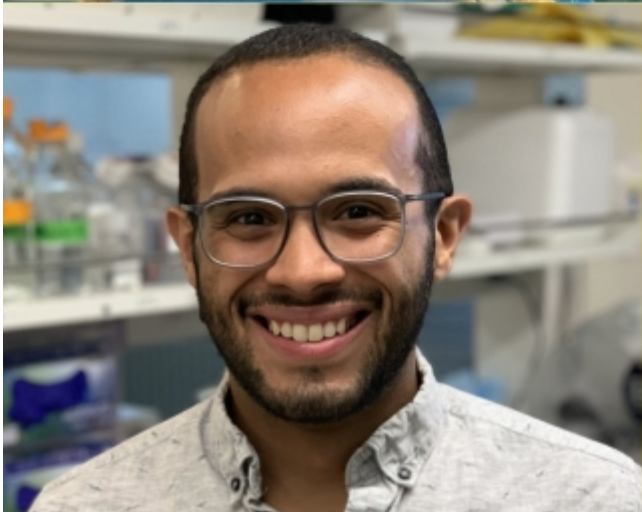


#CerebrosBoricuas receive prestigious scholarships for research ^[1]

Submitted by [Alondra Caraballo Franco](#) ^[2] on 29 July 2024 - 1:53pm



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On July 9, the Howard Hughes Medical Institute announced the new 2024 cohort of the Gilliam Fellows Program [3], composed of 50 scientists. Fellows in this cohort, recognized for their research and commitment to equity and inclusion in science, belong to 43 institutions in the United States and include scientists specializing in biomedical areas, brain development, molecular etiology, among others. This program prepares leaders in science and awards \$53,000 annually to each student and their thesis advisor, up to a maximum of 3 years.

We are proud to highlight that **3 #CerebrosBoricuas are part of the 2024 cohort**, being this year the most competitive in history with applications from 162 institutions. This year, **for the first time, the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras campus is the training site for one of the scholarship recipients.**

Meet the #CerebrosBoricua who are part of the 19th cohort of the Gilliam Fellows Program.

- **Rubén García Reyes**, a doctoral student in Neuroscience at Washington University in St. Louis [4]: I feel honored and grateful to have been awarded this very selective scholarship. Being one of 50 national members of the Gilliam Program is a source of pride because we continue to demonstrate that in Puerto Rico brains are developed that can fly and shine no matter where they are. Being a doctoral student and doing science every day is not easy. Competing for external funding is extremely competitive and being selected demonstrates that our research in neuropharmacology is innovative and well positioned to move forward contributing to the development of knowledge and biomedical advances. Being a Gilliam Fellow gives me gas in the tank. You have to be resilient and persistent in life and in science. You grow by trying multiple times until you get an appropriate method. Along the way, you consult, read, and question biological and chemical systems so that you can search for explanations that help you take a step forward. Ultimately, these achievements do not happen on their own. It is teamwork with my thesis mentor that allows us to demonstrate that we have an environment that cultivates curiosity and creativity to innovate and create something new.”
- **Luis Rodríguez Rodríguez**, PhD student in Biomedical Sciences at UT Southwestern [5]: “I am grateful and honored to be part of the Gilliam Fellow Community. This fellowship will allow me to continue my research as part of my PhD and will give me the opportunity to connect with peers who, like me, seek to advance equity and inclusion in the field of science. I am forever grateful to all the people and mentors who have helped me during my academic training both here in Texas and in Puerto Rico. From Dallas rePResenting.”
- **Julienn Torres Rodríguez**, who is the first Gilliam Fellow doing her research at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras campus [6]: “When the notification came I did not have

my phone because we were discussing an important experiment. Suddenly, Dr. Garcia came to where we were gathered and said: “PERMISO. YOU GOT THE GRANT!”. Honestly, I was left processing what he had said and could only say, “What????”. To which he responds quite excitedly, “JULIENN, YOU GOT THE GILLIAM!”. I finally reacted and looked at one of my classmates and said, “THEY GIVED ME THE SCHOLARSHIP!!!”. Everyone started clapping and I was thinking so many things, I felt so grateful because it truly is a once in a lifetime opportunity. Being a Gilliam Fellow is going to allow me to develop leadership skills to promote an equitable and inclusive scientific culture. In addition, this provides benefits that will further my learning and growth as part of the neuroscientific world.”

New Faculty Transition Fellowship

On the other hand, we would also like to congratulate Monica Quiñones-Frías, Ph.D. who won the prestigious MOSAIC K99/R00 del American Society for Cell Biology [7], which provides funding to complete her postdoc and begin her career as a professor. The fellowship provides up to five years of professional development mentoring and research support. Currently, Dr. Quiñones-Frías is a postdoctoral researcher in Dr. Avital Rodal's laboratory at Brandeis University [8], where she is developing a research program to examine the functions and structure of the neuronal endoplasmic reticulum (ER) using a combined approach of genetics, super-resolution microscopy and proteomics. Monica joins several Boricua scholars from past years, including Cristina Román Vendrell, Rebecca Parodi Rullan and Yadira Soto Feliciano.

Quiñones-Frías shares with us her reaction: “I feel that this is an extremely exciting moment in my scientific career! I found out about my scholarship score while I was at a conference and I couldn't hold back the urge to cry because of the emotion. It is years of hard work and dedication to get here. In the United States, there are not many Puerto Rican women who are professors and I feel fortunate to be on this trajectory to have my own lab. I owe a lot to my mentors who have given me the opportunity to learn and have helped me move my career forward. My goals now are to continue to help Puerto Ricans and other Latinos in their careers and to set up my lab where we will study the endoplasmic reticulum in the nervous system using microscopy, genetics and proteomics.”

Huge congratulations, #CerebrosBoricuas! We wish you the best of success in your lives and careers!

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