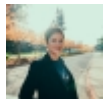


# Meet the 2018 Yale Ciencia Academy Fellows! <sup>[1]</sup>

Submitted by [Mónica Ivelisse Feliú-Mójer](#) <sup>[2]</sup> on 9 February 2018 - 9:45pm



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**Stephanie S. Anguiano-Zarate** is a native from the Juarez, Mexico-El Paso, Texas communities. She holds a BS in clinical laboratory science from the University of Texas at El Paso. As an undergraduate, she participated in research experiences focused on kinesiology and calcium signaling. She completed a year-long post baccalaureate program at Baylor College of Medicine, Texas where she helped to create a library of tagged genes in *Drosophila*. She is now a fourth-year clinical and translational science PhD candidate at the Mayo Clinic School of Biomedical Sciences. She has been graciously supported by a Mayo Clinic fellowship and took part in Mayo's Initiative for Maximizing Student Development project. Her thesis work in Dr. Michael Barry's laboratory in the Department of Molecular Medicine focuses on the development of Adenovirus vaccines against emerging pathogens like Ebola and drug resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. In the near future, Stephanie will pursue a career in research and writing.



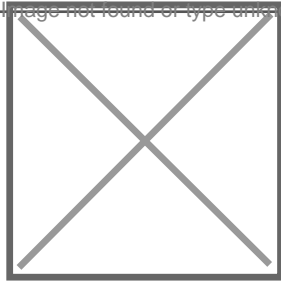
**Marina Armendariz** is a third-year doctoral student in the Department of Biobehavioral Sciences at The Pennsylvania State University. She also is pursuing a minor in demography at The Pennsylvania State University. She earned her bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in health science at California State University Dominguez Hills (CSUDH). Marina is broadly interested in examining health disparities and how they disproportionately impact racial/ethnic minorities. She is primarily interested in understanding the underlying underpinnings of Latino Health. During her doctoral studies, she has developed an interest in understanding how social, cultural, and geographic factors can influence health outcomes in Latinas and Latinos such as physiological dysregulation (i.e. via inflammation) as well as chronic diseases and health outcomes. Her most recent project focused on differences in C-reactive protein (CRP), a biomarker and indicator of inflammation, in middle-aged and older Mexicans.

In addition, Marina is currently an Alfred P. Sloan Scholar. Her future professional goal is to be a professor teaching at an institute where she can work closely with students from underrepresented backgrounds and encourage them to pursue graduate studies. She is passionate about promoting diversity in research and in higher education.



**Kaylee Arnold** is a second-year doctoral student at the University of Georgia, Odessa Campus, in the Department of Ecology in its Interdisciplinary Disease Ecology Across Scales (IDEAS) program. She earned her B.S. in biology in 2013 at the University of Redlands, CA, where she studied the population dynamics of mayflies (*Baetis tricaudatus*) in the San Bernardino Mountains for her senior thesis. After graduation, Kaylee returned to her hometown of Oceanside, CA, where she worked as a fish handling technician at Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute rearing white seabass to help restore the population off the coast of California. While working full-time, Kaylee also volunteered at the San Diego Zoo's Institute for Conservation Research in its Molecular Diagnostic Laboratory. After returning to school to earn her M.S. degree in ecology and evolutionary biology at The University of Georgia in 2016, where she studied bacterial endophyte communities of bald cypress trees. After graduation, she continued on into her current PhD program at the University of Georgia. Under the advisement of Dr. Nicole Gottdenker, Kaylee is currently studying the gut microbiome of the kissing bug, *Rhodnius pallescens*, which is the primary Chagas disease vector in Panama. Her overall research interests are understanding the effects of anthropogenic land use change on the gut microbiomes of wild animals and how land use change affects pathogen transmission to and from wild animals. In addition to research, Kaylee is especially passionate about increasing diversity and inclusion in STEM fields, particularly in ecology.

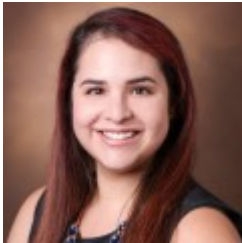
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**Brittnie Bloom** is a first-year global health PhD student in the



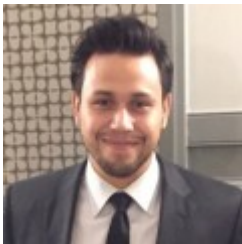
Program through the University of California San Diego (UCSD) and San Diego State University (SDSU). Brittnie is proud to be the first person in her family to attend college and receive her bachelor's degree as a Ronald E. McNair Scholar from SDSU majoring in psychology with a minor in counseling and social change. She received her master of science in counseling from the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) in 2014, where she volunteered with a variety of student-led efforts to increase education about reproductive health, reduce sexual violence, and increase bystander awareness. Before starting her PhD program, she served as a facilitator for two years for survivors of sexual assault with San Diego's Sexual Assault Response Team. As a PhD student, her primary research interests surround topics related to sexual assault and intimate partner violence in specific populations in the US and abroad, such as university students and seekers of healthcare services. She hopes to examine how community and policy interventions can impact health outcomes, specifically of women and vulnerable/disadvantaged populations. In her career, she plans to combine her passion for research with her conviction to remain engaged in her community through nonprofit organizations and volunteering, ultimately wanting to make a positive impact on issues surrounding equity and reducing health disparities in the US and the world.



