Bridget Johnson – M. Buell Ecology Award

I grew up in suburban Ewing, New Jersey surrounded by a large and incredibly supportive family. I was lucky enough to overcome early health issues that would have otherwise left me unable to lead the active lifestyle I have enjoyed since, from playing soccer to hiking through rainforests. Although I had always loved the outdoors, I seriously considered a pre-med track in high school and began at Rutgers as a biology major with that intention. I soon switched to the much more appealing Ecology and Natural Resources major, however, realizing that being a doctor is not the sole way to serve others. To satisfy my additional interests in the social sciences, I gained a minor in Women's and Gender Studies, while also enjoying coursework in Spanish and anthropology.

I am fortunate to have had a number of fantastic college experiences. Studying abroad was a major highlight; I spent one summer in Costa Rica and a semester in South Africa. I studied each country's various ecosystems and fascinating flora and fauna, while learning a great deal about their respective cultures. I happily joined Rachael Winfree's pollination ecology lab in my senior year, assisting with studies of wild native bee responses to agricultural restoration. Throughout my time at Rutgers, Douglass Residential College played a powerful role in providing a strong community and in sharpening my dedication to human rights.

As I graduate, my main interests have centered around sustainable agriculture, thanks to ecology coursework as well as organic farming experience. I am now considering service projects through Americorps and Peace Corps, which would allow me to merge ecological conservation and social justice efforts. In whatever I end up doing, I hope to be useful to others (human and otherwise!). I have been exceedingly lucky, and I am brimming with gratitude for my professors, advisors, friends, and family who have helped me reach this point.