

Anecdote: the "Puerto Rico Social" and promoting careers in science ^[1]

Submitted by [Marla S. Rivera-Oliver](#) ^[2] on 17 June 2016 - 7:28pm



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Promoting careers in science and diversity in them is a high priority for our volunteer Marla Rivera-Oliver.

As part of the 10th-anniversary celebration of Ciencia Puerto Rico, we have been collecting anecdotes from our volunteers to celebrate them and the work they do. We also want to share with you the team's vision for CienciaPR.

Today we will share the story of Marla S. Rivera-Oliver from Arecibo. She has been a volunteer with CienciaPR for a year and a half.

- How did you hear about CienciaPR?

I've always been aware of science in Puerto Rico. During an internet search, I discovered CienciaPR back when it was just starting. I created my account then and I have been aware of all the news that have been published since.

- What initially motivated you to volunteer for CienciaPR?

I have a personal commitment to help promote science and above all, help encourage diversity in science. From a young age, I've always looked for information about opportunities and initiatives in Puerto Rico in which I could participate. Volunteering for CienciaPR has opened doors to help me promote science among Puerto Ricans. Additionally, I've been able to help children who, like me at some point, seek guidance and information on opportunities in which they can contribute their talents in science from an early age.

- What projects or initiatives have you been involved with? What has been your favorite?

I worked on initiatives orienteering underprivileged children, as well as high school and college students.

Also, Ciencia Puerto Rico is very committed to professional development activities. For the last four years, they have managed to reinstate the meeting of Puerto Ricans during the annual conference of the Society for Neuroscience (SfN), which we call the "Puerto Rico Social".

I've had the experience of participating in the organization and development of this activity that fosters collaboration and communication among Puerto Rican neuroscientists throughout the world. Through collaboration between students and researchers, the Medical Sciences Campus of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), participating students of the Society for Neuroscience in Puerto Rico and Ciencia Puerto Rico have brought together more than 100 Puerto Ricans during this activity.

Having the opportunity to participate in this activity from all angles, be it as a student of the UPR, as part of SfN or as an organizer together with Ciencia Puerto Rico, fills me with great satisfaction and pride. This initiative shows me that there is power in unity and that many of us are interested in providing opportunities for professional development and collaboration for scientists from the island.

- What motivates your continued involvement?

Being part of the CienciaPR team, engaging in community-based initiatives, assisting in career counseling projects and helping to foster unity amongst the neuroscience community in PR strengthens unimaginably my desire to contribute to our new and future Puerto Rican scientists. My motivation every day is knowing that my work and dedication can leave a legacy and a model for Puerto Rican children. I am really proud of this and I do it with all my heart. It's like my door lock: scientific research is the key that lets me access to a world full of possibilities.

- Briefly, tell us a story that you treasure or particularly remember as a volunteer.

Having the opportunity to train students who are interested in scientific research is what I am most passionate about and it recharges my energy. I have mentored students who have just begun doing research and are seeking the opportunity to develop professionally. What I cherish the most is seeing how they acquire more knowledge and develop critical analysis and curiosity to know more and more over time. One of the most gratifying experiences in my life is knowing that I added my grain of sand so that more Puerto Ricans stand out in research and find the true meaning of having this privileged career.

- How has volunteering with CienciaPR helped you at a personal or professional level?

Volunteering for CienciaPR has helped me strengthen my ties with Puerto Rican scientists inside and outside of PR. I've had the opportunity to learn new ways to promote science in PR by learning to leverage social networks to promote the visibility of activities in PR. Above all, I've had the opportunity to work with people who are just as committed as I am with Puerto Rico and science.

- What does CienciaPR mean to you?

CienciaPR for me means unity. Bringing together so many people interested in science in PR into one forum is something that many years ago I thought inconceivable. CienciaPR has promoted awareness of the value of science, opportunities for professional development, shared knowledge and information, and more importantly, developed a sense of empowerment among members through which Puerto Ricans can now see careers in science as accessible and possible.

CienciaPR is a forum with high social impact in PR as well as other countries which also know about CienciaPR and are trying to create a similar forum. CienciaPR: 'Thank you for taking the initiative and making a difference!'

- If you could focus on a subject to improve for the benefit of Puerto Rican scientific community, what would it be? How could CienciaPR help achieve that goal?

One of my priorities is raising awareness of the need for scientific research and that science can be seen as a tool to move Puerto Rico forward. Through effective communication, CienciaPR is and will continue to achieve this goal. By making the Puerto Rican community aware of research advances and scientific opportunities in and outside of Puerto Rico, we are creating awareness and making a difference.

We all need to see the potential of science education and research as an investment that will bring good results for our beloved country which is in such economic turmoil.

- What initiative would you like to implement to improve Science Education in Puerto Rico? How can CienciaPR help implement this initiative?

I would like to focus on improving the self-esteem of Puerto Ricans in Science. Many do not even try a career in science because it is not promoted to children as a possibility for them. Therefore, I would focus on working deliberately to raise awareness at an early age about career opportunities in science.

Puerto Rico has generated world-renowned scientists. Why don't they receive recognitions locally? Why are scientific careers not promoted by the government?

I would partner with school counselors to orient them about opportunities in science and they, in turn, can correctly guide children and youth in PR. CienciaPR could help by creating a science career counseling program and organizing training for teachers and school counselors to foster knowledgeable guidance, instead of counseling without foundation or knowledge, to our future scientists.

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