

**NHSN Quarterly Newsletter: El Faro**  
**December 2015**

**Welcome Message from the Editors of  
*El Faro*, Sandra Oviedo Ramirez and  
Allyson Hughes**



Welcome to the Winter 2015 edition of *El Faro: La Voz de la Red*. The purpose of this newsletter is to keep you up to date with current topics and

research amongst the members of the National Hispanic Science Network (NHSN) and the Early Career Leadership Committee (ECLC).

The current edition is focused on providing our members with valuable information about the job market. We know that planning for the future may be something many dread due to many uncertainties. There are many questions that must be considered when planning for the future such as: should you pursue a tenure track position? Should you complete postdoctoral training? What's the process of applying to any

of these positions? What are search committees looking for in a job candidate? The list can go on. Therefore, we have asked members of NHSN to share their experiences of obtaining a tenure track position, postdoctoral training, or a government job. In addition, we have also asked some international NHSN members to share their stories of being an international researcher. In the next sections, you will read about what each member learned along their journey, how they survived, and how they managed to establish working relationships with researchers overseas! It is our hope that reading their stories may serve as a guide to all members, but especially to those who are in the job market now or to those who will soon be on the job market. Special thanks to all the contributors of this issue.

We hope you have a happy holiday season and a happy new year!

Sincerely,

*Sandra & Allyson*

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**Announcements**

Don't forget that the conference poster deadline is January 15, 2016. For submission requirements please visit: <http://www.the-nhsn.org/Conference/>

Our annual meeting will be June 15-17, 2016 in Palm Springs, CA. If you have any questions about the conference or submission, you can contact Betsy at [mgiaim@lsuhsc.edu](mailto:mgiaim@lsuhsc.edu).





**Julie Levison, MD, MPhil, MPH** is a board certified physician in internal medicine and infectious disease, and is an Instructor in Medicine at Harvard Medical School (HMS). She

is also a senior fellow in the Program for Epidemiology and Outcomes Research, Cost-Effectiveness for Preventing AIDS Complications (CEPAC) team, and Medical Practice Evaluation Center at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH). Dr. Levison's longstanding career focus has been the intersection of public health, clinical care, and human rights.

### **What training would you advise upcoming applicants to have before going on the job market?**

Before going on the job market, individuals should seek out mentors to discuss their preparedness and options. There are many forms of mentors. A mentor external from your institution can be helpful in providing a "neutral" perspective. There is the uber mentor who can see the "big picture view". Sometimes they can give you advice about both professional and personal ambitions and have your best interest at heart. It's often hard to find individuals who can provide that holistic perspective. There are individuals who are experts in specific areas whose opinion you respect. They can help guide you in different parts of your life. Seek out a mentorship team and include these different individuals in your decision-making process. If you get discouraging advice, think about the context in which that person is giving the advice. What is their perspective? Why might they be giving you this advice? What are the potential biases if

any? Always think critically about information that you are using to make decisions.

It's always preferable to look for a job from a position of strength, looking towards an opportunity rather than moving away from a position when it's already a bad situation. An example of this could be looking at job opportunities when you have funding for a couple of years and therefore, you are in a good position to negotiate. One can also look for a job when one is considering a change in career direction.

In general, I would recommend that individuals think about developing a personal mission statement. What do you stand for? What do you need to help you succeed? Think big and then think what would be needed to achieve those aspirations with short-term concrete goals. "What are the steps in the next 1 month, 3 months, 6 months, and 12 months to achieve those goals?" Goals often change over time based on personal circumstances, lived experiences, direction of your research, research opportunities, etc. That is to be expected. However, your values are core to who you are and guide you. Be flexible and open to new opportunities. Give yourself the opportunity to check in with these goals every now and then to check on your progress. Include a mentor or mentors in this process to hold you accountable and support your goals.

### **Why did you choose to pursue a job in your field?**

I chose to pursue a faculty position early in an NIH-funded K23 career development award. My research focuses on improving HIV care for Latino populations. Through my research, I wanted to develop long-term community alliances. Therefore, in the faculty position, I wanted to assure that from the beginning of my work, I was in a setting that would support and value this type of research.

**Name 3 strengths that individuals should have:**

Persistence: Success often doesn't come right away. You need thick skin to overcome the inevitable setbacks. Advances often come from managing disappointments and seeing opportunities in the face of adversity.

Think big: Don't permit others to limit your aspirations. Mentors can be helpful in providing guidance. Mentors can also help you decipher feedback that you get from other instrumental individuals, like division chiefs, grant or peer reviewers. Look at the context of feedback and decide where it is coming from. Don't give up. Look to mentors who encourage you to be as intellectually rigorous as possible while pushing your field in new directions and staying true to your personal goals as well.

Enjoy what you do: Pursue avenues of work that you feel matter and will make a difference to patients, populations, and a group of individuals or communities. If you are not enjoying your work, think what you can do to address it. There is always a solution. Sometimes even a small change in your job can make a big difference in your personal satisfaction or productivity.



