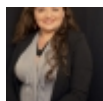


SACNAS National Conference 2012 ^[1]

Submitted by Yaihara Fortis Santiago ^[2] on 28 October 2012 - 8:45pm



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A group of Puerto Rican students share stories with Dr. Luis Echegoyen en la conferencia Nacional de SACNAS 2012 en Seattle, WA

"Networking and mentorship are a highway that can take you really far and is bidirectional" - Rick Weibl

The annual SACNAS (Society for the Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science ^[3]) National Conference ^[4] was held in Seattle, from October 10th to 14th, at the Washington Convention Center in Seattle. Mónica ^[5], Wilson ^[6] and I, participated in this conference that it was one of the most welcoming and energizing conferences, focused on the underrepresented minority groups in science.

SACNAS is the perfect forum for networking in a natural and spontaneous manner. The majority

of the scientists at SACNAS participate in the conference because they understand the value and importance of networking and mentorship to inspire the future generations of scientists; to understand that even when the graduate school process is stressful at times, there are people that can provide advice and guidance. There are often mentors and mentees sitting around during SACNAS enjoying a coffee, discussing career decisions or simply explaining the physics behind a chiral object (a “rattleback”), like [Dr. Luis Echegoyen](#) [7] did with a group of Puerto Rican scientists one afternoon.

This year the conference had the largest number of participants (3800) in its 37 years. They awarded 1400 travel awards to students in all levels, from undergraduate to postdocs. There were 1,350 scientific presentations, 400 of them presented by graduate students and postdocs. For the first time, there was a poster section, exclusively for graduate students and postdocs, indicating how much the conference has grown in the last couple of years.

Ciencia Puerto Rico as a model to engage underrepresented minorities to the sciences using social media platforms.

Ciencia Puerto Rico had the opportunity to contribute to the conference with the panel session: “Engaging Underrepresented Communities with Science using Social Networking Platforms”. The panelists were: [Dr. Frances Colón](#) [8], Deputy Science and Technology Adviser to the Secretary of State; [Dr. Wilson González Espada](#), Physics and Science Education Associate Professor at Morehead State University, Kentucky and leader of CienciaPR’s informal education initiatives; and [Mónica Feliú Mójer](#), Neuroscience doctoral candidate at Harvard Medical School and vice-director of CienciaPR. (I served as the moderator of the panel).

The purpose of the panel was to present Ciencia Puerto Rico’s (www.cienciapr.org [9]) platform as a model to mitigate some of the factors that contribute to the attrition of underrepresented minority students in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) pipeline. Some of these factors include the lack of role models and mentors with a similar ethnic background; lack of access to educational or professional resources; low levels of scientific literacy; and lack of science tools that are contextualized or culturally relevant. During the panel Wilson, Mónica and I had the chance to talk about some of CienciaPR’s initiatives that address some of these challenges and about the website CienciaPR.org as a platform that facilitates mentorship and collaboration among scientists, educators and individuals interested in sciences and Puerto Rico. In addition, we discussed the importance of educating lay audiences about science and the role that scientists play in spreading the scientific message in formal and informal ways while preserving the accuracy and credibility of the information.

[Dr. Frances Colón](#) shared with the audience other initiatives and social platforms (such as [MentorCloud](#) [10] and [IdEA](#) [11]) that facilitate mentorship and help connect communities and diasporas. She explained how these initiatives complement some of the US Federal Programs focused on promoting scientific diversity. Frances also explained how platforms similar to Ciencia Puerto Rico serve as a catalyst to spread knowledge, connect diasporas, identify the needs of underdeveloped communities in science and education, and how scientists are fundamental for this strategic plan. The panel was very interactive and the audience asked several questions and offered great ideas that led the conversation to other topics, such as [Facebook](#) [12], [Twitter](#) [13] and [LinkedIn](#) [14], and how these social platforms can potentially help connect communities (diasporas

and unrepresented minorities in sciences). At that moment, we all witnessed the power of these social networks. During the active discussion, Frances took a picture and uploaded it to her facebook wall. Few seconds after, one of her friends recognized one of the scientists sitting in the front row of our audience. After a laugh, we had an interesting conversation about the power, and the pros and cons of each of these social networks when engaging and reaching underrepresented communities or generating topic trends.

After the panel and during the rest of the conference we had the chance to meet and share with other scientists as well as mentor some students. At the end, we were very excited and full of ideas and hoping we can make them happen in the near future. In summary, we were very excited, because SACNAS is a scientific forum where belonging to a community feels concrete and REAL.

Tags:

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