Dear prospective PhD students:

Below I answer some common questions about myself as a PhD advisor.

If you have more questions, please don’t hesitate to contact me.

Best,

Matt Potoski

I am looking for PhD students who are interested in studying how organizations can address environmental problems.

For me, a really fun part of the creative process in research is finding situations where markets and governments have failed to solve collective-action problems, but people, communities, and organizations still try to solve problems on their own. What makes their efforts successful in some settings, but not in others?

Many of my current research and consulting projects focus on how businesses can create and capture value through their positive environmental activities. Much of my research in this area focuses on environmental certification programs, or “green clubs,” as my co-author Aseem Prakash and I call them. More recently I’ve been studying other environmental business practices, such as environmental employee-engagement programs.

My other research projects investigate a simple question: how can people and organizations solve collective-action problems and produce collective goods in the absence of well-functioning markets and governments? I end up studying this question across a broad range of topics: contract management, college football polls, nonprofit management, political participation, and other areas, including many that have environmental implications. My goal is to help answer questions for getting the right solutions in place.

My research approach is empirical in that I use “real world” data, often employing quantitative analyses, sometimes qualitative. My theoretical approach is ecumenical in that I like to draw on concepts from across the social sciences, including economics, management, political science, and psychology. If I’m doing my best research, I am aiming for the type of approach pioneered by Elinor Ostrom and her colleagues at the Workshop on Political Theory and Policy Analysis.

What I’m looking for in PhD students:

Every advisor wants smart students, and I guess I’m no different, but I also want students who bring creative and entrepreneurial energy to the research process and their studies.
I’m open to advising students whose talents and research interests are synergistic with my own. Successful applicants might come from any number of social science backgrounds and could be interested in academic and professional careers in business management, public policy and management, or political science. I don’t have strict thresholds for selecting students, but strong GRE scores, good writing, research experience, and a willingness to work are all plusses for applicants. I’ve found that students with a couple of years of work experience generally do better in graduate school.

**My advising style:**

I work hard to ensure that PhD studies fit students’ interests, strengths, and career aspirations. Because Bren’s PhD program is relatively small, we are able to customize training from the moment students arrive. This means taking advantage of the Bren school’s wonderfully collegial and collaborative culture and its rich interdisciplinary environment. It also means taking advantage of strengths in other departments on campus for courses and training, mentoring, and teaching opportunities.

My PhD students have worked with Political Science faculty at the Bren School and at UCSB’s Political Science Department, an interdisciplinary PhD seminar on environmental problems (called “PEPP”), UCSB’s PhD emphasis in Economics and Environmental Science, and UCSB’s Technology Management Program.

I really enjoy research collaborations, so I’m looking for students who want to come in and get involved in projects from day one and then move as quickly as possible to leading their own projects.