**Miryam C. Gerdine MPH**, is the Chair of the Networking and Mentoring Committee for the Latina Researchers Network. The Latina Researchers Network was founded in 2012 in response to the underrepresentation of

historically disadvantaged populations with advanced degrees and in support of examining the barriers and opportunities for advancement in research and academic positions. Since then, we

have grown to over 1,300 scholars, researchers, academic leaders and junior investigators across the United States.

**Why did you choose to work in the government?**

In 1996, I was selected as the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI) Edward Roybal Public Health Fellow, and I had the opportunity to choose a placement in any setting I wanted. I did many informational interviews and I decided to work at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for two reasons, a great supervisor Debbie Maiese and for the opportunity to have my contributions have a national impact. With my first assignment, I had the opportunity to work with Dr. Olivia Carter-Porkras from the HHS Office of the Secretary Office of Minority Health and I was able to invite a professor from Boston University, Dr. Hortensia Amaro to participate in the Healthy People 2000 Progress review on Hispanic Americans.

My first year working in the government was a career changer and a transformative experience for me. Gracias to CHCI, my budding social work career was broadened into a public health career in the Federal Government. This September, I will celebrate 20 years of working at HHS. In those years, some of my contributions have been to share my unique Latino scientific lens to decisions in more than 30 competitive grant reviews, contracts and cooperative agreement review panels and to chair 11 panel reviews; including the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Rescue and Restore Victims of Human Trafficking Regional Program grants; the Office of Adolescent Health (OAH), Pregnant and Parenting Teen and Women grants; the Office of Minority Health (OMH), Youth Empowerment Demonstration grants; and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) National Health Service Corps (NHSC)

Scholarship program. Today, I'm a Project Officer, overseeing the federal grants management of two of HRSA's health workforce programs.

**What training would you advise upcoming applicants to have before going on the job market?**

Having strong communication skills is critical at the beginning of your job search and throughout your career. Effective writing and presentation skills are also important and they can be continuously developed. Having worked almost 20 years at HHS now, I also see the value of inter-professional training. We all have a unique perspective and a diverse team allows for more creativity and innovation.

**Name 3 strengths that individuals should have to obtain a similar position.**

Persistence – Applying to HHS is not always easy. I would encourage folks to spend lots of time on each application and seek out assistance in completing your application. I'm always happy to help. Each agency has a Hispanic Employee Program Manager and that is their job. At HRSA that is Jackie Calix; [jcalix@hrsa.gov](mailto:jcalix@hrsa.gov). Also, once you have submitted your application, let folks who work in that agency know.

Team appreciation – It's great if you can be a self-starter, but it will help you greatly if you can recognize early on that everything gets done by a team. So learning who's on your team and their unique contributions will help you, early on. In my role as Project Officer, I work closely with the Grants Management Specialist as we make sometimes difficult budget decisions.

Balance of paying attention to details, i.e., grantee progress reports to seeing the big picture of how my grantees work in training the future public and behavioral health workforce also

contributes up to meeting the goals of my agency, HRSA's second goal of "strengthening the health workforce."

Our numbers at HHS for Latino employment is very discouraging BUT, as someone who has worked at HHS for many years I will share it's been the best decision of my career. HHS is big and you can move around including working abroad. I worked for the CDC Global AIDS program in Mozambique. As I write this, I see perhaps just another 10 years for me at HHS, so we need you to apply today. I'm happy to help anyone who needs a little guidance. My email is [mgerdine@hrsa.gov](mailto:mgerdine@hrsa.gov) and my cell is 202-270-7222. Suerte with your applications!



In Fall 2015, **Katherine Serafine, PhD** joined the University of Texas at El Paso as an Assistant Professor in behavioral neuroscience in the Department of Psychology. Her behavioral pharmacology

laboratory focuses on the different factors that contribute to individual differences in vulnerability to drug abuse. To investigate these factors, Dr. Serafine uses preclinical models to investigate how factors such as age, sex and diet impact sensitivity to drugs of abuse like cocaine. She shares her experience of what it was like to be on the job market recently.

**How did you decide that you wanted a career in academia?**

I was fortunate to have a postdoctoral mentor who encouraged me to talk about my future, even if what I wanted to do wasn't exactly what he did. He encouraged me to complete an individual development plan (IDP – see also, <http://www.faseb.org/portals/2/pdfs/opa/idp.pdf>)

early on in my training. This experience helped me organize the things I was good at with the things I was passionate about, and ultimately lead me to plan for a long term career in one of two trajectories: 1) academic faculty positions with combined teaching/research responsibilities and 2) science education policy positions. I had heard for years that the job market for academic scientists has been declining and that a good survival strategy would be to develop an “alternative career” plan. For me, the logical alternative career involved taking my passion for education and trying to impact change on a more national policy level, in terms of standardizing science education and providing resources for students who were interested in science but that come from underrepresented backgrounds. I felt I could be happy in this “alternative path”, but at the same time, my “plan A” career was to be an independent investigator, teaching and conducting research.

