

The American Space Valencia wishes to congratulate UPV Computer Engineering graduate Cecilio Tamarit for being selected as a Fulbright scholar to attend Cornell University in Ithaca (New York). Find out more about the Fulbright process and Cecilio's impressions in this interview



Facts:

- Around 20 general-purpose fellowships for graduate students are granted each year, give or take around 3. For example, this year it was 19.
- The Fulbright Scholarship consists of a monthly stipend to cover the cost of living in the US (the amount depends on your exact destination), a round-trip, and up to \$40,000 a year in tuition fees. This is for one year, but it can be extended to two. In my case, as I have the opportunity of pursuing a PhD, Cornell is contributing to this as well by extending it to 5 years with a medical insurance, another stipend, and via RAs/TAs once that is done.
- This year I was the only grantee in the field of Computer Engineering / Computer Science and Information Technology.

What was the application process like?

“I applied to the Fulbright Commission in Spain around a year and a half ago, and I was later summoned for an interview in Madrid exactly one year ago. Applying involves no fees and is straightforward, but you do need reference letters and you have to take the TOEFL (which I did right here at the CDL) or a similar exam and pass it with a relatively good score. As a rule of thumb, I would say C1 level in the CEFR is expected. Conditions change from one year to the next, for example, with students who are being interviewed this year they are being more flexible due to the pandemic.

The interview was the part that worried me the most. There was some tense waiting in a conference room with the other applicants. We discussed our intentions in order to ease said tension, and we were later called into a room with three interviewers who were actually very nice and welcoming. I think my grades are good, but definitely not the best. In any case you could tell that was not their main concern: the questions were mostly about my CV, the reason I was applying, etc. With that burden off my chest I took the first flight back to Munich, where I was doing an Erasmus at the time, and heard back from them a couple of weeks later via e-mail.”

What about the university selection?

“Naively, I did not expect this to be the hardest part. One would think that once you are backed by a reputable program like Fulbright, if I may say so myself, you would be half-way there, but this strays far from the truth: months of essay-writing, of refreshing my e-mail, and of hard decisions lied in store. The competition in my field is wild, your application is one among tens of thousands in most cases, and acceptance rates are low. In my exact specialization inside my field, around 500 people applied, and that was Cornell only. This is inevitable, and finding a way to stand out is complicated.

Once you are done with that, provided it went well, choosing your destination is still difficult, and more so in the case of a PhD, as it will define how and where you are going to live for more than a couple of years. Sometimes you are dead-set on going to a certain place, but I was open to several possibilities. In the end, I think I found a good research interest fit at Cornell, and I consider that to be the most important aspect of it all.”

What does it look like moving forward?

“I have never been to Ithaca, but I keep hearing about how beautiful it is. It is also common knowledge that in that area winters are really harsh. Coming from sunny Valencia, it is definitely going to be interesting. What I am sure of is that it will be worth it. I will have the chance to truly dive into what I am passionate about, and experiencing the way of life in the US will be enriching. A part of the philosophy of the program is improving the understanding and collaboration between both my country an theirs, so I will be coming back to Spain. Right now I have no further wish but to contribute to this and making you all who helped along the way feel very proud!”