new position, promotion, professional recognition, or additional volunteer or part-time leadership positions. No professional changes were reported by 25% of alumni surveyed.
- 58% of survey participants indicated receiving either a salary increase/pay raise (40% of total sample) or a new position/job title (36%).
- A large number of alumni highlighted growth in confidence, leadership, or use of inquiry methods, and how those gains enabled them to achieve goals (career or otherwise) that previously did not seem possible.



Quotes:

"I now work as a naturalist at the nature center I volunteered with for my Environmental Stewardship course!!"

"Due to my experiences and acquisition of my M.A.T., I was able to obtain a position with Ohio Department of Education, and am now responsible for the Ohio Learning Standards and Model Curriculum for Science."

"I spent most of my marketing career in the financial services industry. I now work as senior marketing manager at the Seattle Aquarium. It's exactly the change I was hoping for when I signed up for the program."

"I was accepted to a Ph.D. program as a result of my master's degree/experiences."



Alumni suggestions included:

- More program support for career development and transitions, both for current students and alumni.



Actions in progress:

- Facilitate annual webinars for networking, resume building, etc.
- Provide supplemental advising for students/alumni that are actively seeking new careers
- Continue networking/strengthening connections with Miami Career Center and Alumni Services

Skills Gained



Data:

- The most commonly reported skills gained by alumni were related to community engagement (88% of responses) and inquiry-based learning (78%).
- A total of 71% of graduates felt they had an increased ability to see the bigger picture through either “Project planning and organization” or “holistically incorporating social and ecological factors.”
- A total of 111 alumni (20%) responded that they had pursued professional memberships or certifications during, or as a result of, the program.
- A number of graduates articulated the credibility and confidence they gained through the program and specifically in earning a master’s degree.



Quotes:

“I felt like the coursework helped push me outside of my comfort zone in working more with the community. I also really appreciated collaborating with those in my cohort and building that network of like-minded individuals.”

“Hands down the biggest benefit was the content I learned, experiencing hands-on inquiry itself, and the new confidence I gained in the area of conservation through doing the program. How I grew as a researcher and the love I now have for science are a direct result of this program.”

“...being exposed to students from all over the world and going to different countries was enlightening on many levels. Those trips were the first time I have been out of the country and it made me start thinking about things more holistically and helped me see things from new perspectives.”



Alumni suggestions included:

- Increase academic rigor through more coverage of technical skills such as GIS, statistics, or field methods. (Other students indicated they felt very challenged by the current level of coverage of technical skills and rigor).



Actions in progress:

- Created Dragonfly Introduction to Statistics optional free Canvas module open to all students and alumni.
- Exploring collaborations with Miami’s online GIS certificate and courses.
- Continuing work with Miami’s Howe Writing Center to improve science writing and critical thinking.
- Expand support for students presenting at professional conferences such as AZA, NAAEE, Three Minute Thesis, and Miami’s Graduate Research Forum.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



Data:

- 25% of survey participants identified as being part of groups that are typically excluded or underrepresented such as racial/ethnic minority, LGBTQIA+ members, older students, or those having some form of unspecified mental or physical disability. Some students identified with more than one group.
- Many a noted a lack of racial diversity in students and instructors.
- Participation in Earth Expeditions allowed some students to identify with individuals that look or speak like themselves and see historically excluded groups as conservationists. However, Earth Expeditions field courses also posed a challenge for some LGBTQIA+ individuals.



Quotes:

"I noticed sometimes I brought a really different perspective to conversations but I love how open and receptive everyone was. I never felt bad for being the only black person in the room, but I would have loved not to be."

"I felt like some of my classmates caught on to my social awkwardness and went out of their way to make me feel comfortable. And that led to some deep and meaningful conversations that had a positive impact on me..."

"Due to my neurodiversity (undiagnosed at the time), I struggled immensely with adhering to deadlines, perfectionism, anxiety, overwhelm and course reading loads... It would be wonderful if the program could explore how to provide better, more focused support for neurodiverse students.

