

CienciaPR's Director of Educational Programs Selected to Prestigious Women in STEM Program ^[1]

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Ciencia Puerto Rico (CienciaPR) is proud to announce that Dr. Gretchen Díaz Muñoz, Director of Science Education Programs and Community Partnerships has been selected as an AAAS ^[3] (American Association for the Advancement of Science) IF/THEN® Ambassador ^[4]. IF/THEN®, a national initiative of Lyda Hill Philanthropies ^[5], seeks to further women in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) through empowering current innovators and inspiring the next generation of pioneers.

Around the world, women are underrepresented in STEM-related fields. The goal of the IF/THEN® Initiative is to dispel stereotypes and misconceptions about women in STEM by changing the narrative and improving the visibility of female STEM professionals. Dr. Díaz Muñoz is among a select group of 100+ talented women STEM professionals across a variety of industries who will serve as IF/THEN® Ambassadors and high-profile role models for middle school girls. She will receive specialized media and communications training and IF/THEN® will showcase her story and her inspiring work.

“We are delighted that Greetchen’s long-time work as a Latina STEM role model and champion for girls has received the recognition it deserves.”, said Dr. Giovanna Guerrero-Medina, Executive Director of Ciencia Puerto Rico. “She has devoted her career to sharing with others the pride she feels as a Puerto Rican scientist and to making sure all students, regardless of background, can experience the excitement of science. As an AAAS IF/THEN® Ambassador, girls around the world will have a chance to be inspired through her example and we could not be prouder.”

Originally from a humble community in Ponce, Puerto Rico, Dr. Greetchen Díaz-Muñoz received her bachelor’s and master’s degrees in biology from the University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez. She went on to earn a PhD in Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology from The Ohio State University and to do postdoctoral research in virology at the University of Nebraska. Upon returning to Puerto Rico, Dr. Díaz Muñoz joined the Puerto Rico Science, Technology and Research Trust as its first Grants Program Director, where she was responsible for establishing the first jurisdiction-wide competitive research and development funding program. In 2017, she joined CienciaPR as Director of Science Education programs, after almost 10 years as a volunteer in numerous science communication, outreach, and education projects.

Dr. Díaz Muñoz has a long-standing commitment to women and girls in STEM. At CienciaPR, she founded Borinqueña, an initiative focused on empowering Hispanic and Puerto Rican women and girls in STEM. She also created Semillas de Triunfo (Seeds of Success), a STEM Ambassadors program—the first of its kind in Puerto Rico—that encourages middle and high school girls to pursue STEM careers by providing them with information about these jobs and disciplines, connecting them with Latina STEM role models and developing their leadership skills. As STEM Ambassadors, participants complete a community service project to share the importance of science with their communities. During the program’s first edition, 162 girls from 119 schools across Puerto Rico participated and conducted 100 community projects, impacting 10,500 people. Following the program, girls exhibited higher interest in STEM careers and confidence in their scientific abilities.

“We firmly believe that IF we support a woman in STEM, THEN she can change the world,” said Lyda Hill, founder of Lyda Hill Philanthropies. “We’re thrilled that Greetchen has been chosen as an AAAS IF/THEN® Ambassador and know that she will be a tremendous asset to the IF/THEN® Initiative.”

Two other Puerto Ricans, Minerva Cordero, dean and professor of mathematics at the University of Texas, in Arlington and Roselyn Rosario-Meléndez, associate chemist at the L’Oréal company, have also been selected in this group.

AAAS IF/THEN® Ambassadors were selected through a rigorous selection process. Candidates were evaluated for overall excellence with a focus on the following:

- Contributions to their STEM-related field, commensurate with their career stage
- Demonstrated experience and abilities in STEM communication and public engagement via media, classroom, and public programs
- Commitment to inspiring middle school girls to be the next generation of STEM pioneers

For a complete list of Ambassadors, go to www.ifthenshecan.org/ambassadors [6].

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