

# **Boricua students receive the Graduate Research Fellowship Program grant**

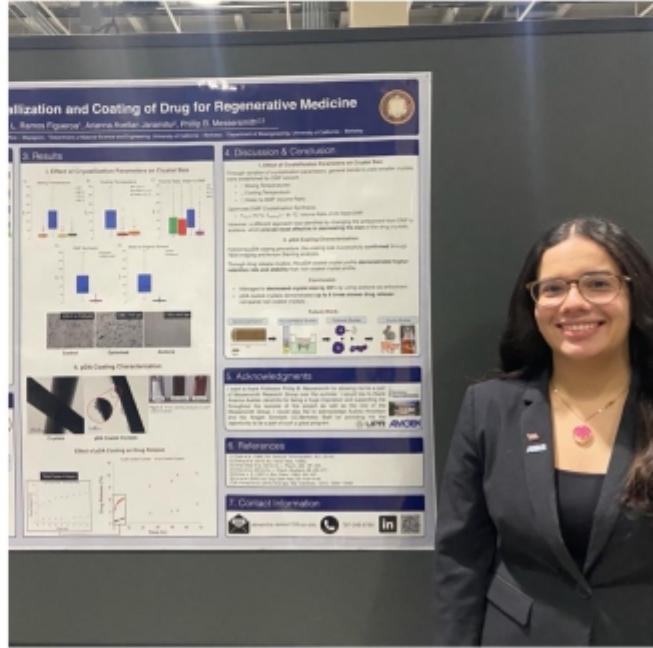
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Submitted by [Alondra Caraballo Franco](#) [2] on 12 April 2022 - 3:26pm



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Mariela Rocío Rodríguez Otero, Héctor Luis Torres Vera, Guillermo Andrés Correa Otero and Alexandra Leonor Ramos Figueiroa

We would like to congratulate all the students who received the prestigious Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRFP) awarded by the National Science Foundation (NSF). This fellowship recognizes and supports students who have excelled in science, mathematics, technology or engineering (also known as STEM disciplines) and other fields of knowledge. Scholarship recipients receive a stipend of \$34,000 per year to pursue graduate studies. The application is highly competitive and extensive, requiring several letters of recommendation, a personal essay and a research proposal with an intellectual merit section and a societal impact section.

On this occasion, a total of **22 students and alumni** from the University of Puerto Rico and the Inter-American University Aguadilla campus stood out among thousands of scholarship applications, with the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez being the Puerto Rican institution of higher education with the largest number of scholarship recipients. On the other hand, **12 graduates and 1 student** from the University of Puerto Rico received Honorable Mention.

There were seven students from the University of Puerto Rico at Río Piedras: **Adriana Paola Claudio-Vázquez, Génesis Michelle Ferrer Imber, René José García del Valle, Isabelle Marie González Montalvo, Laura Isabel Penabad Peña, Nicole Alondra Rivera-Fuentes, Mariela Rosa Casillas**, all students and alumni of the campus.

Likewise, nine Colegiales won the scholarship: **Bianca Marie Davila Montero, Andrea Sofía Flores Pérez, Stephanie Oliveras Santos, Alexandra Leonor Ramos Figueroa, Orlando Gabriel Rivera González, Richard Rodríguez Feliciano, Mariela Rocío Rodríguez-Otero, Anaira Román Santiago and Ignangeli Salinas-Muñiz**, all students and graduates of the Mayagüez campus.

The University of Puerto Rico at Cayey had three winners: **Guillermo Andrés Correa Otero, Patricia Nicole Rodríguez-Morales** and **Héctor Luis Torres Vera**. Finally, we highlight **Kelotchi Sebastián Figueroa Nieves** from the University of Puerto Rico in Humacao, **Karina Marie Matos Fernández** from the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce and **Damayanti Rodríguez-Ramos** from the Inter-American University Aguadilla campus.

We also congratulate those who received Honorable Mention: **Mariela Victoria García Vega, José Francisco Catala Torres, Guillermo Sebastián Colon, Marcel Fernando Corchado Albelo, Norelis Díaz Rodríguez, Derick Emmanuel González Acevedo, José Hernández-Meléndez, Paola Nicole Loperena González, William Anthony Molina Arocho, Paola Nicole Negrón-Moreno, Manuel José Quiñones-Pérez, Victor Francisco Rivera-Santana and Ángel Luis Vázquez Maldonado**.

We also celebrated Puerto Rican winners who completed their high school studies outside of Puerto Rico and therefore cannot be mentioned by name.

Some expressions from students upon learning that they won this competitive scholarship:

**Mariela Rocío Rodríguez Otero, from the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez.** "For me, receiving the GRFP scholarship is a great honor since this means an increase of Puerto Rican representation in the scientific community. The help of the mentors I have had in my career, the education received at UPRM along with my efforts in the scientific field make this scholarship one more success achieved in my academic career."

