Dr. Daniel Colón-Ramos Receives the 2011 AAAS Early Career Award for Public Engagement with Science [1]

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AAAS Press Release Contact: Katharine Zambon, AAAS 202-326-6434; kzambon@aaas.org [2]
The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) has named Dr. Daniel Colón-Ramos to receive the AAAS Early Career Award for Public Engagement with Science, recognizing “his commitment as an early career scientist eager to share his enthusiasm for science while simultaneously pursuing a competitive research career.” In particular, “Daniel Colón-Ramos is a superb scientist with a strong scientific record and broad mission to engage with public audiences in Puerto Rico and the United States,” said AAAS Public Engagement Manager Tiffany Lohwater. “The breadth and depth of his public engagement activities extend well beyond his scientific discipline of neuroscience.” Dr. Colón-Ramos—who serves as Assistant Professor of Cell Biology in the Program in Cellular Neuroscience, Neurodegeneration and Repair

at the Yale University School of Medicine—is interested in understanding the developmental events that direct neural connectivity. AAAS Chief Executive Officer Alan I. Leshner, executive publisher of the journal Science commended Dr. Colón-Ramos for his efforts both as a researcher and a champion for the scientific enterprise. “In spite of a busy and successful research career, Dr. Colón-Ramos has tirelessly sought to engage the public with science, promote scientific education, and foster the development of science endeavors in Puerto Rico. He is an exceptional role model for the next generation of scientists and engineers.” Born and raised in Puerto Rico, Dr. Colón-Ramos completed his B.A. degree at Harvard University, where he did research, with the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, on the use of medicinal plants by indigenous groups in Central America. He completed his Ph.D. degree in the laboratory of Sally Kornbluth at Duke University, where he combined bioinformatics, molecular biology, biochemistry and cell biological approaches to answer questions critical for understanding the molecular mechanisms of apoptosis, a physiological process tightly linked to cancer. He trained in molecular genetics, physiology and neurobiology as a postdoctoral fellow in the lab of Kang Shen at Stanford University. In 2006, while still a postdoc at Stanford, Dr. Colón-Ramos co-founded Ciencia Puerto Rico, LLC, in collaboration with the Council for the Advancement of Puerto Rico Research and Innovation. The non-profit CienciaPR provides a “virtual collaborative space” (www.CienciaPR.org [3]) to bring together geographically dispersed members of the Puerto Rican scientific community, including its more than 5,400 members. Most recently, the effort has expanded to include numerous informal science education and outreach activities, such as scientist-written articles for lay audiences in Spanish-language media; a book about science and Puerto Rico for young audiences and the general public; and the first science podcasting channel in Puerto Rico. Dr. Colón-Ramos has been “an exceptional mentor, colleague and friend,” the CienciaPR administrative team wrote in a lengthy letter of nomination for him. “His drive, motivation, and interest have inspired us to become more involved in the betterment of Puerto Rico and the promotion of science.” Additional public engagement efforts by Dr. Colón-Ramos include a collection of articles employing fantastic concepts from the movie Avatar that illustrate Puerto Rico’s real-life wonders. He is passionate about contributing to the development of future scientists and has spoken broadly about his experience on the academic path to a research career, the importance of mentoring and role models in science education, and the need for an open dialogue between scientists and the general public. He serves as editor of a collection of short stories and essays about science written by Puerto Rican scientists and he is engaging K-12 students in learning and conveying, through their own podcasts, the concepts in the book. In the lab, Dr. Colón-Ramos and his colleagues work with the C. elegans nematode to investigate how individual neurons locate a target to form precise synaptic connections, resulting in the neural circuits that underlie human behavior. The C. elegans system allows Colón-Ramos to visualize synapse development in vivo with single-cell resolution. Using this system, his team has discovered that glial cells are required for the assembly of behavioral circuits in the brain. They also have discovered a novel function for the Netrin receptor UNC-40/DCC in directing synaptic targeting. Established in 2010, the AAAS Early Career Award for Public Engagement with Science recognizes the achievements of individual early-career scientists and engineers who have demonstrated significant contributions to public engagement activities while simultaneously pursuing a research career. The award will be presented at the 178th AAAS Annual Meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, which will take place 16-20 February 2012. The awards ceremony and reception will be held in Ballroom B of the Vancouver Convention Centre, West Building, on Friday, 17 February at 6:00 p.m. CONTACTS: Dr. Colón-Ramos can be reached at (203) 737-3438 or Daniel.colon-ramos@yale.edu [4]. For general information regarding the AAAS

award or additional background information, AAAS Senior Communications Officer Katharine Zambon can be reached at (202) 326-6434 or kzambon@aaas.org [2]. * * * The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) is the world's largest general scientific society, and publisher of the journal, Science (www.sciencemag.org [5]) as well as Science Translational Medicine (www.sciencetranslationalmedicine.org [6]) and Science Signaling (www.sciencesignaling.org [7]). AAAS was founded in 1848, and includes some 262 affiliated societies and academies of science, serving 10 million individuals. Science has the largest paid circulation of any peer-reviewed general science journal in the world, with an estimated total readership of 1 million. The non-profit AAAS (www.aaas.org [8]) is open to all and fulfills its mission to "advance science and serve society" through initiatives in science policy; international programs; science education; and more. For the latest research news, log onto EurekAlert!, www.eurekalert.org [9], the premier science-news Web site, a service of AAAS. For more information on AAAS awards, see www.aaas.org/aboutaaas/awards/ [10]. # # # AAAS is the world's largest general scientific society, dedicated to "Advancing science ? Serving society."

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