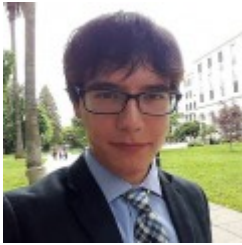
**Denise Buenrostro** is a PhD candidate in the Cancer Biology Graduate Program at San Diego State University. She was born and raised in Chula Vista, California. While attending Grossmont Community College she was awarded the BRIDGES fellowship that exposes underrepresented minority students to scientific research. Upon transferring to San Diego State University, she worked under the supervision of Dr. Paul Paolini investigating the cardiovascular effects of a novel diabetic drug. In the summer of 2008, Denise was awarded a Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) at UT Southwestern Medical Center where she investigated the mechanisms of lung cancer development after completion of missions through a NASA funded program. In 2011, she received her bachelor of science in biological sciences from SDSU. In 2012, she transferred into Vanderbilt's Interdisciplinary Graduate Program and the following summer joined the lab of Dr. Julie Sterling investigating tumor-induced bone disease. Her dissertation work focuses on investigating the role of myeloid cells in bone metastases. Denise's career goal is to become a clinical scientist working in cancer clinical trials.



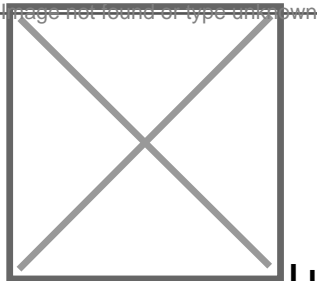
**Albert Burgess-Hull** is an Advanced Opportunity Fellow at the University of Wisconsin (UW) and a PhD candidate in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies. Albert completed his bachelor's degree at the University of Washington, where he studied psychology. His research focuses on identifying and describing mechanisms within a social network that influence the development of substance-use and health behaviors. He is interested in the application and development of advanced quantitative methods to support research. In this domain, he is particularly interested in the use of unsupervised clustering (e.g., finite mixture modeling) to identify groups within the population that may respond to behavioral or pharmacological treatments, or to flag "at-risk" individuals. Albert has received a number of awards and research funding from both regional and national outlets. He is a Graduate Honor Society Member (UW-Madison Chapter) and a Social Networks and Complex Systems Fellow at Duke University's Network Analysis Center where he is working with collaborators to study how marijuana-use spreads within the social network. He has received a National Institute of Health sponsored Mini-Grant from the UW's Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention. He has also received multiple awards, including the School of Human Ecology's (SoHE) Dissertation Award and the Summer Academic Research Awards (STAR) from both SoHE and HDFS. He has published his work in a number of peer-reviewed journals and has presented his research at a number of national conferences.



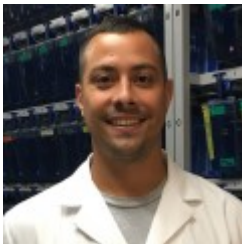
**Victor Hugo Canela** is a second-year PhD student at Indiana University School of Medicine, Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology. Prior to becoming a student in this doctorate program, he earned his bachelor's degree in molecular and cell biology from California State University Dominguez Hills. He was then a lecturer and adjunct professor at California State University Dominguez Hills and Cerritos college, respectively. His previous research experience was with Dr. Christina Wang at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center and Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute investigating the role of Humanin in the rescue of male germ cells and spermatogenesis. He also completed research with Dr. Reuben Kapur at Indiana University School of Medicine where he focused on the development of potential therapeutic options for the treatment of acute leukemia and systemic mastocytosis. He subsequently earned his master's degree in biology from Indiana University. Hugo's current research with Dr. James Williams and Dr. Tarek Ashkar involves the study of and exploration of the renal papillae in the context of kidney stone formation. The goal of Williams' and Dr. Ashkar's labs is to elucidate the cellular mechanisms contributing to the formation of kidney stones, a common disease condition that is still little understood. Aside from research, Victor Hugo enjoys playing guitar and piano, freehand sketching and long distance running. Following the completion of his PhD, he plans to teach biology and anatomy and mentor students interested in the field of biomedicine.



**Christian Cazares** is a second-year neurosciences graduate student at the University of California, San Diego. After graduating from the University of California, Berkeley with a BA in neuroscience, he set off to Philadelphia for two years where he did post-baccalaureate research at the University of Pennsylvania. Currently, as a member of the Gremel Lab, he researches how the brain encodes ongoing, sophisticated motor actions for future, successful execution. To do this, he implants multi-channel electrodes in different regions of the associative cortico-striatal system to record brain activity of freely-moving mice performing a progressive hold down reward task. In the future, he will assess how this brain activity is different in comparison to an animal model of chronic alcohol exposure. As a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship recipient, Christian has led workshops on how to write successful research fellowships with various campus organizations. In the long-term, Christian will keep pursuing his current research path, with the goal of managing his own systems neuroscience research lab in Tijuana, Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico. Christian spends his time outside of the lab playing video games, watching sports, and putting together events for Colors of the Brain, a graduate organization he founded that aims to increase minority representation in the brain sciences.



