**ABE 490 Career Speech Test**

**From Crocodiles to *Craurococcus***

**Kathryn Atherton**

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**Practiced Time: 74 seconds**

When I was in kindergarten, my favorite television show wasn’t *Sesame Street* nor *Blue’s Clues*, but *The Crocodile Hunter*, starring Steve Irwin. I loved how infectious Steve’s passion for wildlife was. He showed the world how important seemingly monstrous or dangerous organisms, such as crocodiles or poisonous snakes, are to their respective ecosystems. Steve sparked my interest in biology and conservation which I carry with me to this day. However, my organisms of interest are a little bit smaller than those Steve worked with.

After participating in two summer research programs, I have discovered my curiosity for microbiomes, communities of microscopic organisms that affect everything from individual animals to entire ecosystems on a massive scale. This past summer, I participated in a bioinformatics research program through the National Science Foundation at Boston University and fell in love with microbial ecology as it incorporates my interest in microorganisms and my passion for conservation inspired by Steve Irwin.

Following my graduation from Purdue, I hope to pursue my doctorate in bioinformatics with a focus in microbial ecology. I want to study the seasonal fluctuations of microbial communities as well as how these communities are changing over time due to climate change and then use these findings to predict how the changes will affect other organisms and even ecosystems on a larger scale. After that, I want to become a professor at a university while serving as an environmental conservation advisor to the leaders of our nation and our world. Additionally, I hope to mentor students and inspire in them a passion for biology and conservation just as Steve Irwin did for me sixteen years ago.