My job search focused on these two career paths. Ultimately, I accepted my current position at the University of Texas at El Paso, as a tenure track assistant professor in Behavioral Neuroscience. Accepting the job at UTEP was an obvious choice for me, because I see this appointment as the best of both worlds. This job allows me to continue to pursue my passion for research and teaching, as well as my interests in providing high quality science education to individuals who represent an underrepresented minority in the field of science, in my home state of Texas.

**Describe your experience of applying to a job in academia. What would you say was the most challenging aspect of this process?**

The hardest part is reading between the lines of a job posting. Having been a member of a search committee previously, I knew that every time I saw a job advertisement – the people reading applications know the exact candidate they are looking for. However, trying to determine who that perfect candidate is from the outside is difficult. I was very fortunate to have had many different kinds of mentors to turn to for advice and help while developing my documents. The biggest time commitment is hand tailoring each application package to the specific job. You might have a perfectly great research or teaching statement for one university, but that does not mean you should just change the name of the search committee chair and send it out every job posting. For me, the hardest part was trying to determine what the job advertisement was telling me about the kind of applicant the committee was looking for. Some committees are purposely vague in their advertisement to attract a wider range of candidates- and I actually found those to be the more challenging applications to write.

**In turn, what would you describe as the easiest aspect of this process?**

The interview! I was surprised that the interviewing process was surprisingly easy for me, at least in situations where the job was the right fit. Sometimes you can be an amazing candidate, but if you don’t mesh well with the existing faculty or the job opening, you won’t be hired. In particular, during my experience at UTEP, the interview was so effortless and fun, that I couldn’t imagine taking any other job offer at the end of the day. The “fit” was so clearly matched that the whole process was actually enjoyable. That said, there are certainly other interview experiences I can look back on

and say “that was anything but easy” but when you’re at the right place, at the right time, and applying for the right job for you – you can feel it as soon as you step off the plane and meet the first person greeting you at the airport.

### **Provide any advice to upcoming applicants.**

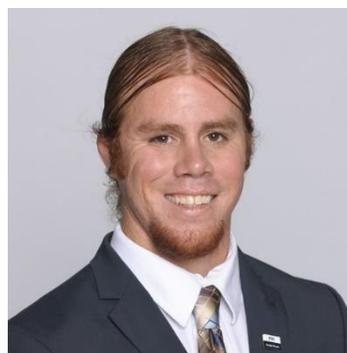
If it feels like you are forcing a square peg into a round hole, you probably are. I remember applying for jobs that I knew were a bad fit – simply because the market is the way it is right now. The most time consuming applications were the ones where I was trying to make myself fit into a mold that I did not belong in. In contrast, the jobs that were a better fit for me were also the easier applications to write.

As part of a training grant, I had many opportunities to discover non-academic science career paths, and to consider what skills I might need to pursue those avenues, should I decide academia was not the right path for me. I learned a lot in that process, and appreciated the opportunity, but I also think it’s important to not lose sight of “plan A” while you are making sure you have a “plan B”. For me, preparing for “plan B – science education policy” was not different than preparing for “plan A – teaching/research in academia”. I needed the same skills - to publish research and develop strong communication skills (especially in terms of communicating science to non-scientists). When the time came to apply for jobs, it was easy to talk about how the same set of skills provided strengths for either academic job applications or policy applications. I think you have to have a strategy about your career path (your dream job, as well as an alternative career path) early on, and you need to revisit the things you are doing periodically to keep yourself on track. The IDP process was extremely eye-

opening for me in this regard, and also helped me figure out where my weaknesses were.

### **In general, what do you consider was the best advice that you have received to cope with the process of applying?**

The best advice I received was simple. Don’t reject a job offer that has not yet been offered to you. My postdoctoral mentor said that to me, and it resonated with me. I had so many colleagues going on the job market at the same time as me, who would rationalize reasons not to apply for a specific job posting. It was almost always location based (sometimes family or other personal issues can restrict you geographically, but other times it was personal preference of not wanting to move to a cold climate from a warm one, etc). However, the individuals that put more restrictions on which jobs they applied for were also the ones I noticed that had to apply for more positions before they found the right fit. It is important to remember that applying for a job and accepting a job are two different steps. Tossing your name into the ring does not mean you have to take the job, if you get the call. Not applying; however, guarantees that you will not get the offer.



**Marcos Martinez, PhD, MSW** recently joined Florida International University as an Assistant professor. His specific areas of

research include: the intersection and impact of socio-cultural, familial, and developmental processes on youth drug use and sexual risk

behavior; cultural adaptation of substance use prevention/interventions; the role of cultural factors and gender on youth and family ecodevelopment; and the influence of acculturation on drug use behavior. He shares with us his experience of what it was like to be on the job market recently.

