An Easy Choice
Fulbright scholar picks EIU’s sustainable energy program

Hector Daniel Flores cares about keeping Earth sustainable.

So, it’s only fitting that Flores picked Eastern Illinois University’s sustainable energy program to pursue his interests.

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Flores, an international student from Honduras, earned the recognition as a Fulbright Scholar. The highly competitive scholar program is sponsored by the U.S. State Department, for the purpose of attracting others from different countries to study in the United States. The program pays for their schooling, and the scholars work with an adviser to pick a program that matches their academic interests.

To Flores, it was only natural to pick EIU’s sustainable energy program focused on creating leaders and managers in the growing field.

Peter Ping Liu, professor of technology and director of Clean Energy Research & Education, said Flores is the first Fulbright Scholar to pick their program.

“It is a prestigious honor for the young program,” he said.

The program started in Spring 2013 as a collaborative effort by 10 departments across campus. The one-of-a-kind program allows students to receive a mixture of hands-on learning and theory inside the classroom, internships and research practicums.

Before arriving in the United States, Flores earned a bachelor’s degree in natural resources management at the National University of Agricultural in Honduras.

Unlike traditional universities, the school believed in a “learning by doing style,” which only has three universities like that in his country, Flores said. For example, Flores said if they were learning about organic fertilizer, they would create the material themselves.

That’s why Flores wanted a program in the United States focused on practical application and personal attention.

“You learn from books and everything, but you also learn from experiences,” Flores said. “It’s not the same if you talk about a place and you’ve never been there. That’s the best knowledge you can get.”

Flores has already experienced the interdisciplinary program at EIU in action. For his first semester, Flores is even taking a communication class teaching him public relations skills in sustainable energy and creating a public relations campaign.

Originally, Flores sat down with an adviser from the Fulbright program, and he narrowed down the list of possible universities from Ohio to Washington.

“I chose EIU because I liked the practical experience I can get here,” Flores said.

Flores is already enjoying his smaller classes unlike bigger classes he has experienced at other universities. “It’s not like a big class of 50 people,” he said. “The environment to learn is better.”
This isn’t Flores’ first time studying in the United States. He studied at Oregon State University, Humboldt State University and North Carolina State University.

At Oregon State University, Flores studied watershed management and worked on his English for eight weeks. In North Carolina State University, he researched and interned for the United States Department of Agriculture. Then, he spent a year at Humboldt State University to further improve his English and pursue bachelor’s degree classes.

After a while abroad, Flores came back to Honduras where he took a job in the exchange program at his university while he also assisted in classes in the natural resources department for about two and half years.

A mentor encouraged Flores to apply for the program, which was an intense process. After taking an exam, writing a personal statement and an interview, Flores was selected with only three other students from Honduras.

Flores is more than happy to receive this national recognition.

“It is a great opportunity to study, to develop as a professional and to learn more,” Flores said.

He has already met some amazing, intelligent fellow scholars throughout the world. At the University of Arizona, Flores met 30 fellow scholars with many different specialties at an orientation program.

He plans to go back to his university and teach sustainable energy for now, but he doesn’t know what the future will hold.