**Guillermo Andrés Correa Otero, student at the University of Puerto Rico at Cayey.** "I am very happy to have received this prestigious award. I am more than grateful to all the professors at UPR Cayey who helped me during the application process and the university in general for preparing me academically and intellectually to achieve this goal. Honestly, it was a great and pleasant surprise to receive the notification since I knew how competitive it is to obtain this award and I applied rather for going through the experience of writing a research proposal, exposing my

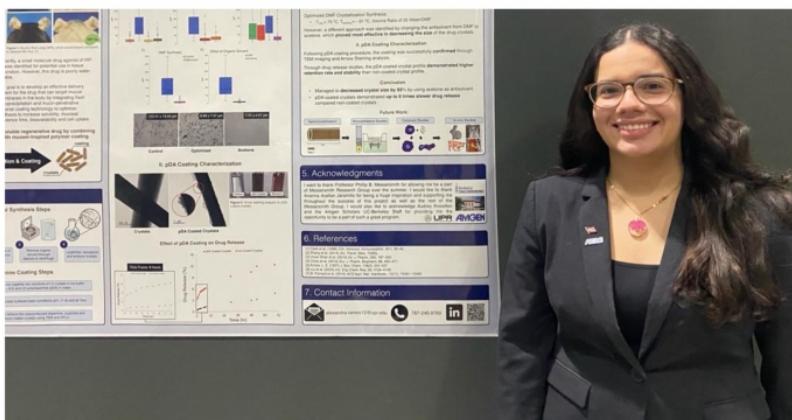
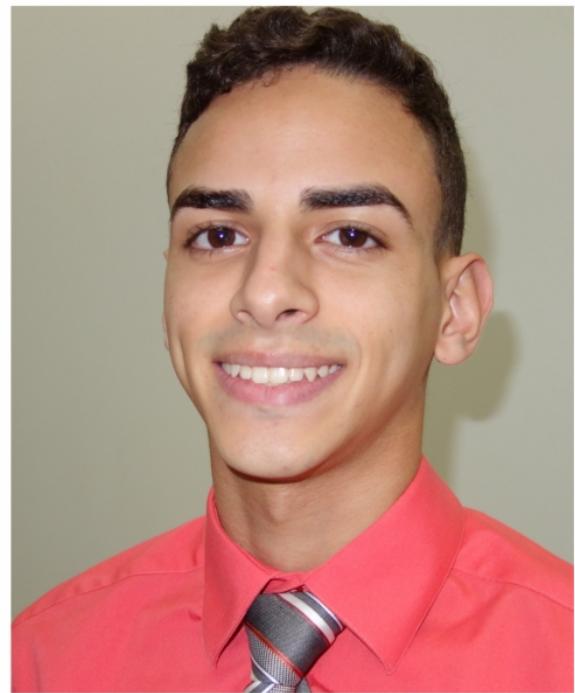
scientific ideas and sharing it with the community. Besides, there was nothing to lose by trying! Being awarded this prize means a lot to me, not only because of the financial security, but also because it reaffirms that I am ready for this new stage in graduate school and shows that Puerto Rico has very talented students who are even recognized by prestigious organizations such as the NSF."

**Alexandra Leonor Ramos Figueroa, a student at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez** who will continue her studies at Stanford University. "The NSF GRFP application was the most challenging of all the ones I had to do for the graduate school process. When I received the news, I couldn't believe my eyes. Receiving the NSF grant has been a great honor that validated my creativity and independent ideas as a researcher. It will give me the opportunity to continue to diversify the scientific community and helps me gain a lot of freedom in choosing what research questions I would like to solve in the field I am interested in. Through this application, I had the opportunity to dialogue with many distinguished professors and students who offered me a lot of constructive criticism which was super motivating."

**Hector Luis Torres Vera, who graduated from the University of Puerto Rico at Cayey** in 2020 and is currently a student at the University of California, Berkeley. "It is a true honor. Words cannot express how happy I am to celebrate this feat. When I moved to Berkeley I immediately felt how easy it is to fall into that imposter syndrome that so many of us struggle with. Receiving this NSF grant is a validation of my sacrifice and effort to move forward in my career as a scientist. I am capable. Moreover, the achievement is not mine alone. It is a collective achievement that I share with a community-queer, Boricua, family and friends-who have supported me during this very difficult but rewarding time in my life."

**Karina Marie Matos Fernández, a graduate of the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce** and currently a student at Duke University. "It was a great emotion because I thought they were not going to choose me. And when I submitted the proposal, there were about 3 minutes left before the deadline to send everything. My laptop fried and slowed down just when I needed it the most. I was nervous, my hands were shaking because I was saying "I missed the plane, no chance of them telling me I'm not going to get it". Until it was sent on time and after that I was super happy and even celebrated having sent it because it took me a lot of work to write it. And the effort was worth it. I tell you that for me this scholarship means a lot because it makes me feel recognized for my efforts and validated as a scientist. It also gives me more freedom to choose the direction of my research."

A big congratulations to all the winners for all their efforts, hard work and sacrifices to win this scholarship! You are an example to follow in the face of the uncertainty that the world is going through right now. It is a great honor that Boricua students receive prestigious academic offers and great scholarships representing us in STEM and other fields. We wish you the best of success in your professional careers!



Mariela Rocío Rodríguez Otero, Alexandra Leonor Ramos Figueroa, Héctor Luis Torres Vera, Guillermo Andrés Correa Otero y Karina Marie Matos Fernández

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