**How did you decide that you wanted a career in academia?**

The decision to pursue an academic career was a result of various experiences during my undergraduate and graduate work specific to minority health, which coincided with my childhood and adolescence in New Mexico. Witnessing firsthand the detrimental effects of alcohol and drug use, in addition to other deleterious health ailments, on individuals, families, and the community at large helped me understand the pervasiveness of these issues and the urgency needed to address them. I therefore felt that pursuing my PhD and going into an academic career would allow me to leverage my position in a manner conducive to the well-being of disadvantaged communities. In this vein, I've had the opportunity to learn from and work with notable scholars in transdisciplinary social, psychological, and biological fields specific to minority health disparities. The time and energy that these scholars and professors invested into my development as an emerging researcher inspired me. Their time and scholarly contributions allowed me to experience firsthand the application of interdisciplinary, community embedded research through academic and community partnerships in ways that are culturally sensitive and strengths based.

Moreover, the amazing environment at Arizona State University empowered me to develop a

research agenda focused on helping communities in tangible and sustainable ways. As a result of these experiences, I feel that I am better situated to leverage my skills and contacts to improve society through teaching, research, and community service.

**Describe your experience of applying to a job in academia. What would you say was the most challenging aspect of this process?**

There were definitely a few challenges throughout the academic job application process. I would say, overall, that I had a good experience, although it was exhausting! Breaking it down, I would say there were 4 phases involved in this process. The first phase involved writing cover letters, preparing my CV, requesting letters of recommendation and gathering any other materials that were required. The second phase was exciting as I began to hear back from schools and was able to set up initial screening interviews. A nice part about the screening interviews was getting to articulate the vision for my research and how it fit within the mission and vision of that particular university. It was also neat to discover people at various institutions that were doing great research similar to mine as well as in related areas.

After several screening interviews, schools where I would be a good fit offered to fly me out for a job talk/on campus interview. Overall, this was the most rigorous and exhausting part of the entire process given that the campus visits typically lasted a couple days and included talking to many people at different professorial and administrative ranks. I think this phase was the most challenging given the time needed to

prepare and execute an effective job talk. The final phase was the best part as I began to receive offers from schools! I must say that equally challenging, perhaps more, than the on campus interview was finding a school where my wife and I could do good work since she was also looking for a tenure track line. I am very happy that we were both able to find a place that was good for both of us and without having to disclose we were married until our respective offers were made.

**In turn, what would you describe as the easiest aspect of this process?**

Honestly, there wasn't anything easy about this process. It required a lot of work, commitment, focus, and preparation. I will say however that these things were things that I made sure to embody from the beginning of my PhD, which helped tremendously when it came to the job market. So if I were to pick the "easiest" part of the process, I would say it was the initial screening interviews. As a result of my preparation and advice that I received from mentors over the years, I felt confident in articulating my program of research and where I saw future in academia. Having the chance to discuss my area of interest and why it is important as well as how to apply my findings to the real world was rather fun. I found that being conversational but organized in my thought process helped me stay calm and collected. By the time you have a screening interview you should be able to communicate who you are, why you do what you do, and your future goals to both academics and non-academics alike.

**Provide any advice to upcoming applicants.**

The advice I have for upcoming and future applicants all surrounds preparation and forethought. I viewed my preparation as beginning the day I started my PhD and thinking about what it was that I wanted to get out of it in terms of research, teaching, statistical and methodological training, and grant writing. In that regard I made sure to take advantage of every opportunity that was available (fellowships; workshops on CV development, the job market, and promotion and tenure) as well as ask my mentors and other professors questions about the job market and what to expect. Specific to guidance, I think it's critical to seek advice from many people so that you are able to get a better sense of academic market expectations and are more informed about the process. Also, it is a small item but, when working on your written application, make sure that everything is addressed to the institution you are sending your application to. You will likely be applying for many jobs and it is far too easy to commit errors, especially as your material will overlap so much. I've heard horror stories of people addressing letters to the wrong school. In the cover letter, ensure that you are clearly articulating what research you have done, your program of research, and where you see your research going. There should be a common thread through all of these pieces. What schools want to see is that you have a common thread in your work and that you have a vision for that work. In this regard, you absolutely should be prepared to talk about funding both in the cover letter and in person. You should be able to explain what types of funding streams you plan on pursuing and perhaps why they are appropriate for your research. As well, do your homework and identify people from the institution that you

would like to work with and be familiar with their work. Think of ways in how you could collaborate with their faculty.

Regarding the job talk, this is such a key part of the entire process. My advice is to tell a story of why you got into this work and then roll into your research. If you jump right into the research eyes are going to glaze over so I would spend 5 minutes introducing yourself and making the link between yourself and the work you are doing. Since I knew everyone didn't have the same interests as I did, I wanted to make sure I was engaging both my audience familiar with my area and those who were not familiar in a way that got them excited about or at least let them see the merit of my work. Seek feedback and advice from mentors on your job talk and make sure to rehearse it in front of your peers and colleagues.

Finally, it is critical to feel empowered by this process: remember that you are interviewing the schools as much as they are interviewing you. If it is not a good fit, don't force it. Do your research and find a place that you can be happy and healthy while doing excellent, impactful work. Do not settle for just any position.

