

Statement of Purpose

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Southern Utah University

INDS 6000 Foundations of Interdisciplinary Studies

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Introduction

My name is Jess Roper and I currently reside in Kanab, Utah, the headquarters of Best Friends Animal Society, where I work as a national operations support specialist. Best Friends is working across the country to end the killing of dogs and cats in shelters, and in my current role I support staff at seven lifesaving centers to place thousands of animals into new loving homes.

I started my career in academia, and I apply the research and communication skills I built as graduate student and lecturer to my current work in animal services. I am dedicated to learning new things and then teaching them to others— from being a yoga teacher to training dogs and their people.

I have explored many roles within animal services, from frontline lifesaving work in Texas animal shelters to training staff and volunteers as a subject matter expert. I wear a lot of hats in my current role, from compiling and analyzing data about our operations in real time to creating training and reference materials for staff and volunteers and more.

Before moving to the national operations team, I was an outcomes specialist, working with the public to place dogs and cats into foster and adoptive homes. I also worked with partner organizations to coordinate transports of animals to parts of the country with more capacity to help them. I began this work in Houston, Texas and continued at the Best Friends sanctuary in Kanab, where many animals with special needs are housed.

Outside of work, I enjoy exploring the great outdoor activities southern Utah has to offer, such as hiking and skiing, with my dogs. I also have a regular yoga and

meditation practice, all of which inspires my poetry. If I'm not working with animals or enjoying nature, I love to curl up with a good book and cook vegan food.

Why an MIS Degree?

As a former academic, I was immediately interested when I found out that Southern Utah University and Best Friends had partnered to create the first master's degree with a focus in Contemporary Animal Services Leadership. I started with the Principles of Contemporary Animal Services certificate course when it was first offered, and I was hooked! My next opportunity was the professional development course based on the content of the Best Friends National Conference in the summer of 2021.

I realized I was already earning credits towards the MIS degree, so I decided to formally enroll and begin the journey to dive deeper into professional education that had never before been available to me. Since my job is very important to me, this degree is possible because it is 100% online and I can earn hours while still working full time.

This certification along with the results of the capstone project will help me build my career skills and connections so that I stand out as an especially competent candidate for future leadership positions.

Disciplines Chosen and How They Culminate Together

CONTEMPORARY ANIMAL SERVICES LEADERSHIP (CASL)

I chose this degree because of the CASL focus and its connection to my employer, Best Friends Animal Society. I have pursued as many educational opportunities as possible within the animal services field, from national conferences to webinars to professional mentors, but there is nothing more comprehensive than a

degree program built to hone the skills needed to be a successful leader in this field. In addition to topics directly related to animal services, I am excited for formal education in areas like fundraising, communications, and non-profit management. CREATIVE

WRITING

Writing is a passion for me, and I write both professionally in my job at Best Friends and for myself as a creative outlet. I am excited for the opportunity to hone my writing skills so I can be a more effective communicator both within and outside of work. I also hope to publish some of my poetry and stories, and creative writing courses will help me achieve this personal and professional goal.

CULMINATION

Through the pairing of these disciplines, I will build upon my existing strengths and knowledge while also exploring related fields in which I am less experienced. Storytelling and communication are a critical component to engaging supporters to join the animal welfare movement, so building those skills through creative writing in addition to more technical courses will round out my professional profile as I explore more facets of animal welfare non-profit work.

Plan for Success in the Program

With the social distancing and quarantine practices necessitated by COVID-19, I am spending a lot more time at home than I normally would. Taking courses has helped to fill up free time in a way that feels productive and valuable. I have a track record of success in higher education through excellent time management skills and lots of experience with unsupervised learning.

Since I am working full time in tandem with the degree, I will take one course at a time in each split semester, which should equate to roughly six courses and 18 degree hours in one year. Since I am bringing in six credit hours of previous coursework, I anticipate completing the degree in approximately 18 months or four full semesters.

Capstone Project

Given my background in higher education, I want to help develop additional material for the CASL focus, either creating and/or teaching a course.

One option I have considered is a course developed on the content of the 2022 Best Friends National Conference, reflecting the course offered last summer. Another option could be a course focused on the creation and management of lifesaving programs, for which I have already drafted an outline to be used in a module of the “How to Start and Run a Sanctuary” workshop offered through Best Friends.

If neither of those options works out, I could teach a course that has already been developed, such as INDS 6414, Foundations of Contemporary Animal Services Leadership.

How My MIS Education will be Used Professionally

In a field that is becoming increasingly professional and competitive, an advanced degree will afford me additional consideration for future leadership positions. Learning more about non-profit management, professional communications, and fundraising will likewise diversify the types of roles for which I will be considered. Finally, additional training in creative writing will make me more competitive for full time writing positions within animal welfare as well as moving me closer to my goal of publishing my personal pieces.