

Professional Profile of Robert Bair

I will introduce myself as an undergraduate student majoring in both Environmental Science and International Studies. I am also pursuing two undergraduate certificates; one in Latin American and Caribbean studies and the other in Portuguese Language Proficiency. My hope is to one day pursue a Master's Degree in Environmental Engineering. The reasons for which I am applying to the IHE IRES program are many, mostly stemming from my travels. In short, my aim is to expand the skills by which I hope to use to serve the Latin America's rural communities.

Being of Costa Rican descent, I've spent a great part of my childhood, adolescence, and now adulthood traveling between the US and Costa Rica. I developed a deep love for Latin America and its people, and have dedicated myself to traveling throughout much of Central and South America. It was in this "developing world" that I encountered families caught in the grasp of poverty and oppression. I saw landscapes and environments of intense beauty being destroyed by pollution and the ever-increasing desire for raw resources. My heart and mind were greatly moved by what I saw and what I experienced.

I have since then dedicated myself and my time as a University student to finding solutions rather than just asking more questions regarding inequality, oppression and environmental degradation. I have done two internships (one with the department of Latin American and Caribbean Studies and the other with a non-profit organization that does community development projects in Orissa, India). This semester I have had the opportunity to work for the department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at USF as an undergraduate research assistant for Dr. Yeh. It is here that I am learning hands-on skills related to water-quality issues. It is with these skill that I hope to tackle some of the sanitation problems I have encountered during my travels.

My hope is that while working in the lab with Dr. Piet Lens I can gain valuable experience in the operation and maintenance of anaerobic digesters. With this knowledge I hope to gain yet another tool with which to tackle another great problem of rural communities: lack of viable energy options. I also hope to learn from the rest of UNESCO-IHE's faculty, staff and students about how they are dealing with similar issues in their countries. I plan on returning with valuable skills that I can then invest in further research and in the communities I desire to serve.