



A soil ecologist studies how living and nonliving factors (and their interactions) affect the functioning of the soil environment.

Dr. González holding an earthworm, *Trigaster longissimus*, a native species found in mature forests of the Luquillo Mountains in Puerto Rico.

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Important Scientist Characteristics

During my middle and high school years, I studied arts. The creativity, originality and sense of balance that you try to achieve in a work of art can definitely help develop skills needed during the many periods of trial and error and experimentation needed to do good science.

Example of a simple research question I have tried to answer: How do soil fauna (animal life) affect the decay of litter debris (leaves and wood) in different ecosystems?

Technology or equipment used in research:

A soil respirometer is a machine used to measure the change of gases (most commonly, carbon dioxide and oxygen) as produced or consumed by the organisms living in the soil.

: Most Exciting Discovery

: I discovered that soil fauna significantly affect the breakdown of leaves and wood in both temperate and tropical ecosystems.

: **When did you know you wanted to be a scientist?** Like many students doing a B.S. in Biology, I thought I would continue studies in the medical field. In fact, towards the end of my degree, I was accepted into medical schools. However, working at an ecophysiology laboratory researching mangrove and other forested ecosystems and digging earthworms from extremely hard-dried soils in pastures gave me a different view. Towards the end of the summer (as I also visited the hospitals I was most likely to work/practice during med school), I discovered I wanted to become a soil ecologist, not a doctor!

<https://www.fs.fed.us/research/people/profile.php?alias=ggonzalez>