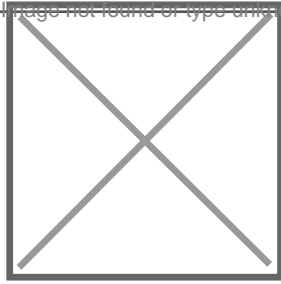
**Luis R. Colón-Cruz** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) - Medical Sciences Campus (MSC) in the



Neurobiology at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) - Medical Sciences Campus (MSC) in the guidance of Dr. Martine Behra. He earned a bachelor's degree in biology from the University of Puerto Rico - Medical Sciences Campus. After graduation, he pursued a master's degree in public health at the University of Puerto Rico - Medical Sciences Campus, sponsored by the NSF-CREST in collaboration with the Puerto Rico Center for Environmental and Molecular Neuroscience (PRCEN), where he explored the impact of waterborne pollutants in the nervous system. Currently, he is working on his doctoral degree thesis, supported by the MERIT program, focused on understanding the interplay of neuro-genetics and altered behavior in Zebrafish as an in-vivo genetic model. He has generated several CRISPR/Cas9 loss-of-function zebrafish mutants by targeting key genes involved in the central and peripheral nervous system development and function. He aims to link genotype with behavioral phenotypes by screening mutated zebrafish larvae in an anxiety-induced behavioral test in presence of neuroactive molecules. As a long-term goal, he plans to continue a scientific career as a post-doctoral fellow and apply for a research-directed position, where he can enhance the neurobiology research by using genetic approaches to identify new molecular targets and develop novel pharmacological interventions to remedy neuro-behavioral disorders. In his free time, he enjoys playing tennis and soccer.



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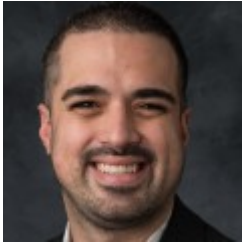
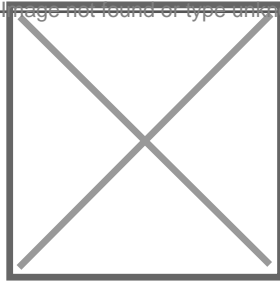
**Ailed M. Cruz Collazo** is a fifth-year PhD candidate in the Department of

Biochemistry at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) Medical Sciences Campus (MSC). She obtained her BS in chemistry from the UPR-Río Piedras and her MS in environmental health from the School of Public Health in the UPR-MSC. While completing her master's studies, she worked as a research assistant on the National Science Foundation/US Forest Service San Juan Urban Long-Term Research project and as a research assistant in the Translational Proteomic Core Lab at the UPR-MSC. Her current research project is focused on the effects of diet on cancer, specifically the molecular mechanisms of soy isoflavones in the protein synthesis of metastatic breast cancer. She is currently working in Suranganie Dharmawardhane's laboratory at the UPR-MSC, Ailed is also a NIH-MERIT award recipient. Ailed is strongly committed to improving general education and sees science as one of the ways by which she can contribute to this endeavor. As a long-term goal, she sees herself in a senior research position, generating research and scientific activities that improve the quality of life for the community. She wants to contribute to the growth of knowledge and have the flexibility to work with both the academic audience with investigation and the general public with science communication. In her personal life, Ailed is a mom and enjoys reading, art/crafts, and music.



**Lauren Edwards** is a neuroscience doctoral student at Emory University. She earned her bachelor's degree in neuroscience and cognitive science with a minor in biochemistry from the University of Arizona. As an undergraduate, she was a NIH-MARC trainee, spending her time conducting research on central executive function in children with specific language impairment. Through summer programs, she also participated in neonatal quality control research and research using nanotechnology. For her thesis, Lauren is evaluating neurophysiological changes in motor network connectivity during the stroke recovery process. Her professional goal is to attend medical school after graduation and becoming a physician scientist to bring her love of patient care with her translational research.

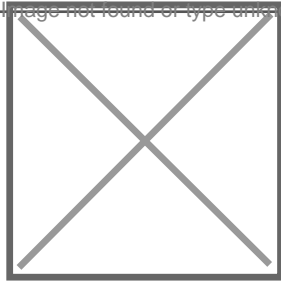
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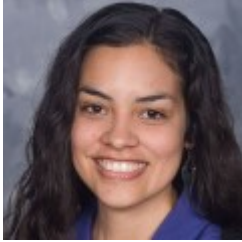
**Reinaldo Franqui** is a fifth-year PhD candidate in the Molecular

Program at The University of Iowa. He completed his undergraduate degree in microbiology at the University of Puerto Rico, Humacao campus. During his undergrad years, he was a member of the Ronald E. McNair Program, which introduced him to careers in research. After a research internship at The University of Illinois at Chicago in neuroscience, Rey applied and was accepted into the Molecular Medicine PhD program at The University of Iowa. Under the supervision of Dr. David G. Klapper, he has been researching drug resistance mechanisms in the blood cancer Multiple Myeloma. He has published five peer-reviewed articles, earned several science poster awards, presented his research orally at the American Society of Hematology in Atlanta, and is expected to defend his dissertation in May 2018. After having the opportunity to participate in a startup internship, Rey became interested in intellectual property law for the life sciences and science policy regulation. This inspired him to prepare for law school and he has already been accepted into several respectable law schools across the US, where he hopes to serve as the link between science, business and law. For many students, Rey has ensured to maintain a balance of school work and extracurricular activities. Currently, Rey serves as co-president of The Association of Multicultural Scientists and the Latin@ Graduate Student Association, where he promotes events that foster inclusion and the professional development of students of all professional and cultural backgrounds.

