

In the Spotlight—Early career researcher

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Felipe Aguilera was a BECAS CHILE–CONICYT recipient in 2010 to conduct his PhD studies in Australia. He is the current President-elect of the International Society of Invertebrate Morphology (ISIM).

Felipe is an Editor of Biochemical Genetics and in 2022 has joined the Editorial Board of JEZ-B: Molecular and Developmental Evolution.

Google Scholar page: https://scholar.google.com.au/citations?user=fUYk_wAAAAJ

With whom and where did you study?

After finishing my Bachelor's in Marine Biology at the University of Valparaiso (Chile), I earned my PhD degree under the supervision of Bernie Degnan from the University of Queensland (Australia). After that, I stayed as a postdoc in Bernie's lab for almost 2 years then I moved to Norway for another postdoc with Andreas Hejnol at the Sars Centre.

What got you interested in biology? When did you know evodevo was for you?

I grew up in a coastal city in the Central region of Chile, and thus went to the beach quite often. I loved (and still do) walking on the beach and rocky places looking for anything and everything animal. I think this curiosity triggers my interest in biology and pursue me to follow a scientific career. During college, I got fascinated by biochemistry and genetics, and during my PhD I learned about evolution, molecular biology, and bioinformatics to understand how molecular repertoires change over time to construct different kinds of molluscan shells. With very little experience in developmental biology but strong skills in

bioinformatics, my focus was first restricted to comparative genomics/transcriptomics, but this changed during my time in Bernie's lab where I had the chance of working and seeing marine embryos of mollusks, ascidians, and sponges, but more profoundly in Andi's lab, during which I got immersed in embryonic development of several marine groups and comparative approaches. From then on, my goal has been to combine developmental biology, evolution, and bioinformatics to answer EvoDevo questions, using comparative approaches and different marine model systems.

What is your experience with setting up and running an evodevo lab?

It was a big change coming from overseas to setting up a lab in Chile. The step of building up a lab and managing a whole team has been a huge leap, with mentoring being the most challenging part of the job. I started my lab in March 2018, and at that time I spent a considerable piece of time writing grants to secure lab funding. Once I got research funds, I did not realize that it was to be difficult to get students to join the lab; then I got students, but the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, and everything got worse. In that specific grant, I had to perform most of the experiments by myself due to COVID-19. Nowadays things are going smoother with secure lab funding and several students in the lab. Therefore, I am more focused on writing scientific papers based on results from the lab and providing meaningful training for students. Indeed, I now invest most of my time in caring deeply for my trainees and their success, but also in being thoughtful and committed to continually improving as a mentor.

What strategies do you use to promote your research beyond your institution, possibly receiving attention from outside of academia?

I try to be active on Twitter to reach a broader community. The account is mine, not a lab account, which is intentional because the lab is made by people and my thoughts do not necessarily represent them. I use Twitter (@faguilgen) to share not only about research papers and scientific conferences that I think are cool but also to let followers get to know the person behind the scientist.

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