

PRESS RELEASE

GRACE GUTIERREZ NAMED 2023 DISTINGUISHED SENIOR AT THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

COLUMBUS, Ohio—Grace R. Gutierrez of Columbus, Ohio, has been named a 2023 Distinguished Senior at The Ohio State University College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES).

“The Distinguished Senior Award is the most prestigious undergraduate award in CFAES and honors top graduating seniors on the Ohio State Columbus campus,” said Ann Christy, CFAES professor and associate dean for academic programs. “The 25 award recipients exemplify the CFAES mission in areas such as academics and scholarship, research and innovation, service and involvement, and influence and leadership.”

Gutierrez, a forestry, fisheries, and wildlife major in the School of Environment and Natural Resources (SENR) was nominated by college faculty and staff who felt that she personified the award’s attributes of academic, disciplinary, and professional excellence.

It was in the native forest of Alum Creek State Park in Delaware, Ohio, where Gutierrez had her most valuable learning experience. “During my first “plant walk” with Ohio State’s Society for Ecological Restoration, I was taught plant identification skills for the first time,” she said. “Just learning the names and appearances of common Ohio trees was an incredible experience. I felt such wonder and childlike joy to ‘meet’ and recognize the important fellow members of our ecosystems that I walk amongst each day on campus, but had overlooked.”

The honors student interned for several months with the U.S. Forest Service in Delaware, Ohio. Working as a biological sciences trainee, she learned new plant propagation techniques and collected data for experiments in their breeding program. The Franklin County resident also had the opportunity to develop a research project using infrared spectroscopy to detect host response and resistance to emerald ash borer beetle infestation in ash trees.

For Gutierrez, her greatest sense of accomplishment came in 2022 at the annual Ecological Society of America conference held in Montreal. “I presented results from two ecological restoration research projects I led or collaborated on. I most valued the perspectives and ideas gained from speaking with scientists and other professionals from around the world,” she said.

In addition, she served as a student instructional assistant for the SENR Community, Environment, and Development course for three semesters, helping develop and deliver course content and mentoring 260 fellow undergraduate students. She also conducted research in associate professor Steve Hovick’s lab studying ecological and evolutionary drivers of invasion success in plants.

She was also a treasurer for the Society for Ecological Restoration at Ohio State, a SENR Scholar, project lead for

Friends of the Lower Olentangy Watershed native pollinator garden restoration project, and co-lead for the City of Columbus Greenspot program.

For her honors thesis, Gutierrez will travel to Norway on a research study abroad scholarship to work in a Norwegian University of Science and Technology lab. “We will investigate how mycorrhizal fungi are affected by climate warming and positive interactions between plants (nurse shrub dynamics) in harsh mountain environments,” she said.

After graduation, she plans to earn a master’s and PhD degree and pursue post-doctoral positions to explore plant evolutionary, community, and restoration ecology. After that, Gutierrez hopes to find professional positions that allow her continued research and management of ecological restoration projects.

A reception for the Distinguished Senior Award recipients and their families was held on Wednesday, March 22, hosted by Ann Christy and Cathann A. Kress, vice president for agricultural administration and CFAES dean. Meet the 25 outstanding students and learn more about each via a YouTube video release at go.osu.edu/CFAES2023DSA.

In autumn 2022, there were 2,248 undergraduate students in CFAES pursuing bachelor of science degrees in 22 majors. Learn more about CFAES academic programs at go.osu.edu/B4V2.



Grace R. Gutierrez

COLUMBUS, OH

FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
- HONORS - RESEARCH IN FOREST ECOSYSTEM
SCIENCE AND RESTORATION

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Photo available by sending a request to flood.13@osu.edu

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2023 DISTINGUISHED SENIOR AWARD



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