

ECOPOLITICS PODCAST EPISODE 4.6: Becoming an Ecopolitical Researcher

Additional Pedagogical Resources

Summary: In this episode, host Peter Andrée sits down with two doctoral students and a postdoc on the path to becoming ecopolitical researchers: Devon Cantwell, Kaleigh McIntosh, and Obed Asamoah. They talk about their unique projects, how they came to pursue this work, and unexpected lessons learned in graduate school. This episode explores the importance of relationships, humility, and a commitment to social and environmental justice for anyone seeking to become an ecopolitical researcher.

Key Takeaways:

- The path to becoming a researcher was unique for each of the panellists and the experience of learning and growing as researchers leads to dynamic academic careers. Each individual's journey is shaped by their personal experiences, different educational backgrounds, experiences with key mentors, and geopolitical contexts.
- The discussion features three early-career researchers and underscores the intersection of environmental science, politics, and local community needs, showing the multifaceted nature of ecopolitical research.
- In addition to contributing to the broader body of knowledge in the field, the questions ecopolitical researchers investigate can empower communities and address pressing issues by connecting their findings and experiences to their communities' needs and interests.
- For first-generation graduate students, academic environments can create a hidden curriculum. This refers to informal and often unnamed experiences and practices that can be difficult to navigate but serve as barriers for early-career researchers

Discussion Questions:

- What role does collaboration among researchers, policymakers, and local communities play in addressing environmental issues?
- In what ways do personal backgrounds and experiences shape the research focus of emerging ecopolitical scholars?
- How might your personal research interests and backgrounds contribute to practical solutions for environmental challenges faced by communities, whether in Canada or beyond?
- What strategies can researchers employ to ensure their work is accessible and applicable to the communities they study?

Learn More About our Guests:

Dr. Obed Asamoah: I come from Sefwi Anyinabrim, a small forest community in the Western North Region of Ghana. Having spent my childhood in various forest communities within this region, I developed a deep appreciation for the forest, as it was the foundation of my family's livelihood. However, as I grew older, I witnessed a rapid expansion of forest industries in my village. The number of timber production companies soon outstripped the available forest resources, severely impacting the livelihoods of local people. This realization ignited my passion for forestry. I enrolled in a Bachelor of Science program in Renewable Natural Resources, majoring in Forest Resources Management. After completing my undergraduate studies, I aspired to gain a broader, global perspective on environmental sustainability. This ambition led me to the Czech Republic, where I earned a Master's degree in International Development with a specialization in Environmental Science. My commitment to research and teaching in forest science remained unwavering, and I pursued a Ph.D. in Forest Science and Technology at the University of Eastern Finland. My doctoral research focused on the sustainable utilization of non-timber forest products and their potential role in poverty alleviation in Ghana. I chose this topic in response to the high poverty levels in my community, recognizing that sustainable forest management could significantly improve local livelihoods. I take great pride in the knowledge and skills I have acquired, which I aim to apply in the service of sustainable forestry. As the saying goes, "When the last plant dies, the last animal also dies." The forest remains a critical pillar in preserving our environment, sequestering carbon, and mitigating climate change.

Select articles, books, projects:

- Bamwesigye, D., Kupec, P., Chekuimo, G., Pavlis, J., Asamoah, O., Darkwah, S. A., & Hlaváčková, P. (2020). Charcoal and Wood Biomass Utilization in Uganda: The Socioeconomic and Environmental Dynamics and Implications. *Sustainability*, 12(20), 8337. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12208337>
- Asamoah, O., Danquah, J., Bamwesigye, D., Verter, N., Acheampong, E., Macgregor, C., Boateng, C., Kuittinen, S., Appiah, M., and Pappinen, A. (2024). The perception of the locals on the impact of climate variability on non-timber forest products in Ghana. *Ecological Frontiers*. 44(3): 489-499. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chnaes.2023.07.004>

Devon Cantwell (she/her/hers): I am a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Ottawa in the Department of Political Studies. My dissertation studies global city climate governance norms with a specific focus on the implications of city climate actions on residents. I specifically focus on climate action plans (CAPs), green spaces, transit (micro and macro), and pedestrian infrastructure using case studies of four global mega-cities: Ho Chi Minh City, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, and Seoul. I use a broad set



of methods in my dissertation, including interviews, ethnography, spatial ethnography/grounded visualization, GIS analysis, archival research, and policy document analysis. Before grad school, I had a career in K-12 STEM education.

Select articles, books, projects:

- Cantwell-Chavez, D. (2025, Jan 24). US Cities and Global Climate Governance in the Age of Trump 2.0. *Research Institute for Urban Wellness - MacEwan University, Edmonton Substack*. <https://substack.com/home/post/p-155614972>

Kaleigh McIntosh (She/Her/Hers): I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Dept. of Geography and Environmental Studies at Carleton University. My research focuses on stakeholders in the Wolastoq Valley in New Brunswick, Canada, using a set of case studies to critically assess the relationships between diverse stakeholders in the watershed and their contribution to resilience efforts. In doing so, I examine how long-term collaborative governance relationships with a diverse and inclusive set of stakeholders can contribute to the resilience of complex socioecological settings like the Wolastoq Valley.

I completed my BA in Political Science at Carleton University and my MA in Development Studies at York University. My MA field research examined community-based climate adaptation and the contributions of community-based groups in South Tarawa, Kiribati, to international civil society adaptation policies and practices. Throughout my academic career, I have been driven to understand climate resilience efforts from the perspective of who is or is not involved and how that contributes to broader questions of social and environmental justice and addressing the needs of complex socioecological settings. I also am passionate about podcasts as communication and education tools. This year, I am celebrating the 10th anniversary of my podcast Probably About Politics, where we are passionate about learning about democracy and elections around the world.

Select articles, books, projects:

- Gaffney, N. (2022). [*My Name is Wolastoq*](#). Ninen Productions
- McIntosh, K. and Jesmer, A. (July 2024). [*Tren Maya & Pluriversity w/ Laura Primeau*](#). In Probably About Politics.

Resources in the Episode:

Hidden Curriculum

- Devon has contributed to a number of chapters in [*Strategies for Navigating Graduate School and Beyond by the American Political Science Association*](#) that provide helpful insight into the experience of navigating grad school including: [*“No Rapunzel in This Ivory Tower: Finding Your Collective and Overcoming Academic Isolation”*](#) and [*“Things that Can Go “Wrong”: Finding Our Own Way in Graduate School.”*](#)



- [A Field Guide to Grad School: Uncovering the Hidden Curriculum by Jessica McCrory Calarco](#) is also an insightful resource for navigating the frustrating experience of the hidden curriculum in graduate school.

Cities and Climate Governance

- For more on how cities can participate in global sustainability efforts, Dr. Harriet Bulkeley joined the Ecopolitics Podcast for [season 2 episode 14: Global Cities, Environmental Politics, and Low Carbon Transition](#).
- Devon also recommended checking out Dr. Harriet Bulkeley's article: [Cities and the Governing of Climate Change](#).

Non-Timber Forest Products

- Here is some of the work Obed has done around community perceptions in Ghana [commercialization of non-timber forest products](#) and [the impacts of climate variability](#) on these products.

Community-Based Research

- To continue thinking about community-based research the Carleton Centre for Community Innovation (3ci) has a series of roundtables including this one featuring Kaleigh: [Virtual Roundtable: Learning to do community-based and Indigenous research](#).