

Fulbright Fellowship Chile

Chilean Fulbrighter Darko Cotoras Viedma and his own evolutionary process



I came from Chile on a Fulbright Foreign Student grant to pursue a Ph.D. in the Integrative Biology Department at the University of California, Berkeley in 2013.

My research Fulbright focused on understanding the evolutionary processes which create new species on volcanic islands, brought me to the most remote of all the archipelagoes: Hawai'i. At the beginning of my grant, one of the biggest difficulties I faced was in choosing a specific focus for my research. To be at UC Berkeley is like being a kid in a candy store: it's impossible to decide! After a year of taking courses and attending seminars, I realized that in order to successfully pursue all your interests, you have to start with one thing.

Further along on my grant, all of my field and lab work proved to be full of complexities. From grant writing, to technical lab problems, there were countless challenges I faced. But, these actually ended up being great learning opportunities that allowed me to interact with many people in my host community. These field and lab experiences showed me a whole new dimension of biology that I had never experienced in the classroom.

Outside of the classroom, I also had a chance to interact and learn from other cultures. This is my first time living in another country, and this experience has been enhanced by the fact that I've been living in Berkeley's International House. Here, I've learned that cultures are complex and that interactions on a personal level can be radically different than what you expect. I've also discovered that by just being yourself in a non-academic setting, you can reveal much about your own country and culture.

In the end, I have experienced how to access the natural world with all of its complexities and beauty, in a very realistic, practical way. I feel enormously fortunate to have had a Fulbright grant because it has given me a chance to realize a dream that I've held for the past four years.

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