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**Natalie Guerrero** is a third-year medical student in the Medical



Training Program (MSTP) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She obtained a B.S. in neuroscience with a minor in music from Pomona College. Her interests include research on and racial/ethnic health disparities, particularly in maternal and child health and immunology. Natalie earned a PhD in population health sciences in 2017, and the title of her dissertation is "Child Problem Behavior and the Role of Gender, Race/Ethnicity, and Maternal Depression." As a graduate student, she was a graduate research fellow in the University of Wisconsin-Madison Research on Poverty and was inducted into the Edward A. Bouchet Graduate Honor Society. She has served in leadership roles in the Latino Medical Student Association and the Medical Student Executive and Diversity Committees. Natalie's career goal is to become an expert in health disparities and poverty research and a practicing primary care physician, active in research in these areas and providing clinical care to underserved patients. She is currently working with others to build vibrant, healthy communities, and she has served as a mentor in the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program, a world-wide, service-oriented global program that provides mentorship to middle-schoolers.



**Liz J. Hernández Borrero** is a PhD student in the Biomedical Sciences Program at Pennsylvania State University. She obtained her bachelor's degree in chemistry at the University of Puerto Rico-Río Piedras and a master's in biomedical sciences at her current institution. To augment her education and seek out new experiences, she participated in the Minor in Research Career (MARC) and Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement (RISE) programs. She took advantage of several summer internship opportunities throughout college as a research assistant. She is interested in translational research of drug discovery and safety. Her thesis was funded by a NIH Diversity Supplement which involves the screening for small molecule inhibitors of the wild-type p53 pathway in tumors with p53 mutations, with the goal of translating this research to clinical use. Her overall career goal is to be at the cornerstone of science and business as an independent researcher, focusing on the discovery, development and implementation of novel therapies that have the potential to go into the clinics and improve patient health care.





**Imade Imasuen-Williams** is a PhD candidate in the Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Department at Indiana University School of Medicine. She joined the Indiana Biomedical Program for PhD Studies in 2013 and joined the lab of Dr. Murray Korc in 2014, to study pancreatic cancer. Her current research is focused on epithelial to mesenchymal transition (EMT) to identify mechanisms of pancreatic cancer progression and metastasis using genetic and mouse models of PDAC. She has identified that TIP30 controls pancreatic cancer progression through gene dosage effect, and she is also working with a CDK4/6 inhibitor that she has demonstrated to have an irreversible effect on EMT in pancreatic cancer cells. Imade received the Ingram Scholarship to attend Vanderbilt University, where she received her BA in cellular biology and Russian language. Imade's career objective is to define mechanisms of cancer metastasis and identify potential pathways that can be targeted to prevent cancer progression. She is committed to rigorous science and to help the initiative of recruiting diverse individuals into STEM fields.



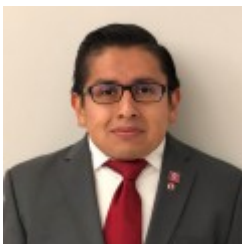
**Lauren Kennedy** is a PhD candidate in her fourth year in the Department of Translational Medicine, and Health at Virginia Tech. Originally from Stoneham, Massachusetts, Lauren received her undergraduate degree at Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia in 2014. She graduated magna cum laude honors with a bachelor of science in psychology, a minor in creative writing, and a concentration in neuroscience. In her undergraduate years, she was involved in a variety of neuroscience-related domains, including molecular synaptic methods and clinical neuropsychological assessment, and psychophysiological experimental approaches. Lauren's current research is focused on the acute stress response, and incorporates psychophysiological and cognitive methods. More specifically, she is interested in how we can take to intervene with the acute stress response to prevent negative reactions such as feeling of being overwhelmed, which can interfere with task performance. One way to achieve these outcomes that Lauren is particularly interested in is using biofeedback, giving individuals insight into their current stress levels and offering coping mechanisms to help resolve stress. The target population for her work is physicians operating in the healthcare setting. Through conducting rigorous research, Lauren is passionate about sharing that work with others through various forms of outreach in the community. Upon finishing her doctoral degree, Lauren plans to join the faculty at a liberal-arts university, enabling her to connect with and inspire the next generation of students to engage in research and pursue their scientific goals.



**José E. Liquet y González** earned his bachelor's degree in industrial microbiology at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez (UPRM), his native town. Here he developed the biodegrading applications of microbes, and teaching. During his time in the UPRM, he worked on several microbiology projects involving methane production by microbes grown with various substrates, biomasses, and biodegradation of TNT by soil fungi. He also spent two summers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, researching the bacteria present inside leaf-cutter ant's colonies in the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and the bacterial community from the Finnish laplands in Rutgers University. He and his friends, with other friends, started a show on the campus radio station where they invited graduate students to talk about their research in a casual manner. As his passion for environmental microbiology grew, he decided to pursue a PhD in microbiology. After graduating, José was accepted to the PhD program in the University of Tennessee-Knoxville and joined Dr. Jennifer DeBruyn. In Dr. DeBruyn's lab, he studies the ways soil bacteria degrade biodegradable-plastic films used in agriculture. In the future, José aspires to become a professor and research best practices in scientific education and communication. When he is close to the beach, José spends his time surfing, or skateboarding and cycling when he is more inland.



**Melanie Lolier** is a fourth-year behavioral neuroscience PhD student at the University of at Albany, SUNY. She earned her master's degree in behavioral neuroscience at Queens College, CUNY, studying the role of genetic variation in addictive behaviors in mice. Prior to that, Melanie earned her bachelor of science degree in neuroscience at Union College in Schenectady, NY. Before that, she completed an honors thesis investigating the neural activity of dragonflies in flight during courtship behaviors. Her current research focuses on elucidating the effects of early synthetic progesterone exposure on cognitive development in rodents, with the hope of understanding how early progesterone treatment in pregnant women may affect the fetus. Outside of academics, she enjoys HIIT workouts, cooking, and being a foodie.