"There were some cultural challenges while traveling. Like not being visibly queer or trans while on layovers in Africa or China. It is still illegal to be queer in many places and I had to think of those things before I traveled."



Alumni suggestions included:

- Increase student/staff diversity and support for diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout the Project Dragonfly program and network.



Actions in progress:

- Continue to grow program-wide DEIA initiatives, particularly actions generated by the student Diversify group, including the Dragonfly Diversity Cafes; continue to build DEI student recruitment; further integration of DEIA topics and diverse authors throughout the curriculum and learning resources; partner and staff development, including EE field staff; further integration with other Miami University offices such as those devoted to diversity and inclusion, accessibility, mental health, and career services; support existing and build new approaches that leverage the community-embedded learning structure at the heart of the AIP and GFP to advance collaborative learning and action across diverse social settings; present, publish, and support innovation among students, institutions, and communities for more inclusive and empowering solutions.

Post-graduate Connections



Data:

- 80% of graduates report maintaining contact with program colleagues.
- 50% of AIP graduates have remained part of their AIP zoo/botanical garden community by visiting (23%), being a member (18%), employee (10%), or as a volunteer (7%).
- 27% of graduates are not currently connected to their AIP zoo/botanical garden but would like to be. Sometimes the lack of on-going connection was caused by distance or pandemic-related factors.



Quotes:

"There is so much that has moved me forward since obtaining my degree, but one of the "intangibles" is the contacts and relationships I formed during my program. I am still in touch with many of my classmates, and actively continue to exchange ideas, work, and professional partnerships."

"I continue to volunteer with my zoo and try to stay heavily involved in its mission to encourage pollinator health."

"I have moved to Fairbanks, Alaska. No zoo here. But I still visit when I'm in town. I also use my experience at Woodland Park Zoo and the AIP program to inform me when helping design courses and create museum exhibits. And of course, I'm still involved with science communication."



Alumni suggestions included:

- Alumni reunion events, potentially via meetings to reconnect at zoo/gardens (AIP) or on an alumni-focused Earth Expeditions field course.



Actions in progress:

- Build/Reconnect with Miami alumni services for Dragonfly graduates.
- Explore the creation of a Dragonfly Alumni Network.

"The Thing I Share Most about Dragonfly is..."



Leanne Hoffman '18

**Advanced Inquiry Program
Hebron, Kentucky**

"Being able to pursue my passions and turn it into something that impacts my community."



Matthew Kollstedt '14

**Advanced Inquiry Program
Fairfield, Ohio**

"Being at the Cincinnati Zoo. Being at the Zoo to work on my master's meant the world to me. If I could do it again, I would in a heart beat!"



Jessica Ulliyott '21

**Advanced Inquiry Program
Santee, California**

"Though the experience was challenging, I was always able to balance school with being a mom. I knew the in-person days well in advance so I could schedule childcare and could even incorporate them into projects (like having them come with me to survey plants)."

Additional Quotes: The AIP

"All the wonderful days spent learning on-site..."

"I found the AIP credential assisted me in applying for funding grants for the non-profit I volunteer with."

"...it was a unique experience having courses both online and in-person at a zoological organization. The interactions with current zoo professionals and researchers was great."

"I always tell people about the amazing in-person experiences at zoos and other nature-oriented locations, and how those experiences gave me unique insight into how zoos and conservation organizations really work. In-person days really helped tie together everything we learned in the virtual classroom, and provided an opportunity to get to know my classmates and instructors better. I really value the personal and professional relationships I made through this program. And I'm a lifelong introvert! For the first time in my entire academic career, I felt like my classmates were truly my peers. We all had different areas of expertise, but we had more or less the same goal: further our impact on conservation and awareness. That made it easy for us to share ideas and build off of each other's work in meaningful ways."

"The Thing I Share Most about Dragonfly is..."