**In general, what do you consider was the best advice that you have received to cope with the process of applying?**

The best advice I received was to take the long view and trust that you will find the right place for your family, life, and career. It is a daunting process, this academic job market, and I found that breaking it up into smaller pieces helped to make it less overwhelming. Ask your peers who you admire and who have made the transition

from student to professor for sample cover letters and job talks. Give yourself time to think about the kind of scholar you want to be and then work backwards to determine how to accurately display yourself on the market. Similarly, I spent a lot of time thinking about where I wanted to be five or ten years down the road with respect to my research. This was great advice because it not only made me draw out the common thread that ran through my current and future research but made me articulate it in a way that was easy for interviewers to follow and make sense of. You want to make lasting impression and demonstrate to the search committee that you are not just a researcher but also a colleague who they want to be around long into the future.



**Karen Nieves-Lugo, PhD MPH** is a postdoctoral fellow at the Psychology Department and member

of the Latino Health Research Center at the George Washington University. She received a Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service postdoctoral fellowship (F32) award funded by the National Institute of Mental Health, where she is examining the relationship of depression and substance use (alcohol, tobacco and drug use) with physical function among HIV-infected veterans compared to uninfected veterans in the Veterans Aging Cohort Study (VACS), and to determine the effect of these factors on change in physical function over five-years of follow-up.

**Why did you seek a post doc position after graduation?**

I decided to seek a post-doctoral training after graduation because it offers a great opportunity to obtain additional skills and become proficient in others areas such as: 1) psychological factors, substance use, and physical function and 2) advanced skills in grant writing. In addition to have the opportunity to network with other researchers and being part of the DC-CFAR dedicated to the advancement of junior researchers.

I completed my Ph.D. in psychology at the University of Puerto Rico. During my doctoral studies I gained a great amount of research experience working on HIV-related issues among Latino men in Puerto Rico. After graduation, I moved to Virginia and started looking for opportunities to develop my career as an HIV researcher. I searched for volunteering opportunities in the area, where I found a community organization that provides services to people living with HIV, and I reached out to them. This experience helped me in acquaint knowledge about the resources and ongoing studies of HIV/AIDS in the area of Northern Virginia. This community organization enrolled participants for an HIV study, and through the organization I found information about the District of Columbia-Center for AIDS Research (DC-CFAR) and the Latino Health Research Center (LHRC).

I reached out to the LHRC and got in contact with the director. The director was supportive and gave me the opportunity to join her research team in spring of 2012. The LHRC director is an experienced investigator in psychosocial and behavioral factors relevant to HIV/AIDS among Latino men who have sex with men (MSM). I had the opportunity to work closely with the director and we developed an excellent relationship.

**How did you find out about your post-doc opportunity?**

After one year of working with the director of the LHRC and her research team, they encouraged me to apply for the Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award (NRSA) Postdoctoral Fellowship (F32). I researched the National Institute of Health (NIH) website for information about this funding opportunity, the scope, requirements and instructions on how to apply. After a couple of discussions and brainstorming with the LHRC team, I started the process of applying for the F32 award.

**Please describe your experience of applying to post-doc position. What would you say was the most challenging aspect of this process? In turn, what would you describe as the easiest aspect of this process?**

The first challenge that I had was making the connections to start my career as researcher in a new country, and finding the right mentors and collaborators within my research interests. Working on my application for the postdoctoral fellowship, I made connections and received feedback from several researchers in the area of HIV and aging. I contacted the chair of the Physical Function Working-group for the Veterans Aging Cohort Study asking for her mentorship in the area of HIV and aging. She has extensive experience conducting research and publishing findings on factors related to physical function among people living with HIV. She delightedly accepted being my second mentor. I began working with her and became member of Veteran Aging Cohort Study Physical Function Working Group.

However, the most challenging aspect of this process was writing the grant proposal. It was an intense and long thinking process because it is a different process than writing a manuscript, for example. In a grant proposal the ideas need

to be clear and concise with a comprehensive explanation within a limit of pages, all at the same time. However, I am grateful that, I had the opportunity to work with excellent mentors and collaborators that taught and accompanied me throughout the process of developing and submitting the grant proposal. During this time I learned strategies and gained skills in grant writing. The process of writing the grant proposal took almost a year. My mentors assisted me making connections with the program officer in NIH. The program officer was a key person during this process; he sent me a detailed feedback and encouraged me to submit the proposal. The easiest aspect of this process was working with my mentors and collaborators as well as writing the other components of the grant proposal with the support from the Department of Psychology and the staff at George Washington University.

#### **Provide any advice to upcoming applicants.**

One of the things that helped me get the postdoctoral training award was having a good relationship with all of my advisors/mentors. Start during your graduate studies and continue this relationship after graduation. You need to show them through hard work and commitment that you have something to contribute and demonstrate your value as professional. However, during this process you need to prepare yourself and be open to criticism and feedback. Always listen to your advisors/mentors, they will provide you with valuable insight, knowledge and wisdom enabling a great opportunity to learn new skills that will lead you to achieve your goal of becoming an independent researcher. In a research career, it's also important to network with other researchers, attend professional conferences, and always be thinking about the next step in your career by setting achievable goals and following them.

