RISE changes to T32 grant mechanism: G-RISE at Ponce Health Sciences University, a new chapter!

By: Dr. Caroline Appleyard, Director

After 14 successful years the RISE graduate training program at Ponce Health Sciences University will change from an R25 to T32GM144896. The new grant ‘G-RISE at Ponce Health Sciences University’ started this past May 1, 2022. This $3.18 million 5-year grant aims to increase the number of Hispanic Americans doing biomedical research and encourage the growth of biomedical research in Puerto Rico.

The new grant continues to build upon the very successful training program created under the previous R25-RISE funding mechanism which had a positive impact on the training of our PhD students and on the entire PHSU community. Under the prior R25-RISE Program the PhD completion rate increased from 73% to 90%, the average time to graduation decreased from 6.24 to 5.55 years, and 64% of R25-RISE trainees continued with postdoctoral training after graduating. Of the 60 R25-RISE trainees supported 24 obtained independent fellowships, 35 already graduated with a PhD and 8 have full-time faculty positions. G-RISE will build upon those successes and adapt to several important lessons learned. It will provide the organizational structure and extensive mentoring necessary to ensure trainees have a sense of belonging and scientific identity while empowering them to prepare for and overcome obstacles in their scientific careers. The program proposes to accomplish these goals through enhancement of the academic, research, personal, and professional competence of our underrepresented minority students to better prepare them for diverse careers in the biomedical sciences. The specific measurable objectives of the PHSU G-RISE program are to provide: (1) professional, operational, and technical research skills training for PHSU G-RISE trainees; (2) communication skills training for PHSU G-RISE trainees; (3) team building/networking opportunities for PHSU G-RISE trainees; and (4) increase the PhD completion rate while reducing time-to-degree. Each of these objectives will be pursued with an experience-based balance of continuing activities that were highly effective as well as a strategic set of new training components that were developed to address the emerging needs of our trainees.

We look forward to continuing to increase the competitiveness of highly qualified underrepresented students graduating from the Biomedical Sciences PhD Program at PHSU and the number who advance to postdoctoral positions and diverse research-related careers!
17th ANNUAL PHSU-PRI SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

On May 7, 2022, the Ponce Research Institute hosted its 17th Annual Scientific Conference, which was held at the Hilton Ponce Golf and Casino Hotel. The main goal of this conference is to highlight ongoing research activities at Ponce Health Sciences University, and its affiliated hospitals. It also promotes network and collaborations. There were over 400 registrants, with 133 research presentations in Basic Sciences, Behavioral Sciences, Clinical Cases, Clinical Sciences, and Public Health. Presentations were evaluated by over 30 judges from affiliated and partner institutions throughout Puerto Rico. At the end of the activity, prizes were awarded to the top three presenters in each category. Winners from the biomedical sciences include sixth year RISE trainee, Lubriel Sambolin, who was awarded 2nd place in poster presentation and second year RISE trainee, Nashaly Izirray, who was awarded 3rd place in oral presentation respectively. We congratulate them for their excellent work!

ORAL PRESENTATION

3rd place: Nashaly Izirray (2nd year RISE trainee)
Effects of reducing FKBP5 expression in the ventral hippocampus on PTSD-related behaviors

POSTER PRESENTATION

2nd place Lubriel Sambolin (6th year RISE trainee)
Peripheral and Ventral Hippocampal Long-chain Ceramides Correlate with Depressive-like Behaviors in Rats

We also recognize the outstanding presentations of all our trainees:Jessalyn Pla (4th year), Sheila Valle (3rd year), Nelly Arroyo (3rd year), Joshua Pérez (2nd year) & Yobet Pérez (2nd year), as well as former RISE trainees, Elliott Rodriguez (4th year), Alexandra Aquino (4th year), Roberto J. Morales (5th year) and Orlando I. Torres (6th year). Congratulations!

RISE ALUMNI NEWS

Congratulations to former RISE trainee, Dr. Siomara Hernández, on her new position as non-clinical Study Manager at Audentes Therapeutics, effective June 13, 2022. Under the mentorship of Dr. Caroline Appleyard, she graduated in 2016 from our PhD Program, and pursued her post doc at Michigan State University. Dr. Hernández can be reached at https://www.linkedin.com/in/siomaraahr for any advice on her field, for mentoring or networking!

All the best, Siomara!
PD session: Strategies for promoting your research and advocating for yourself

Our RISE Program aims to increase the competitiveness of trainees graduating from our Biomedical Sciences PhD Program by providing them with professional skills needed to succeed. Aligned with this, we invited Mrs. Cindy Makita-Dodd, Career Strategist and Coach, who gave them a workshop about Interview Preparation, on Friday, May 20, 2022. Through a very detailed presentation, she helped them improve their interview skills for future professional opportunities. Our trainees received useful tips and guidance and participated in mock interviews. It was a very interactive and pertinent session!

PD session: External Training: Updates and Feedback

As part of our RISE Program funding opportunities, our trainees can benefit from RISE support for External Training that will help them learn new techniques as well as advance in their thesis projects. On May 27, RISE trainees Jessalyn Pla (4th year), Yesenia Rivera-Escobales (3rd year), Yadiel Rivera (1st year) and Elvin Hernández (1st year) gave their peers updates and feedback from their most recent experiences attending external trainings. Jessalyn talked about Electrophysiology, Yesenia talked about Fiber Photometry, Yadiel and Elvin talked about Diet, Microbiota and Cancer Immunotherapies, as well as various educational workshops that they attended as part of the AACR 2022 Annual Meeting. Congrats everyone on your excellent presentations!

#FaceOfScience campaign

Our PHSU-NIGMS RISE Program joined the Enhance Science and the NIH Diversity Program Consortium for the #FaceOfScience social media hashtag campaign on Wednesday, May 4, 2022. Its purpose was to celebrate the NIH/NIGMS Research Training Community. Our Puerto Rican inspiring young researchers who enhance science across the nation (our current PHSU-NIGMS RISE Program trainees) are pictured below!

(From L-R) Yobet Pérez (2nd year), Jonathan López (3rd year), Lubriel Sambolin (6th year), Jessalyn Pla (4th year), Joshua Pérez (2nd year), Yadiel Rivera (1st year), Yesenia Rivera (3rd year), Elvin Hernández (1st year), Sheila Valle (3rd year), Nelly Arroyo (3rd year) & Paola N. Flores (1st year)
Under the mentorship of Dr. James Porter, our 6th year RISE trainee, Lubriel Sambolin-Escobales, successfully defended his thesis dissertation on June 9, 2022. The title of his thesis was “Relationships between Stress, Diet, Long-chain Ceramides and Depressive-like Behaviors in Rats” where he aimed to determine the possible synergistic effect of high-fat diet in combination with short-term unpredictable stress on serum sphingolipids content and depressive symptoms. Also, to determine the effect of the direct infusion of long-chain ceramides (C20:0) into the ventral hippocampus of rats and its effects on the development of depressive-like behaviors.

Congratulations, Dr. Sambolin. All the best in your future endeavors!