



# Christina Wong

Occidental College



Growing up in a large urban metropolis I was rarely afforded the opportunities to climb mountains, wander aimlessly in forests, or spend hours gazing at the stars, thus many people may wonder: How I became interested in the field of ecology? Well, my love for the environment began as a member of the Student Conservation Associations (SCA) San Francisco Urban Youth Corps., program. A program dedicated to educating urban youth about the importance of nature and conservation. For two years I participated in preservation projects in city and state parks, Toyiabe National Forest, CA and Denali National Park, AK. My interest in biology began after taking several introductory courses in college. I found ecology through my first ESA SEEDS field trip

to the USGS National Wetlands Research Center in Lafayette, Louisiana where I learned about wetland and stream ecology. SEEDS and the NSF-REU programs are what fueled my desire to pursue a career in ecology.

Prior to SEEDS, I knew I wanted to study urban environments, and use science to improve and empower communities however I was unsure if there was a discipline that would allow me to pursue my passions. SEEDS showed me that there is a place in science for people like myself by introducing me to the fields of urban and ecosystem ecology. As a current SEEDS fellow, I am working at the Central- Arizona Phoenix LTER with Dr. Nancy Grimm and Dr. Ryan Sponseller on a project that is investigating the effects of anthropogenic nitrogen on N<sub>2</sub>-fixation rates of desert biological soil crusts. The fellowship allows me to design and implement a project that combines all of my interests: urban ecology, ecosystem ecology, biogeochemistry, and conservation biology. Ultimately, as an ecologist, I hope to change the common “urban perception,” that divides cities from nature, by working to restore and expose the “hidden” ecological systems within urban communities. I am interested in studying: how human activities are altering ecosystem processes, how human-dominated ecosystems differ from traditional systems, and the impacts, benefits and consequences of anthropogenic changes on our environment. In the future I wish to become an international researcher and urban planner who will assist in the development and design of sustainable cities.

I recently graduated from Occidental College in Los Angeles with a B.A. in Environmental Biology and want to attend graduate school in the fall of 2007. Next year I plan on working as an Environmental Education Intern with the San Francisco Department of the Environment and as an English teacher in China. Furthermore, I will be starting a two-year term as a member of the Board of Directors of the Student Conservation Association.

The advice I have for fellow students is to get involved in research projects and seek advice from students, professors and research mentors about graduate school and other opportunities. Many students fall through the cracks because they are uninformed about the endless array of opportunities that are simply waiting for them. I think exposure, education and past experiences can help a person find what he or she is truly passionate about. Lastly, I highly recommend international travel become familiar with different communities dream to be “uncomfortable” and dare to embrace a culture that is unlike your own.

To communicate ecology to diverse audiences one must develop diversified scientific leaders whose differences permit them to broaden scientific questions while also allowing the field of ecology to reach and engage various sectors of our society. Also we must encourage more scientists to become engaged in their local and regional communities by: publishing their work in a variety of media, mentoring students, interacting with the public, and creating dedicated educational programs. Truly the success of enhancing our ecological audience worldwide is simple, yet requires something difficult a sincere (mind, heart and time) commitment to education and outreach that is rooted in casual and passionate conversations with all people.