#### **Where would you like to be in your career five years from now?**

Being a postdoctoral fellow has been a good learning process, and it has brought me the opportunity to share my expertise and ideas with other researchers. Through this training, I am preparing myself to become an independent researcher and move forward the understanding of psychological and behavioral factors affecting physical function among people living with HIV. One of my long-term career goals is to become a leader in the domains of psychosocial and behavioral factors (e.g. substance use) relevant to aging and physical function among people living with HIV/AIDS. Specifically, I would like to work with the Latino community living with HIV in order to decrease substance use and improve their health care and quality of life. I foresee myself working at an agency where I can perform research and provide services to people living with HIV.



**Eden Robles, PhD, MPH** is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Texas at El Paso working for the Latino Alcohol and Health Disparities Research Center.

For me, I see my experience of successfully obtaining a postdoctoral position as happening over a course of three phases. First, my experience in obtaining a postdoctoral position really begins with my decision to believe that I could successfully obtain a doctoral degree and pursue a career in research. I became a single mother at a young age and was faced with the decision of pursuing my studies or a career working at a local store. With the encouragement and guidance of some of

the counselors at OLLU, I enrolled and began pursuing a bachelor's degree. It was at OLLU that I met my mentors Cora Le-Doux and Jorge Valadez and the incredible staff at the McNair's Scholar Program. Both Cora Le-Doux and Jorge Valadez shared their stories of struggle, discrimination, triumph and success in pursuing a doctoral education at a Tier I and Ivy League school. Their stories were real, relatable, and inspiring. The McNair's Scholar Program taught me the foundational skills that I would need to navigate within the academic culture and provided me the resources I would need to be competitive.

The lessons that I learned in confidence and in extending my support network are the keystones to all else that I have accomplished. Without this foundational support and mentorship, it would have been more challenging to successfully apply to a doctoral program and a postdoctoral position. Thus, my first advice to upcoming applicants is to be open to being inspired and mentored, and to find meaning in the lessons learned and mentoring relationships that you form with others. More specifically, allow your confidence in the experience to shine through and the opportunities will always follow.

Life as a doctoral student at the University of Texas at Austin provided me with the access to a wealth of resources and amazing networks. At UT Austin, I gained many mentors and a strong support network that continue to work with me such as Drs. Yessenia Castro and Chris Salas-Wright. Yessenia introduced me to the National Hispanic Science Network. Moreover, with the help of Brandy Maynard I was able to learn about process of postdoctoral positions. . t. My advice to upcoming applicants is to become familiar

with the faculty in your school that are specific or related to your area of research. Ask them to connect you with networks, conferences, or other researchers that might help you. Listen to their experiences and become curious about why they did or did not pursue a postdoctoral position. You don't have to take the same route that they did, but through their connections and experiences you will find your own path.

Around early fall I had a sobering conversation with my dissertation chair about my future. Reality set in for me after this conversation – I couldn't be a doctoral candidate forever no matter how happy I was working with Yessenia. After a conversation with Judy Arroyo, I realized what I really wanted was further guidance and supervision. I needed that extra time to build myself as a scholar and researcher, and I thrive under strong mentorship. I wanted to build my publication record and learn the ins and outs of grant writing. She provided me with several leads to postdoctoral opportunities and gave me helpful hints as to how to select the best opportunity for me.

Given a lead and surrounded with an incredibly supportive network, I began searching through the postdoctoral opportunities. The idea of taking up a faculty position made me nervous. I wanted the extra time to build myself and the access to strong mentorship. During that period of time, Dean Zayas asked me and a few other doctoral students to volunteer at a conference on substance use and Latinos. It was at that time that I met with Craig Field, the Co-PI on the research project I was a part of, and I learned about the possibility of a postdoctoral position. Through this postdoctoral position, I would have the opportunity to build my publication record with the data I had

helped to gather. In addition, I would benefit from mentorship in research, training to teach, and an opportunity to mentor undergraduate students towards a career in research. The opportunity to mentor undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds spoke to my heart. My advice to upcoming applicants is to take the first step forward and know that your support network will help you the rest of the way if you let them do so. Look at the bigger picture when selecting a postdoctoral picture and make sure it is the right fit for you in all aspects.

While I am enjoying the postdoctoral life, I aspire to begin my life as an independent researcher. I am in a position where I am surrounded by mentors that care about my future. I continue to enjoy mentorship with Yessenia Castro and have gained a mentor in Craig Field. Together with my mentors I am working towards building my experience in research so that I can independently manage my own research project and someday successfully secure my own grants. I see myself working in a research university and successfully applying for tenure. More importantly, I see myself inspiring other undergraduate students that dare to dream of careers in research, but don't necessarily know how to start. Remember to look for mentors that will build your confidence, inspire you, provide you opportunities, build your network, and arm you with the practical knowledge you'll need to find the right postdoctoral position for you. My final advice for upcoming applicants is to remember your journey and to build others in research by sharing your own story of struggle and triumph.



