

PROFESIONAL BIOGRAPHY - Fernando Gilbes-Santaella is Associate Professor and the Director of the Geology Department in University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez. He is also the Director of the Center for Hemispherical Cooperation in Research and Education in Engineering and Applied Science (CoHemis). In 2002, he founded the Geological and Environmental Remote Sensing Laboratory (GERS Lab) with the mission of promoting and facilitating the education and research of remote sensing tools applied to the Earth System Science. As biological oceanographer he has several publications on environmental remote sensing, bio-optical properties, and coastal studies. He has a B.S. in Biology and a M.S. in Marine Sciences from the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez, and a Ph.D. in Biological Oceanography from the University of South Florida. Current research involves multidisciplinary projects on remote sensing, biogeo-optical studies and geographic information systems sponsored by several local and federal agencies.

PERSONAL BIOGRAPHY - I was born in 1965 in countryside of Ponce, Puerto Rico. The surroundings of my play ground helped me to develop a profound sense of connection with nature, and especially with water. I grew up close to a river, where aquatic activities got my attention all the time. I loved to go swimming, fishing, and even just sit and listen to the water movement. Perhaps these childhood experiences with water motivated me to become an oceanographer. When I finished high school I decided to study Biology and I moved to Mayagüez city, a small town in the west coast of Puerto Rico. As part of my extracurricular activities in the university I joined the Association of Biology Students, having the great opportunity to participate in multiple field trips around Puerto Rico. During that time I visited most of the local forests and learned about the flora and fauna of my beautiful island. I was in direct touch with the nature that I was learning in books. I enjoyed it so much that I decided to become the President of this Association; as such I learned important skills of leadership, planning, and responsibility. After finishing my B.S. in Biology I moved to La Parguera, a small coastal community in Lajas (Puerto Rico), for conducting graduate studies in Biological Oceanography. After waiting all my life for that moment I was finally in full contact with the ocean. Those were incredible years for me. I learned diving, went to many research cruises along the Caribbean Sea, and developed a scientific mind toward marine problems. During that time I was also the recipient of a fellowship given by the NASA Graduate Student Researchers Program. This fellowship not only paid for my graduate studies, but it also changed my life. As part of it I learned remote sensing of phytoplankton (i.e. ocean color). I also had the opportunity to travel for first time in my life out of Puerto Rico. Every summer I went to NASA Stennis Space Center, in Mississippi (United States), where I worked with data for my thesis. After getting my M.S. degree I went to Florida (United States) for a Ph.D. in Biological Oceanography. During those years I continued learning about remote sensing of ocean color. But also at that time I developed a great interest for meteorology, especially for hurricanes. I attended a course in this topic and for the first time I realized the large connection between meteorology and oceanography. Even today as professor in the Geology Department of the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez I teach about the relationship between these two fields. Tracking hurricanes with satellite images is now a hobby for me; among others like designing and maintaining web pages, taking care of my fish tank, and playing with my dog. I enjoy very much living in a tropical island of the Caribbean and my activities in the water continue, although now I have a different sense for them.