**Miguel A. Lopez Jr.** was born in Mexico City, raised in Los Angeles, and graduated from The Ohio State University, Newark, Ohio. He graduated cum laude from The Ohio State University, fully funded by the Dean's Graduate Scholars Program, with a BA in Spanish linguistics and a BS in microbiology. Miguel worked on research through a Summer Research Opportunities Program at Ohio State. His research was done in the guidance of Dr. Dehua Pei in the Department of Chemistry, focused on recombinant protein production and enzymatic amino acid synthesis. Miguel is currently a second-year PhD student in the Biomedical Sciences Graduate Program at The Ohio State University. He joined Dr. Yoder's laboratory in the Department of Cancer Biology and Genetics (CBG) to study the biology of HIV-1. Specifically, he studies retroviral integration, which is the insertion of the virus into the host genome. Miguel's dissertation project aims to characterize the real-time process using a combination of biochemical and single-molecule imaging techniques. This project highlights the capabilities of using this novel tool to interrogate complex biological systems. In his promise as a successful scientist, Miguel has been awarded a Dean's Graduate Fellowship, CBG Development Fellowship and NIH Diversity Supplement. Miguel has been passionate about supporting the Latinx community since his undergraduate years as the president of the Ohio State SACNAS Chapter. His future career goals include continuing his passion for biomedical research and his ongoing efforts to decrease the diversity gap.



**Eunice Lozada Delgado** is a fifth-year PhD candidate from the Department of Biology at the University of Puerto Rico-Rio Piedras Campus. She previously earned her bachelor's degree in microbiology from the University of Puerto Rico-Humacao Campus. Her research as an undergraduate student focused on the study of the microenvironment of the reproductive system of the Puerto Rican endangered frog *Eleutherodactylus juanariveroi* with conservation efforts under the mentorship of Dr. Neftalí Ríos-López. As an undergraduate student, she was also part of a summer internship at the University of Notre Dame, IN in Dr. Schafer's laboratory in the Biology Department, studying the role of antioxidants in breast cancer. As a graduate student, she is studying the role of microRNAs in Glioblastoma, the deadliest malignant brain tumor, in Dr. Pablo Vivas' laboratory. In 2016, a proposal she sent to PR-INBRE was accepted for a Technology Transfer Award. She completed a 4-week training experience at Dr. Sarkaria's laboratory at Mayo Clinic Rochester, MN where she learned glioblastoma mouse model techniques she is currently using in her dissertation work. Her professional goals include becoming a researcher for skin products and a scientific communicator. During her spare time, Eunice likes to paint and play tennis.

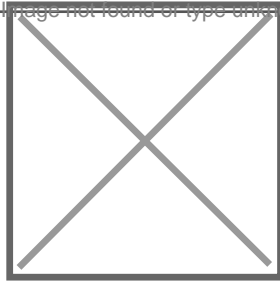


**Sofía Macchiavelli Girón** is a PhD student in the Department of Plant Pathology and Entomology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She received her bachelor's degree in biology with a minor in chemistry from the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez (UPRM). As an undergraduate, she participated in the Maximizing Access to Research Careers (MARC) program, where she discovered various research opportunities available to undergraduates in the biological sciences. She worked in a plant molecular biology lab at UPRM and participated in the Integrated Biological Sciences Research Program at University of Wisconsin-Madison. She decided to pursue a PhD in plant pathology to combine her molecular and applied knowledge. She works in Dr. Amaral's vegetable pathology lab, where she studies the management of silver scurf of potato, a disease of concern to the potato industry. Her work will lead to decreased food waste and more efficient and productive farming practices. As a graduate student, she has been active in STEM outreach and professional development opportunities. In the future, she is interested in working in higher education, specifically improving agricultural production practices. She is also interested in increasing STEM student diversity through undergraduate research. Outside of the lab, she enjoys visiting farmers' markets, cooking and reading.



**Rosario Marroquin-Flores** is a first-year PhD student in the Department of Biology at Illinois State University. She earned her bachelor of science in biology with a minor in chemistry from the University of New Mexico in 2015. Shortly after graduating from her undergraduate program, she worked under Dr. Christopher Witt investigating the impact of haemosporidian parasites on the reproductive success of New Mexico birds in an NIH-funded, Post-baccalaureate Research Education Program at the University of New Mexico. She is currently working in an ecological-physiology lab under Dr. F. R. S. investigating the molecular underpinnings of temperature-dependent sex determination in the eastern slider turtle, *Trachemys scripta*. Specifically, she is taking a functional genomics approach to investigate the regulatory role of RNA-binding proteins in gonadal development. Her research goals involve advancing the field of developmental biology through her personal research and increasing the exposure and accessibility of scientific research to traditionally underrepresented students. Her long-term career goals are to secure a position as a principal investigator in collaboration with outreach programs to increase the matriculation of underrepresented students into graduate research programs. During her spare time, she likes to step away from her research endeavors by writing fiction, painting, and spending time outdoors.

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**Mariane Martinez** is a PhD candidate in the BioSciences Department

at Rice University, Houston, Texas. She completed her bachelor of science in biology at Texas A&M University in 2012. She is proud to be a first-generation student and to have continued her education. She is very passionate about her research project at Rice, which involves studying the functional salivary gland for head and neck cancer patients who have lost salivary function due to radiation therapy. Specifically, Mariane's research focuses on customizing three-dimensional hyaluronic acid-based hydrogels to produce biomimetic environments for salivary gland cells. Additionally, she has been selected to be an Interdisciplinary Research in Science and Engineering (IRISE) scholar and has earned a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship (GRFP) to fund her project, among other awards. A long-term goal of hers is to become a successful cell biologist and principal investigator of her own lab.

