

“I got to see the world through their eyes”

DAAD-Prize 2022 for Daniel Ojeda de Vicente

The DAAD Prize, which is financed by the Federal Foreign Office and includes a prize money of 1,000 €, is granted for outstanding achievements of international students studying at German universities. At HNEE the prize is awarded annually during the festive enrolment ceremony. This year, BIOM student Daniel Ojeda de Vicente from Spain was honored for his outstanding academic performance, remarkable social commitment and kindness.

How did you feel like when you heard that you've been nominated?

That was a bit awkward because I'm not accustomed and have not received an award like this before. Once I passed the first surprise, I was excited. I feel like it's an important recognition and retrospectively it helped me to value some of the things I have done.

What brought you to HNEE to study Biosphere Reserves Management?

I studied Biology many years ago in Salamanca, Spain. I really enjoyed my studies but Biology is not necessarily an applied science like you learn here in Eberswalde. So I left university for many years and in the meantime travelled and worked in Europe. I noticed that I needed a change in my life. Then the pandemic came and different life circumstances where opening the opportunity. A couple of years ago I was in LernLaden Neukölln where I was advised to check the programmes offered here in Eberswalde and it seemed to match my life's interests. With this advice and the need for a new direction I discovered the Biosphere Reserves Masters programme, which I'm doing now currently in the second semester. So I came with not knowing so much what to expect, but with excitement for a new endeavour and curiosity to see what a Sustainable Development and Applied Science University would look like.

What is your main study focus, what excites you the most?

The unique opportunity to study in Eberswalde is to harness academic research and teaching for positive change in society. This means what you invest here will have practical consequences in the world on the short and on the mid-term. Biosphere Reserves are an interesting experiment because they combine conservation with sustainable development. So it changes the perspective on nature to include humans. This I found inspiring.

Coming back to your personal experience as an international student. What was it like to arrive in Eberswalde and do you have any tips or tricks for newcomers?

My experience is particular in the sense that I've been living in Germany for quite a few years. I worked a lot in intercultural environments and I continue to learn so much from other cultures. When I learned that in our Masters there were going to be more than 12 nationalities and languages, I thought this is really the place for me to be. So I have the privilege of the experience, which I could use to support and accompany my friends who just arrived from



Nigeria, from Ghana, from Vietnam. So for me it was more the role of the one who can offer something but as it always works in relationships I got to profit a lot. I got to see the world through their eyes and my tip would be for those coming now, to not forget what they bring has a lot of value. That in Germany they will find opportunities that might not be in other countries, but that their life experiences are unique and some of us here are looking forward to discover them.

What did you find culturally most challenging about living in Germany?

When I came to Germany I came with my own judgements and prejudices. The hardest is to deconstruct them, to challenge them, to understand that when we are in a new reality, things might work differently than you expect. You carry your luggage, your burden of the things you have experienced before; they might help you get through things but it can also be an obstacle for you to have an open mind and to ask questions.

When you think of the international students at HNEE, do you have any wishes for improvement?

Early I noticed that there is a big effort on integrating the international students. There is a multitude of systems and opportunities for them to engage. I've seen

person so I start my days early and that helps me structure and plan for the day. From early age I learned to organise myself in that way. But I also enjoy going to a party from time to time and then sleeping becomes challenging. In Eberswalde we have this BBQ place on the forest campus and I enjoy the time I got to spend there, especially with my friends from Africa. It was an interesting experience for them as many of them do not drink alcohol but they can enjoy a dance and a party and this we did a few times as well as going out in nature.

Do you wish to share a little story from one of your self-organised excursions?

Yes, of course! There have been quite a bit of them. At first we were going to Schorfheide-Chorin. We students enjoy the semester ticket, which we had to fight for keeping it for a reasonable price. So we went there on the weekends. This was not always easy because our Muslim friends maybe wanted to go to the Musk and do their praying on Fridays. Then our Christian friends will then go to church on Sundays. Saturdays was not always easy for others. So we were rotating. I remember my friend from Palestine Sanad who is now back with his family and who was here an exchange student with a university partnership in Vietnam. He was always enjoying going out into nature. At one time it has snowed and I think for him it was a really new experience. Not the first but maybe the second time he has seen snow. It snowed really hard so we had a proper snow fight and that was big fun. I've never been good at throwing snowballs but I had the impression that he, having grown up in Palestine, was really good at throwing them. [laughter] And then we walked to the lake where I did my swimming and at this time he did his praying, so we were really good excursion companions.

Do you have a plan for your future after graduation from HNEE?

I would like to support Biosphere Reserves for Sustainable Development and my interest lies especially in climbing. Most of the Biosphere Reserves happen to be in mountainous areas so I see the potentials and also the risks that climbing has. I want to research them and to find out in what ways climbing is an opportunity and what the limits as well as the management measures are that are necessary so that conservation can be granted.

[At the end of the interview, a little spider was climbing up on Danielo and he handled it with love and care - as he seems to do with everything and everyone around him].

them work very well. My friend from Nigeria, who is studying BIOM with me arrived as an exchange student and is now a full-time student in Eberswalde. This transition was difficult and it took him a lot of effort but because he is very gifted and has a strong willpower, he managed to use the best of his time here. He also counted on the support of the buddy-system that I think made a big difference for him and others. For me our student's organisation AStA plays also a role in keeping us informed and giving us opportunities to organize stuff of our own or join events. Also the International Office with the different welcoming opportunities and occasions to meet other students. That I find also really good and supportive. We are living in difficult times. There is a war and there is a pandemic. The university has done the best it could to get through it. We are still working on it to adapt. In a world of permanent and quick change of course we need to ask ourselves this question, how we can do better but in general the university, the students and the university structure are on a good path and they should continue to explore the pool of offers to the international students.

I'm really impressed that you are such an active student inside and outside of the university context. When do you sleep?

Sleeping is very important for me, I have to say. I'm a bit of a morning

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