

National Institute of Health awards University of Puerto Rico Río Piedras Campus [1]

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The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has distinguished the University of Puerto Rico Río Piedras Campus with the prestigious Institutional Award for Excellence in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) in Biomedical Research.

The NIH Office of Scientific Workforce Diversity (COSWD) announced the ten recipients of the NIH Institutional Award for Excellence in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) in Biomedical Research. In April 2023, the NIH launched the DEIA Award Competition to recognize transformative projects and processes developed by institutions of higher education that promote inclusive excellence and foster environments that advance an institutional culture based on diversity and equity.

The DEIA Award competition was supported by NIH UNITE and the 24 NIH institutes and centers that provide extramural funding. Each winning institution will receive a \$100,000 award from the NIH in recognition of their exceptional dedication and innovation in fostering DEIA within research settings.

The award is given for exemplary efforts to create cultures of inclusive excellence and enhance DEIA in biomedical and behavioral research at the institutional level. The University of Puerto Rico Rio Piedras Campus, the first teaching center in Puerto Rico, was one of ten institutions to receive this innovative award from the NIH.

This prestigious award was given to the Rio Piedras Campus in recognition of the successful implementation of the Neuroscience Research Opportunities to Increase Diversity Program (NeuroID: <https://neuroid.uprrp.edu> [3]), funded by the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS) 13 years ago.

The NeuroID program is led by Professors Dr. José E. García-Arrarás and Dr. Carmen S. Maldonado-Vlaar, two outstanding Puerto Rican neuroscientists from the Department of Biology at UPRRP. This successful neuroscience program has played a transformative role in the training of numerous Puerto Rican high school students within this institution.

This innovative neuroscience research training initiative has successfully guided dozens of Puerto Rican students into graduate programs in neuroscience, contributing significantly to increasing diversity in academic and scientific environments at the higher education level.

The achievements of the NeuroID program are attributed to three main objectives. First, the establishment of a comprehensive and innovative program within the Rio Piedras Campus that provides undergraduate students in Puerto Rico with valuable insights into the various facets of a career in neuroscience research. Second, the program has developed an effective network of mentor scientists who guide students along their academic and research trajectory to eventually become successful neuroscientists of world caliber. Third, it has strengthened the neuroscience community in Puerto Rico by bridging the gap between universities within the island and research laboratories at top-tier institutions in the United States.

After receiving the news about this prestigious award, Dr. Carmen S. Maldonado-Vlaar , Co-Principal Investigator of the NeuroID program and author of the application for the award, commented: "This is the first time that our Rio Piedras Campus is recognized as a bastion of diversity, equity and inclusion in biomedical research, a distinction that positions our outstanding research and academic efforts at the top of higher education institutions in Puerto Rico and the United States. Both Dr. Garcia Arrarás and myself are very honored to receive this important award that fully recognizes our dedication and unwavering commitment to guiding the successful career paths of our incredible students.

The awarded institutions are:

- California State University San Marcos
- Duke University
- Rochester Institute of Technology
- University at Buffalo, The State University of New York
- University of California, Davis
- University of California, San Francisco
- University of Florida
- University of Illinois Chicago
- University of Puerto Rico-Río Piedras
- Vanderbilt University

Importantly, the award-winning institutions have implemented effective strategies that promote equity and remove structural barriers to success among students, postdoctoral fellows, and faculty in biomedical and behavioral research. These initiatives contribute to systemic change by fostering inclusive research environments and serve as models for adoption by other academic research institutions.

Dr. Marie Bernard, NIH Principal Officer for Scientific Workforce Diversity, commented, "Congratulations to the awardees for their well-deserved recognition. I thank each institution that submitted an application to compete for this award. I look forward to the continued success of our collective efforts to promote DEIA in the biomedical and behavioral sciences."

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