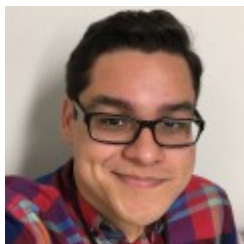


**Roxana E. Mesías** is a PhD Candidate at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in the Department of Neuroscience. She was born in Guayaquil, Ecuador and moved to the United States when she was a high school sophomore. She earned her BA in biochemistry from Wheaton College in Massachusetts as a Posse Foundation Scholar. While at Wheaton, she organized the first science conference, "Taking the Next Step!", where local high school, college, and graduate students attended workshops and networked with STEM professionals. The conference was designed to help all students, but especially minority students, to become involved in STEM careers. Roxana has been involved in activities where she can mentor younger students pursuing STEM careers. Roxi was the recipient of the McNair Scholars Program Fellowship at the University of New Hampshire and the Wheaton College Adams Fellowship for Professional Development. This fellowship exposed her to cutting-edge research at top academic institutions. Currently, under the supervision of Dr. George Huntley, Roxi's thesis project is examining the effect of an autism-related mutation on the development of neural circuits and their supported behaviors in mice. The goal is to identify pathways of guiding future therapies. This work is supported by an Autism Speaks Weatherston Fellowship. After completing her PhD, Roxi intends to pursue a post-doctoral fellowship and ultimately obtain a position in academia where she aims to have an active research program in developmental neuroscience, while teaching and mentoring diverse students.





**Keila Natalia Miles** is a fifth-year PhD candidate in the Neuroscience Graduate Program at the University of Cincinnati. Keila received her BS in biomedical science from Oakwood University in Huntsville, AL. Most notably, she was vice president of the Alpha Chi Honor Society, an organization that was comprised of the institutions top 10% of scholastically achieving students. During her undergraduate tenure, she participated in several summer research programs such as the Research Experience for Underrepresented Persons (STEP-UP) and Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) at a plethora of institutions across the United States. Current research interests center on dietary intervention and rare metabolic diseases. She conducts her research under the tutelage of Dr. Matthew Skelton at Cincinnati Children's Hospital, studying the effect of ketosis on Creatine Transporter deficiency. Keila's long-term career goal is to be involved in science policy and advocacy. These careers are most appealing to her because they highlight the importance of science promotion and education and provide a direct line of change in underrepresented communities in STEM. This career trajectory will allow her to use translational research knowledge to policy making in an effort to enact reform in science funding and funding allocation. Keila is committed to science advocacy and awareness, evidenced by her involvement in the University of Cincinnati's Society for Advancing Chicano's/Hispanic and Latin Americans in Science (SACNAS) (former President, current Social Media Chair). Additionally, she has served as the coordinator for Brain Awareness Week at her home institution.



**Anthony Monroe** is a first-year PhD student in immunology and Fuqua School of Business dual-degree student at Duke University. He obtained his bachelor's degree in animal microbiology/immunology, oceanography and creative writing at Cornell University. During his undergraduate, he participated in the Hunter R. Rawlings Presidential Research Scholarship, which allowed him to participate in cutting edge research at the Cornell School of Veterinary Medicine, working with Dr. James Casey on fish rhabdoviruses and turtle fibropapilloma viruses. Through numerous years of research in the Casey lab and summer research at the University of Miami and Harvard University, Anthony found his interest in virology, immunology and vaccinology. Anthony completed the Post-Baccalaureate Research Education Program at the School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City, working with Dr. Benjamin Chinn on the interaction with host cell mechanisms for entry into cells. He is currently working on understanding the antibody response and ways to access correlates of protection during vaccination and how to improve immunogen design for more effective HIV vaccine regimens in the laboratory with Georgia Tomaras. A long-term career goal is to effectively bridge the gap between basic and applied academic science, eventually building a collaborative research institute. Anthony is also passionate about LGBTQ inclusionary efforts in academics and industry and hopes to build a long-term cooperative coalition amongst industry and academic institutions to foster a more welcoming environment.



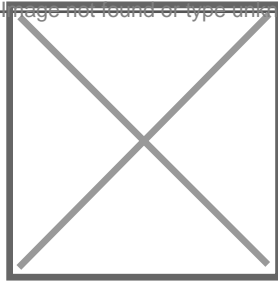


**Ryan Natividad** is a first-year doctor of public health (DrPH) student in the Department of Epidemiology at the Colorado School of Public Health, and he is well-versed in public health policy. He is currently a Research Assistant with SEARCH for Diabetes in Youth, a longitudinal, multisite study aimed at understanding diabetes among children and youth in the United States. He is also a Social Epidemiologist in the Office of Health Equity at the Department of Public Health and Environment, involved with developing county-level health profiles in the state of Colorado. Earlier in his public health career, Ryan assessed the impact of community health worker interventions in reducing cardiovascular disease and hypertension among Filipino Americans at New York University Langone Medical Center, Center for the Study of American Health. Transitioning to health policy, he implemented and advocated for linguistically appropriate healthy eating, active living, and built environment programs across various Asian American communities in New York City. His research interest lies in the intersection of public health, urban planning, and health/public policy and how these fields address the physical determinants of community and individual health through place-based, environmental approaches. Ryan has a BA in anthropology from Columbia University and an MPP from the University of California, Riverside School of Public Policy. In addition, he is an alumnus of the Leadership Center of Coro New York Leadership Center and the Asian Pacific Islander American Health Leadership Center.