**Dr. Catalina Lopez-Quintero** is a medical doctor from Colombia with a PhD in Public Health from Israel. Currently she is an NIH post-doctoral fellow at the Department of

Epidemiology and Biostatistics at Michigan State University (MSU). Her journey as a scientist in the US is not a traditional journey and we have invited her to describe her experience and share some tips that could be helpful for other researchers like her.

### **How did you start doing research in the US?**

While completing my master studies in Public Health in Israel I applied for a travel award to attend a conference in the US, and that was a great opportunity to present my research and expose it to the scrutiny of renowned researchers who gave me their feedback and encouraged me to publish it. Their vote of confidence in my work was important for getting my first article published and conducting my research. Over the course of my doctoral studies I had the chance to present my work at multiple conferences, including the NIDA international forum, the College on Problems of Drug Dependence conference and the National Hispanic Scientific Network (NHSN) conference. These meetings were particularly relevant for developing my research career and building a network to work and collaborate with researchers in the US. For instance, during those meetings I got offered a position as a research scientist and a postdoctoral fellow.

**In your opinion what are the main challenges international researchers face in doing research in the US?**

It takes time to get to know how the academic and research systems work in the US and to learn to navigate through them. Finding someone who is willing to patiently guide you in the process is essential. In this regard I was fortunate to work with Professor Jim Anthony and help him coordinate the activities for the National Hispanic Science Network (NHSN) Early Career Stage Mentoring Program for NIDA Research (ECSM). This was a unique opportunity to learn together with the participating fellows about NIH funding opportunities for research and career development, as well as how to establish a functional relationship with mentors. I was also fortunate to be selected as one of the international fellows for the Interdisciplinary Research Training Institute on Hispanic Drug Abuse, which helped me to establish a network of colleagues and mentors interested in the same lines of research.

Being an international researcher in the US means gaining new identities and becoming a part of new communities. Being an international researcher means being an outsider. As a new immigrant, I identified with many of the problems faced by Latino immigrants. New surroundings and conditions, cultural differences, and language barriers, are just some of the challenges I face as an immigrant in the US. In the US I am no longer just Colombian. I am a “Latina” because I am seen as such, tagged along with others of Hispanic heritage under the same label which ignores geographic and cultural differences. Nonetheless, I experience more deeply the common grounds of

the Latin-American culture and the solidarity it brings with it. Organizations and communities such as the National Hispanic Science Network create a home for me as a researcher and as a Latina.

**Could you provide any advice to other international fellow scientists who would like to do research in the US?**

Identify potential mentors that can understand your research trajectory and who are willing to help you develop your career in the US or elsewhere. Attending conferences such as the NHSN meetings can help you find those mentors.

Volunteer in any activity (peer review, conference organizations and participation) that allows you to get to know other researchers and to navigate the academic and research systems in the US.

Identify colleagues that can help you to find professional opportunities and are willing to guide you in the process of acculturating to the research culture in the US.



**Francisco José Montero Bancalero, PhD** is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Osuna (Spain). He is also the Editor of Revista Adicción y Ciencia ([www.adiccionyciencia.info](http://www.adiccionyciencia.info)).

a.info).

**Describe your journey as an international scientist. How did you establish working relationships with other scientists?**

My journey as an international scientist from Spain to the United States has given me a great sense of satisfaction, both professional and personal. I have met important researchers in the field of addictions and they have enabled me to share ideas. I am pleased to have collaborated with Margarita Alegría and her *International Latino Research Partnership*; Ligia Chavez, from the University of Puerto Rico; Octavio Campollo and his journal *Anuario de Investigación en Adicciones*. At the same time, I have had the pleasure of strengthening my relationships with my peers in Spain, including Antonio Jesús Molina, Javier González Riera, Anna Robert and Claudia Morales. Thanks to all of them. Furthermore, I cannot neglect to say that, starting from this stimulating atmosphere for research, I have developed my own online Journal, *Revista Adicción y Ciencia* ([www.adiccionyciencia.info](http://www.adiccionyciencia.info)). I invite all concerned authors to submit their manuscripts to the email address: [fmontero@adiccionyciencia.info](mailto:fmontero@adiccionyciencia.info). The topic is addictions, with or without substance.

All of my journeys as an international scientist have been possible with the support of the National Hispanic Science Network and the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

**What would you say is the most important aspect of creating a network with other scientists who are in a different country?**

The primary aspect is to work together and join efforts, since working with researchers in different countries allows for the opportunity to enrich the definition of a problem in which we

are all interested. In the case of addictions, an international network provides a crucial setting to improve knowledge about this phenomenon because consideration of cultural factors determines a better understanding of this public health problem. I am not only talking about the substance, but also the user and his/her environment, where culture is include

**In your opinion, what is the most challenging aspect of creating and maintaining work relations with scientists who reside in a different country?**

The creation of working relationships is a gradual learning process influenced by the characteristics of the network to which you belong and the flow of interactions between its members. Overall, the relationships built must be maintained by reaching out to fellow researchers.

