

Good Morning, my name is Maia George and I am from Moretown, Vermont. I am a senior at UVM majoring in Early Childhood Education, with a certificate in Place-Based Education. Last Friday was my last day of student teaching in a first grade classroom, and I got to spend most of it in a forest classroom tagging one tree each with my students for them to care for years to come. It was absolutely idyllic. Not just because it was a beautiful spring day and I got to spend it with curious young minds, but because I have learned throughout my time at UVM all of the ways that this type of learning will transform the lives of my students. That learning that is authentic and tied to place and context is profoundly impactful. That interdisciplinary education that links all subjects to a common and child-motivated thread, like caring for their tree, is a powerful way to make lasting connections in learning experiences. In addition to why, I have also learned how to tie together all of the many, and there are certainly many, pieces at play when teaching young learners in an ever-changing world.

I am a recipient of UVM's Green & Gold Scholarship, which is a full-tuition scholarship awarded to one senior from each high school in Vermont each year. This scholarship is the sole reason I decided to attend UVM. I wanted to go out and explore beyond the state, but chose not to turn down the opportunity at an affordable education, and I could not be happier with this decision. Through my program at UVM, I have been in field placements for 5 out of my 8 total semesters. I even spent one of these semesters teaching in a preschool internship and traveling in Auckland, New Zealand. In Burlington, I have worked in private centers, Head Start Programs, and in public schools. And all throughout, I got to take classes with a close cohort of students and faculty who are deeply passionate about teaching theories and philosophies, which have shaped the educator I have become. UVM has the unique opportunity to provide varied access to different types of educational settings for field placements, including outdoors-based, urban, and even study-abroad teaching internships. In my four years at UVM, I have learned the theories behind teaching practices, while implementing them and watching their impact in real-time, but not all of my peers have been as privileged. Many of my colleagues and mentors at centers in the Burlington area struggle to afford attending programs like mine, and/or to pay for costs of living in the area on their teaching salaries. This means that they either leave Vermont, or they are not able to receive the education that they deserve as educators, that their students deserve to receive from them. My hope is that receiving high-quality educator preparation like I have had to privilege to do at UVM is more accessible to my colleagues in the future, because the Green & Gold Scholarship has shaped my ability to become the teacher I am today.