**Jennifer Patritti Cram** is a second-year doctoral student in the Neuroscience Graduate Program at the University of Cincinnati. Jennifer earned her bachelor of science degree in neuroscience from Ohio State University (OSU) graduating with research distinction. As an undergraduate student, she worked with Dr. Helen Chamberlin in the department of Molecular Genetics studying the role of tumor suppressor genes in model organisms *C. elegans* and *C. briggsae*. Jennifer has been involved in the efforts of retaining minority students in sciences as founding president of the SAAS at OSU, as a scholar in Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation program, by presenting at various national conferences, and by leading discussions at the Ohio Latino Educational Leadership Summit about building science networks for Latino students. Jennifer is now an NIH predoctoral fellow working in Dr. Nancy Ratner's lab at Cincinnati Children's Hospital studying the molecular mechanisms of peripheral nerve tumor formation in neurofibromatosis type 1 using mouse models. As for her future career plans, Jennifer is interested in pursuing a post-doc in either academia or industry. Most importantly, she is interested in maintaining her involvement in retaining and increasing minority participation in STEM.

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**Robert J. Rabelo Fernández** was born in San Juan and raised

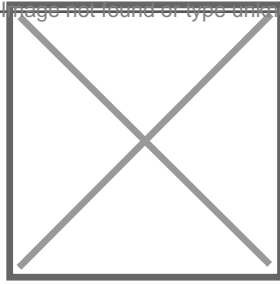


Puerto Rico. He is a first-year PhD student at the Biology Department of the University of Puerto Rico at Rio Piedras (UPRRP). Prior to coming to UPRRP, he obtained a master's degree at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez. His thesis research was focused on the resistome of the *Caracolus marginella* snail gut microbiome using metagenomics at the Biotechnology and Bioprospecting Laboratory, under the supervision of Dr. Carlos Martínez. He earned his BS in biology with a second major in microbiology from University of Puerto Rico at Humacao. As an undergraduate student, his research focused in the search of antibiotic activity in microbial mats and the characterization of a novel *Exiguobacterium* species at Cabo Rojo Salterns at the Cabo Rojo Microbial Observatory Laboratory, under the supervision of Dr. Lilliam Casillas-Martínez. During this period, he participated in the McNair Program and the LSAMP-Program, both designed to encourage minority students to pursue doctoral degrees in STEAM fields. As a long-term goal, he would like to become a principal investigator at his own laboratory and a professor in an academic institution. In the future, his ideal work would be in a government institution to enhance the science and educational politics. In his free time, he enjoys learning about new cultures, studying insect diversity in the stream waters of Puerto Rico, and going to the theater.

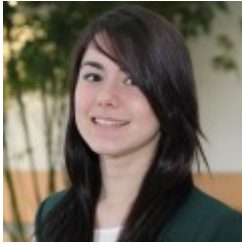


**Adrian Rivera Reyes** is a fourth-year PhD candidate in the Cancer Biology program at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn). He is currently conducting research under the guidance of Dr. T.S. Karin Eisinger, working to determine the mechanisms by which the Hippo signaling pathway regulates soft tissue sarcoma (STS) cell proliferation. He seeks to determine the utility of this pathway for the elucidation of novel diagnostic and therapeutic approaches to treat STS. Adrian is also the co-president of the Penn State Peruvian and Diplomacy Group (PSPDG) and is involved in multiple affinity groups at Penn, where he is recruiting trainees with diverse backgrounds. He obtained his BS in cell and molecular biology from the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), Rio Piedras. During his undergraduate education, he was a Minority Access to Research Careers (MARC) fellow, an NIH-funded program that provides research training to underrepresented undergraduate students in biomedical sciences and prepares them for graduate training. He performed his undergraduate thesis research under the guidance of Dr. Carlos Mejía at the Comprehensive Cancer Center of the UPR, Medical Sciences Campus. His long-term goals are to serve as a leader in biomedical research who actively participates in the recruitment and retaining of diversity trainees in higher education, as well as pursuing a science policy fellowship to establish a career in science policy.

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**Christie Rodríguez Ramírez** is a fourth-year PhD candidate in



Biology Program at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. Prior to coming to Michigan, she earned a BS in Industrial Biotechnology from the University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez. As an undergraduate, Christie worked in the Nanomaterials Processing Laboratory under the supervision of Dr. Oscar Perales-Pérez. Her work was on the synthesis and functionalization of zinc oxide nanoparticles. After graduating from college, Christie completed a two-year post-baccalaureate program at The Mayo Clinic where she worked in the laboratory of Dr. David Sidransky. Christie's work focused on studying the molecular pathways governing SDF-1-induced acute myeloid leukemia. This experience influenced Christie's decision to pursue a PhD in cancer biology. Christie is currently conducting her dissertation work in the laboratory of Jacques Nör where she is studying the role of p53 in regulating stemness of mucosal carcinoma cells. One of Christie's professional goals is to develop a career as a research scientist capable of translating her findings from the bench to the bedside. In her spare time, she volunteers as a part in several outreach programs on campus. Some of these include Michigan DNA Day and the Science Education and Engagement for Kids (SEEK) curriculum development and teaching. Christie is a strong advocate for science education for kids and hopes to continue to participate in programs such as these throughout her career.



