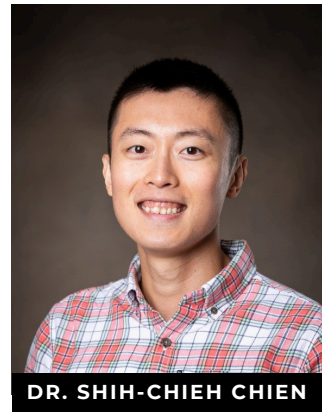


How Montclair's PhD Opens Doors to a Career in Sustainability

Dr. Chien shares how Montclair's interdisciplinary approach prepared him to tackle global environmental challenges.



DR. SHIH-CHIEH CHIEN

For Dr. Shih-Chieh Chien, pursuing a PhD was about turning a lifelong passion for the environment into meaningful action. Originally from Taiwan, Dr. Chien dreamed of becoming a teacher and making a difference in how we approach sustainability. Today, as an Assistant Professor of Biology at Wartburg College in Iowa, he credits Montclair State University's PhD in Environmental Science and Management with giving him the tools to bring that dream to life.

"I've always been interested in not just the natural sciences, but also the social and economic dimensions of sustainability," Dr. Chien shares. "Montclair's program was perfect because it integrated all these aspects, giving me the comprehensive perspective I was looking for."

Montclair's PhD in Environmental Science and Management stood out to Dr. Chien for several reasons. The interdisciplinary curriculum allowed him to explore topics ranging from ecosystem science to environmental policy—fields he saw as crucial for addressing today's global challenges. "Environmental problems don't exist in silos," he explains. "To solve them, you need to understand both the science and the human elements."

The program's geographic location was another major draw. "Montclair is close to New York City, which is such a diverse and vibrant place," he says. "I got to meet people from all different backgrounds, and that broadened my perspective as both a student and an international scholar."

Montclair's financial support through graduate assistantships also made pursuing a PhD more feasible. "As an international student, this was a huge factor," Dr. Chien notes. "It reduced my financial burden and allowed me to focus on my studies and research."

Dr. Chien's time at Montclair was marked by professional opportunities, from conducting research to teaching. However, one experience that stood out was his role as an International Ambassador, a collaboration with Montclair's Office of Global Engagement. "I went back to Taiwan to give talks at my former schools," he recalls. "I shared what it's like to be a PhD student in the United States, and I promoted Montclair to prospective students."

This experience proved invaluable as Dr. Chien entered the academic job market. "Most universities look for candidates who have experience promoting diversity and inclusion," he explains. "Being an International Ambassador allowed me to demonstrate my commitment to these values."

The sense of community within the PhD program made all the difference for Dr. Chien. "We were like a warm family," he says. "Whenever I faced challenges, my classmates were there to provide emotional support. It helped to know I wasn't alone."

Collaboration was another highlight. Dr. Chien and his peers often worked together on research projects, sharing their expertise and co-authoring papers. "Everyone had their own specialty, so we complemented each other's strengths," he says. "That teamwork made the research process much more rewarding."

One of the most profound moments of Dr. Chien's journey came after he successfully defended his dissertation. "I asked my advisor, Dr. Jennifer Krumins, if I was truly qualified to be a PhD," he says. "She reassured me that no one knows everything, not even seasoned professors. A PhD is just the start of a lifelong learning process."

This advice resonated deeply with Dr. Chien, shaping his approach to both teaching and research. "It's about staying curious and continuously seeking knowledge," he reflects.

Dr. Chien's journey to Montclair was inspired by his desire to make a difference, both in the classroom and in the field of environmental science. "In Taiwan, teaching positions are very competitive due to low birth rates," he explains. "Pursuing a PhD opened up the possibility of becoming a professor, which has always been my dream."

Today, as an educator and researcher, Dr. Chien is living that dream. His time at Montclair gave him the skills, experiences, and confidence to thrive in academia. "Montclair was absolutely the right choice for me," he says. "The program didn't just prepare me for a career—it gave me a broader perspective on how I can contribute to society and sustainability."

For Dr. Chien, the PhD is more than a degree—it's a foundation for making a lasting impact. "Montclair gave me the tools and opportunities to grow," he says. "Now, I'm excited to use what I've learned to inspire others and promote a more sustainable future."