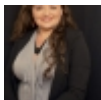


Passion for education and the extended family of CienciaPR ^[1]

Submitted by [Yaihara Fortis Santiago](#) ^[2] on 27 September 2016 - 11:21am



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Yara presenting at the 2nd Educational Symposium of Ciencia Puerto Rico.

During my PhD, I really missed being close to my family in Orocovis and interacting with other Puerto Ricans that also wanted to contribute ideas to the scientific development of the island. I wasn't sure where to start so I decided to invite Dr. Daniel Colón Ramos, a professor at Yale University, to offer a seminar to students and professors of my program at Brandeis University. Daniel agreed, and without realizing it, I got involved in one of the most rewarding projects of my professional life.

During Daniel's visit I had the temerity to ask how I could get involved with Ciencia Puerto Rico, an organization he founded and managed at that time. From the conversation came several ideas to conspire and collaborate, albeit, long distance and we spent several weeks exchanging emails on these ideas.

Months later, I organized the annual symposium for the SACNAS ^[3] (Society for the Advancement of Chicanos / Hispanics and Native Americans in science) Brandeis Chapter and I invited Daniel to be the Keynote speaker. I asked him about contacts from other scientists in the Boston area

that could be part of a panel on careers in science. Daniel connected me with Monica, who at the time was pursuing her doctorate at Harvard. The connection with Monica was instantaneous, as if we knew each other our entire lives.

Before meeting Daniel and Monica in person, I had been in touch with them when I submitted an essay for the book “¡Ciencia Boricua!: Ensayos y anécdotas del científico puertorriqueño” (“Puerto Rican Science: Essays and anecdotes from Puerto Rican scientists” [4]). From the experience with the book it became clear to me that Ciencia Puerto Rico “meant business”. After meeting with Daniel and Monica I got involved as a volunteer with the organization.

In less than a year I published an essay in the book ¡Ciencia Boricua!; I was part of conceptualizing, organizing and running the first educational symposium *I want to be a scientist... and now what?*; I published two articles in the newspaper El Nuevo Día; I wrote two profiles of scientists for the website; and organized a panel for the SACNAS conference on the use of virtual networks to connect scientists from the diaspora, following the model of Ciencia Puerto Rico. I did all of this while defending my PhD thesis and applying for the AAAS [5] Science and Technology Policy Fellowship, and somehow I pulled it off.

The project that I most enjoyed in those years was to offer workshops [6] on the book ¡Ciencia Boricua! for more than 200 teachers around the island, and coordinating the project ¡Ciencia Boricua! in the Juan Ponce de León School in Guaynabo.

I have hundred of anecdotes and stories from my years as a volunteer and while remembering my contributions as a volunteer for Ciencia Puerto Rico, I could not help but feel nostalgia and a huge joy at the same time. Ciencia Puerto Rico has been a school of life and professional development that boosted my career beyond academia, and gave me a valid reason to reconnect with Puerto Rico, even while abroad. However, the best part of Ciencia Puerto Rico is its human capital. The committed and extraordinary group of volunteers changed my paradigms about leadership, public service, and teamwork.

At first, I was motivated solely by the idea of contributing to the education of the future generation of Puerto Rican scientists, but I ended up finding an extended family. Giovanna, Daniel, Monica, Gretchen, Marcos, Jackie, Wilson and Samuel became an excellent source of intellectual and moral support in the most difficult moments of my doctorate journey. The many virtual team meetings gave me the courage and the desire to focus on finishing my doctorate and find my career path. Later, as the family continue to grow I met Francis, Reyna, Paola, and many others who have put their time to move Ciencia Puerto Rico’s projects forward. I’ve learned something from each one of them!

Ciencia Puerto Rico took me off my comfort zone, and offered me a blank canvas to design and implement my own projects. Through these projects I have had the joy and incredible fortune to meet incredible scientists and learn from the fascinating research being carried out around the world by Puerto Rican scientists, just like me. So, as I see Ciencia Puerto Rico’s continue to grow and strengthen its impact within and outside of Puerto Rico, I feel the immense satisfaction that the next generation of Puerto Rican scientists are in good hands. Let’s keep it going!

*** Ciencia Puerto Rico is celebrating its 10th anniversary. We recently launched our first crowdfunding campaign "I am with CienciaPR" (#ConCienciaPR). No donation is too small. Join us in our efforts and help us make the next 10 years of CienciaPR even more successful. To donate please go to bit.ly/ConCienciaPR [7].

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