Lauren Asquith '16

**Global Field Program
Mason, Ohio**

"...The trips- Baja, Borneo, and Galápagos. The people I went with, people I met, and wildlife experiences I had."



Édouard Beardsley '20

**Global Field Program
Charlottesville, Virginia**

"The trips taken and connections made during these trips."



Darcy Higgins '20

**Global Field Program
Hoonah, Alaska**

"Meditating in Thailand and swimming with whale sharks."

Additional Quotes: Earth Expeditions and the GFP

"Visiting countries where I was able to learn from local, non-Western experts."

"The experiences and the confidence I gained from going outside of my comfort zones, especially the times I was in country exploring on my own. I also share stories of the beauty of the locations we visited and the camaraderie shared between so many different, yet like-minded individuals."

"My time in the field - Belize, Namibia, and the Galápagos. I share experiences from these places often with many people and how each has impacted me deeply in different ways."

"The journeys we took and where we went. Leaf cutting ants in a Costa Rican thunderstorm, snorkeling with a whale shark in Baja, and snorkeling with Nurse Sharks in Belize."

"Going for the [Earth Expeditions] trip was the best part of the program for me. Going to South America, meeting the original tribes, interacting with them, eating their food and learning their knowledge in medicine, crops, and discovering Guyana in the most beautiful way possible."

"The Thing I Share Most about Dragonfly is..."



Randy Evans '17

**Global Field Program
Oxford, Ohio**

"I speak most about the opportunity to learn from conservationists from around the world. From a program perspective, I often explain that the curriculum is designed to encourage students to pursue their own focus and passions while learning the tools to make them effective scientists and communicators. By far, the team of staff and faculty at Project Dragonfly are among the most passionate and genuinely supportive I have met in academia. Finally, establishing this amazing network of peers is perhaps the most valuable gift."



Tiffany James '21

**Global Field Program
Knoxville, Tennessee**

"I have encouraged so many people to start the program! I always talk about the networking connections I made through this and the confidence I have to reach out and get involved."



Jessica Jedvaj '20

**Advanced Inquiry Program
San Diego, California**

"I'm just pleased to have gotten my master's at such a reasonable price."

Additional Quotes: Flexibility, Community, Inquiry-Based Education, and Gratitude

"I most often share about my graduate experience in the context of bringing the MA and MAT together to work collaboratively and learn from one another as well as the marriage of inquiry-based education and community based conservation in the program. The networking opportunity a community ... is also an incredible benefit."

"Thank you for the great program!"

"Deciding to participate in the program was one of my best life decisions."

"I do my best each fall and winter to promote Dragonfly with my colleagues. ... Thank you to all of the amazing staff in Oxford and around the world to make Project Dragonfly flourish!"

I had been looking (for years) for a Master's program that would help me become a better teacher and a better global citizen, while being able to work full time. I was thrilled when I found the Dragonfly Program, and overjoyed when I was accepted into the program. It was a life changing experience- thank you!

"I just love this program so much!! Thank you for creating it!! The love and commitment its leaders have for the students shines through."

"The Thing I Share Most about Dragonfly is..."



Alexi Guddal '21

**Advanced Inquiry Program
Lynden, Washington**

"At times I was ... pushed out of my comfort zone in talking to leaders in my community. Looking back I'm really thankful. I gained so many valuable connections and skills..."



Michael Rosenblum '14

**Global Field Program
Fair Lawn, New Jersey**

"Of course I start with my travel experiences and pictures, but I always end up focusing most on the people. ... I always tell people, that I enrolled in the program for the destinations, but inevitably came home talking more about the people than the places."



Marsha Sisney '18

**Advanced Inquiry Program
Chicago, Illinois**

"Project Dragonfly offered me a passport to the world. The once in a lifetime experiences were beyond extraordinary. ... My passion to become an ambassador and steward of the ocean blossomed with every opportunity Project Dragonfly provided."