

WELCOME TO NEW CCED FACULTY BOARD OF ADVISORS' MEMBER: DR. AHLQUIST

Daniel Ahlquist, Ph.D., Associate Professor

As a political ecologist, I am interested in people's political, economic, cultural, and material relationships to their environments, especially how power relations and social inequalities play out through unequal relationships to the environment. In my research and teaching, I focus on the interwoven social and environmental dimensions of conservation, agriculture, land use change, development, and climate change, with attention to the dynamics of settler colonialism, social inequality, and environmental justice.

Through my research, I have the privilege of learning from and building relationships with people and communities in Mainland Southeast Asia and the Northern Great Plains. I take an inductive approach to research, meaning that I immerse myself in the places and stories I'm studying with open eyes and ears and a lot of questions. Over the years, this approach has led me to experiences I never could have imagined beforehand, from fighting a forest fire with Highland farmers in Thailand to hanging out at a cowboy poetry gathering in Montana. It has given me the opportunity to observe different community and stakeholder groups as they mobilize to build the futures they want for their families, communities, and lands, from an Indigenous-led land rights movement in northern Thailand to pathbreaking collaborations between ranchers and conservationists working to protect rural livelihoods and grassland ecosystems on the Northern Great Plains.

When I first started teaching in MSU's James Madison College (JMC) in 2016, my students were often confused as to why in a college of public affairs, they were learning about human-environment relationships. They came to JMC to study things like social policy, political theory and international relations, after all. Not conservation, agriculture, and climate change. That has changed in recent years. Students these days are more attuned to the stakes and urgency of the environmental changes they are seeing in the world around them, and they are learning to see these so-called 'environmental problems' as social problems with causes and solutions firmly within the realm of public affairs.



My students today come in eager to learn about the challenges facing their communities and motivated to address them. It is a privilege to get to play a small part in their process of learning and discovery, and I've been amazed by how much I've learned from them, especially when it comes to issues affecting Michigan communities. One of the highlights of my career has been watching my students mobilize to take social and political action on issues that matter to them, from lobbying MSU's Board of Trustees to adopt a more sustainable investing framework to successfully lobbying the Michigan House of Representatives to allocate state funds to fighting food insecurity on college campuses. It is no surprise, then, to find three of my current and former JMC students doing excellent work with the CCED.

I'm delighted to be joining the CCED Faculty Advisory Board. I'm already learning so much about Lansing and other Michigan communities – not only about the challenges they face, but also about how they are building toward more equitable, sustainable, and resilient futures. I look forward to learning from and supporting the work of my CCED colleagues and the communities we serve.