Fulbright Scholarship brings world traveler to Mizzou

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Computer technology was “mysterious and even magic,” to a young Ronny Bazan Antequera. Chasing that magic led him from his hometown of La Paz, Bolivia, to training courses in Japan and India and finally to the brink of his Ph.D. at the University of Missouri.

Bazan started his advanced education in computer science at San Andres University in his hometown, earning his bachelor’s degree in 2005. The cost of graduate programs in Bolivia proved too expensive, so Bazan went to work for the government, then earned scholarships to attend the months-long training sessions abroad.

Then, Bazan discovered the prestigious Fulbright Scholar program, which provides grants for U.S. students to study abroad and for foreign students to study in the U.S. He began the near yearlong process of applying for a grant, including submitting materials, several rounds of interviews, GRE and TOEFL entrance exams and months of learning English, all in the hope of earning a slot

“There are other examinations in Spanish, also,” Bazan said. “There were around 400 who applied from different backgrounds. At the end, there were only about 10
people who went to the U.S. Embassy for the final interview. We had to show them a project, why we want to study here.”

After his selection in 2012, Bazan opted to attend MU. He earned his master’s degree in computer science in 2014, and along the way, began working as a graduate research assistant in the Virtualization, Multimedia and Networking (VIMAN) lab under the guidance of Prasad Calyam, assistant professor of computer science.

“I’m really interested in networking and cloud computing, and I know this university is among the few that are working on that field,” Bazan said. “This was one of my first options when I got this scholarship, and fortunately, I was accepted here.

“I’m gaining a lot of knowledge [in the VIMAN lab], and I’m really excited about that.”

Research in the lab is focused on hybrid cloud computing for data-intensive applications and optimizing network performance, and as such, it is a place for multidisciplinary work to flourish. Recent collaborations include a project with Electrical and Computer Engineering Department Professor Marjorie Skubic to use Kinect sensors she has developed to limit the risk of senior citizen falls and remotely monitor them. Additional research funding has come from the Federal Communications Commission and the Department of Energy.

The lab currently is working on a “Science DMZ” project, creating 100 gigabit-per-second secure networks capable of handling the mass quantities of data that scientific research produces.

All of that work has kept Bazan busy publishing. He was a co-author with Calyam and fellow VIMAN lab student Sripiya Seetharam on a paper that appeared in GENI Research and Education Experiments Workshop last year, and he’s listed as an author or co-author on four more papers expected to be published later this year.

“I was fortunate to showcase our research in several regional and national conferences and symposia, as well as participating in some publications as a co-author,” Bazan said. “And thanks to my adviser (Calyam) and his encouragement, I obtained some international certifications from leading companies such as VMware and Microsoft.”
Once he completes his doctorate, Bazan said he wants to work in the computing industry, continuing his work with the same high-powered computing technologies he’s worked with at MU. And it’s the ability to work with that technology that makes the long trek from the Bolivian capital to Columbia, Mo., worthwhile.

“I am happy I am part of this process, and to use those technologies that are in the process of becoming the standard in the future,” Bazan said. “Those projects are very interesting, and I really like the lab and the job I’m doing there.”