

Eric Holthaus
Application for Graduate Admission
MA Program in Climate and Society
Columbia University

Statement of Academic Purpose

Throughout my educational career at Saint Louis University I have had many opportunities to excel in the field of meteorology. Of note were two internships at NASA – both of which led to published papers – and a workshop by invitation to NCAR in Boulder, Colorado. However, my most personally enriching experiences have not been in math or physics, but in understanding my connections as a scientist with the rest of the world.

During my senior year I enrolled in a course entitled “Social Justice”. The motto of SLU (a Catholic, Jesuit institution) is for their students to become “men and women for others”. The instructor sought to explain, in practical terms, how to fulfill this mission of the university. Through the course, we were exposed to a variety of injustices, which raised many questions for me. What was my role in the fate of the planet? Were there injustices occurring in the atmospheric or environmental sciences? If so, what could be done to correct them? At the end of the course, we were reminded of the responsibility we would soon possess as graduates of SLU: to go out into this very same world and live lives of service.

Right away I took this mandate to heart. On a spring break service trip to Brownsville, Texas, I met a man named Arturo. Arturo had fled his native Honduras, where in 1998 his entire family – save he and his sister – was killed in Hurricane Mitch. His heart-rending story of picking up the pieces of his tattered life and leaving his home with the hope of starting a new life is a story I will never forget. It is also a story that has changed my life.

From that moment, I have dedicated myself to the cause of helping people like Arturo cope with the effects of our planet’s changing climate. After graduation, I spent a year volunteering with migrant farm workers from Mexico in rural Oregon. While in Oregon, I was also exposed to the intrinsic beauty and value of the natural environment of the Pacific Northwest. I saw how important clean water and healthy forests were to the people of the Northwest; in fact these resources were central to their economies and well-being. In cases where this was forgotten – such as the clear-cutting of timber or building dams without regard to salmon migration patterns – the repercussions were vast and usually hard to counteract.

After my year of service, I resumed graduate study in Meteorology at the University of Oklahoma under one of the world’s foremost tornado experts, Dr. Howard Bluestein. However, I have begun to realize that while the power and beauty of weather has captivated me since childhood, my true desire is to study its impact on current and future generations. Therefore, while Oklahoma is an excellent place to observe and study severe weather, I have decided to look for a program that is more well-suited to my goals and dreams.

Since Latin America is among the most vulnerable regions to climate change, I would like to focus my graduate study at Columbia University on the economic, societal, and policy implications of extreme weather events and climate change there specifically. Ideally this study will culminate in a career as a policy advisor to Congress or a major NGO. I strongly believe that Columbia’s program in Climate and Society would prepare me to excel and make significant contributions towards the well-being of a changing world.

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FLAS Fellowship Statement

During my senior year of college I met a man named Arturo. A group of my friends and I were on a spring break service trip near Brownsville, Texas – a major entry point for refugees from Central America into the United States. On this particular trip we were working alongside refugees at *La Posada Providencia* – a safehouse while they waited for their papers to be processed after applying for asylum. Arturo arrived at *La Posada* after taking various modes of transportation north from his native Honduras, where in 1998 his entire family save he and his sister was killed in Hurricane Mitch. His heart-rending story of picking up the pieces of his tattered life and leaving his home with the hope of starting a new life is a story that I will never forget. It is also a story that has changed my life.

From that moment, I have dedicated myself to the cause of helping people like Arturo cope with effects of the changing climate of our planet. To gain further experience after finishing a degree in meteorology from Saint Louis University, I spent a year volunteering with migrant farm workers from Mexico in rural Oregon. I also spent a semester studying abroad in Madrid.

Since Latin America is among the most vulnerable regions to climate change, I would like to focus my graduate study at Columbia University on the economic, societal, and policy implications of extreme weather events and climate change there specifically. Columbia University's interdisciplinary program in Climate and Society would perfectly fit with my academic and career goals – to make day to day life in Latin America safer from the threat of climate change, and the FLAS Fellowship will help me to make those goals a reality.



Arturo waving goodbye to us from *La Posada* in San Benito, TX