

## Diversity Champion Spotlight: Obed Hernández- Gómez, Forestry and Natural Resources

Obed Hernández-Gómez is a PhD Candidate in Dr. Rod Williams' lab in the Department of Forestry and Natural Resources. He will be defending his dissertation research on the communities of skin microbes on hellbender salamanders this April.



As a native Spanish speaker combating stereotypes and succeeding in a professional scientific career, Obed has worked with English as a second language (ESL) students in the Lafayette community schools to increase bilingual students' appreciation for academics, their desire to pursue higher education, and awareness for potential careers in the field of science. Being able to personally relate to these students; as he also felt frustrated with English, since his earlier schooling was all in Spanish, he quickly became an inspiring role model for these children and acts as a critical bridge between the ESL students, the class, and the teacher. He provides motivation for the students to succeed academically and to pursue careers as future scientists. He is a remarkable example of someone, once similar to them in grade school, who is now successful and breaks stereotypes that they might associate with the word "scientist".

Obed has been extremely successful with this program and has visited students in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade at Tecumseh Middle School and 4<sup>th</sup> grader at Glen Acres Elementary School, both in Lafayette. His pre- and post-surveys show an increase in desire to attend college and positive change in attitude regarding ESL student triumphs in academics.

Obed's peers and lab members continually look to him as a role model and beacon for motivation; he epitomizes an unsung diversity hero and has earned respect, gratitude, and praise for his outreach efforts here at Purdue and within the community.