A Rising Star: Fulbright Scholar Martin Lacayo-Emery

San Diego State University's top-ranked geography department attracted graduate student Martin Lacayo-Emergy to SDSU. Now, as one of six SDSU Fulbright Scholarship recipients this year, he is currently conducting research at the University of Zurich in Switzerland.

FULBRIGHT SCHOLAR MARTIN LACAYO-EMERY IN LUGANO, SWITZERLAND

Lacayo-Emery's specialization is information visualization, an emerging field within geography that turns documents or large amounts of data into graphics to enhance comprehension. His research uses 'self-organizing maps,' wherein computers display non-spatial information, such as words, in ways that are typically reserved for locations. This mapping places similar concepts near each other, creating a visual way of searching for information.

Lacayo-Emery hopes to incorporate findings from his work abroad into the thesis he's required to produce for his masters of science in geography.

While focused on his research, Lacayo-Emery is enjoying first-hand exposure to another culture. "The appeal of being abroad comes from experiencing how things differ from home. For me, I gain perspective on my own values and resources, and I feel more appreciative for what I have," Lacayo-Emery said. "I would tell every SDSU student to go abroad as often as you can, for as long as you can. And, when you return, you'll appreciate what you have at home."

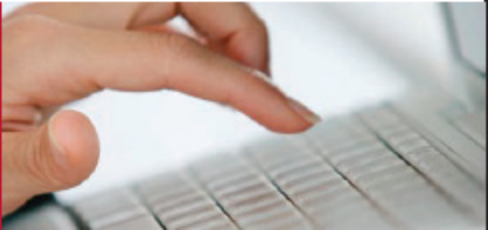
Lacayo-Emery uses English for his academic work, but he's studying German to help him acclimate to Swiss life. "I'm really enjoying how Zurich is cosmopolitan, while maintaining its Swiss sensibilities about how societies should function—especially regarding infrastructure, like public transit, and safety," Lacayo-Emery said.

EXAMPLE OF A SELF-ORGANIZING MAP — CREATED BY ANDRÉ SKUPIN, PH.D.

A rising star with infinite professional opportunities, Lacayo-Emery is quick to acknowledge the role of SDSU's renowned graduate program in geography, as well as his advisor and professor André Skupin, for his success in securing a Fulbright grant. Lacayo-Emery served as Skupin's teaching assistant and researcher.

"Dr. Skupin took an active and personal interest in my education. He helped me receive two of the three travel grants I obtained to present at conferences during my first year," Lacayo Emery said. "His help, combined with the reputation of the department and the exposure my research had through three international conferences, allowed me to make the connections necessary to receive a Fulbright Award."

It's too early to say what's next for Martin Lacayo-Emery. He says perhaps a doctorate, if his research goes well. And, definitely, more travel abroad. ■

AZTEC SUGGESTIONS

Submit story ideas, class notes or offer feedback about our publication. Contact us at **stateintouch@mail.sdsu.edu**.