**Violeta J. Rodriguez** is a first-year doctoral student in Clinical Psychology at the University of Georgia. Violeta's previous work has focused on symptoms of psychopathology among people living with HIV and developmental outcomes of HIV-exposed infants from low-income countries. To pursue her PhD, Violeta obtained a master of science in education in research, training, and evaluation at the University of Miami while working in a research capacity in the development of HIV prevention programs in South Africa, Zambia, and Argentina, which stimulated her interest in cross-cultural and multicultural research. Her long-term research interests involve the measurement of constructs in the context of family science to facilitate the inclusion and assessment of socioeconomically, ethnically and racially diverse families to better understand the effect of parent psychopathology on typical or atypical child development. After completing her master's internship and PhD, Violeta hopes to pursue a career in academia.



**Luis Alexis Rodríguez-Cruz** graduated with a bachelor's degree in biology with a concentration in biotechnology from the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce. Current student in food systems at the University of Vermont (UVM) and is expecting his master's (2018) in food science and technology from the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez. For his thesis, he performed an assessment of food safety practice among fishermen in Puerto Rico, a baseline study for the future development of educational materials and work in the community. At UVM, he is working to develop a research project in Puerto Rico focusing on understanding how farmer perceptions of climate change relate to their response to it and how this influences adaptation behaviors at the farm level. During his master's, he worked with the Extension Service of UPRM assessing barriers and motivators to healthy eating activity among Puerto Rican children to develop culturally-sensitive educational materials. As an undergraduate, Luis Alexis did research in plant science with the Tropical Agriculture and Extension Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, and in biomedical sciences with the School of Medicine, which gave him a strong background in the natural sciences. His research interests are at the intersection of climate change, food security, public policy, perceptions, behavior, and culture. Luis Alexis is extremely passionate about generating meaningful information that is accessible to communities. In his leisure time, he enjoys cooking, reading, and writing.

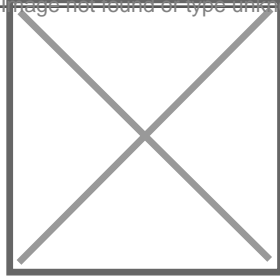


**Ciorana Roman Ortiz** is a PhD candidate in the Neuroscience Department at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. Her research focus is to further understand how neural circuits form emotional memories and how faulty brain circuits can result in psychiatric disorders. She earned her BS in health sciences from the University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus. At the time, she worked in Dr. Gregory Quirk's lab characterizing the structures involved in the acquisition and extinction of passive versus active fear responses. Early in her career she participated in the Summer Program in Neuroscience Ethics, and Survival (SPINES) at Marine Biological Laboratory, where she met an amazing group of talented faculty and peers that inspired and encouraged her to continue in her academic path. Since completing this program, she has been passionate about promoting diversity in neuroscience through mentoring and outreach. Currently, Ciorana is in Dr. Roger Clem's laboratory, where she utilizes molecular and electrophysiological approaches to study how specific GABAergic populations modulate behavior during fear conditioning, extinction and how changes in inhibitory transmission support these forms of learning. Her long-term goal is to establish her own research lab, ideally in her home country, where she can continue neuroscience and perform ground-breaking research in emotional brain function.

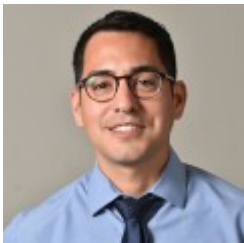


**Jesus Antonio Romo** is a fourth-year doctoral candidate in cell and molecular biology (and immunology track) at The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA). He is originally from Monclova, Coahuila, Mexico. After obtaining a bachelor of science with an emphasis in biology and immunology, Jesus then went on to pursue his master's degree conducting research in a molecular microbiology laboratory focused on the pathogenesis of the bacterium *Bordetella pertussis* where he worked on polyamine uptake and utilization. He has also been the STEM outreach coordinator for the CEIG outreach component at UTSA for since 2010. Jesus held a faculty position at Galen College of Nursing in San Antonio, Texas where he won the "difference in teaching" award while teaching medical microbiology and anatomy and physiology face-to-face and online. Currently, he is finishing his PhD (spring 2018) at UTSA working in a medical mycology laboratory with the fungus *Candida albicans* studying biofilm formation, discovery and development. Jesus' passions include teaching, outreach, research, and communication. Apart from multiple conference travel and presentation awards, Jesus is a past winner and Scientific Teaching Fellow through the American Society for Microbiology. His overall career goal is to have his own research lab as well as develop new and innovative ways to enhance science education in the classroom. He is interested in teaching at a primary or secondary undergraduate research institution where he can develop the STEM programs at that institution and also helping mentor minorities.

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**David Jose Salas** is a rotating first-year doctoral student in the



Biology Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles. Prior to returning to California, he served in the US Army as an early warning systems operator. He then obtained a BS in clinical sciences with a minor in Chicano/Chicana studies from the California State University, San Marcos. As an undergraduate, he participated in the McNair Scholars Program, The University of California's Summer Research Opportunities Program, and the National Institutes of Health Undergraduate Scholarship Program. His undergraduate research projects included studying epigenetic modifications in *Trypanosoma brucei*, domain discrimination in Gag of HTLV-1, and the role of the Rho GTPase axis in cell adhesion. While his research interests are broad, he is primarily interested in cell biology, miRNA processing and the tumor microenvironment. Outside of the lab, he is interested in health disparities, health literacy of postmenopausal Latina women, and secondary education. A long-term goal of his is to work in secondary education policy, as well as in social services.