When a network's members come from different countries, this can be seen as an obstacle, but this can also provide an excellent opportunity to overcome limitations. Maybe the first steps are the hardest, but they are the most exciting. However, the medium term can be more disappointing because perhaps the expected results are still far away. At this moment, researchers have to be able to shoulder the delay of the goals.

Nowadays, new technologies allow us to be connected with each other and to have continuous access to information. There is no doubt about the importance of this tool for an international network. However, total dependency on these technologies is not recommended. Think about what happens when someone changes their email address. A phone call or a face to face meeting is always

necessary eventually. An international conference is also a great chance for researchers to chat to each other in the same place.

**Provide any advice to other fellow scientists. Share your story and any tips that you would like to offer.**

High doses of motivation, flexibility and the capacity for sacrifice are attitudes to develop. We are only human, so we have to prioritize because we can't attempt everything. A view from this perspective helps us to retain hope when results are delayed. Sometimes, it is difficult to reconcile personal and professional requirements. Therefore, we have to be flexible, proactive, and be able to find spaces for reflection. Working as a team is as crucial as maintaining channels of communication. Perseverance can be the key! Finally, I must offer thanks to El Faro for this invitation and the opportunity to share my voice.



**Irene Pericot-Valverde, MA** is a member of the Addictive Behaviors Research Group at the University of Oviedo (Spain). She completed her

bachelor's and master's degree at the University of Barcelona. She will be defending her dissertation early in 2016. Irene is also involved in several research projects and grants in the field of psychological treatment for nicotine dependence.

Since I started in research, it was in my personal and professional interest to reach out and connect with other researchers outside of my university. Over the last years, I have been

awarded four scholarships for interning abroad. In those internships I worked under the supervision of Dr. Patrick Bordnick at the University of Houston, Dr. Sudie Back at the Medical University of South Carolina, and Dr. Stephen Tiffany at the University at Buffalo-SUNY. Despite all of them being successful researchers that were busy, they were generous with their time and resources. They were always willing to share their wisdom, knowledge and expertise, and accepted me as another member of their research group. All of those internships were not only professional experiences but also personal experiences that pushed my thinking and helped me grow. Developing relationships with other scientists is a difficult and daunting task, especially when they are in another country. For this reason, I would like to offer some tips to help other fellow scientists.

There are several ways to start these relationships. One of the best ways is attending academic conferences. Conferences are a great place for networking and building contacts. Conferences provide an enriching experience that allows you to learn from the best professionals, get in touch with colleagues with whom you share scientific interests, and receive great feedback on the work you present. But just attending conferences is not enough, you have to make an effort to meet and build relationships with other researchers. Presenting your research is a good way to do this, since other researchers will often approach you to discuss your work. One thing that is important to do before a conference which helps you get to know other researchers and be known in academic circles is emailing people you want to meet. Do not hesitate to write to the big names in your field of interest. You will find that most of them will answer you.

Another way to develop relationships is using your existing relationships to meet other researchers. Your advisor or colleagues in your department may be able to introduce you to start relationships with other researchers. You will find that research is a small world where people are connected by less than six degrees of separation. Another resource that may be helpful to start networking with other researchers that have similar interests is to join scientific organizations like National Hispanic Science Network (NHSN). In addition, these organizations may be useful to early career scientists searching for mentoring or engagement opportunities in other research groups. Nowadays, professional networks such as ResearchGate, Academia or LinkedIn can also help with the opportunity to connect with other researchers that work in your field. However, you should keep in mind that those connections are weak and if you want to establish good relationships don't focus only on connecting solely via social media venues.

Establishing these relationships is just as important as building them. Doing an internship in another research group is an excellent way to develop strong relationships. During the internship, you can learn other approaches or recent advances in your field. It is important to be active, collaborative and of course help as much as you can. You need to keep in mind that only being at another university or research group is not enough, you must demonstrate that you are competent, hardworking, and despite your stay being temporary, you should take on some responsibilities. Before you finish the internship, you should also collaborate on a manuscript or a paper for a conference. Internships are expensive, especially when you want to go abroad. However, the benefits of the

experience gained justify the cost. Also, the cost of interning abroad can be covered partially or completely by scholarships and fellowships, in fact, there are a large number available.

Maintaining the relationships that you previously have established is also important. You should try to keep in touch regularly via e-mail or the professional networks mentioned above. But remember, the quality of these interactions is more important than the frequency. Instead of sending an e-mail every week saying "How are you doing?" you should contact when you have more important concerns. This does not mean you cannot ask how they are doing or let them know how you are doing. Just be aware that researchers have a lot of responsibilities and they have a limited amount of time. Also, collaborating and contributing to the field by publishing articles with those researchers provides you a great ways to make those relationships last and highlight your research to a broader audience. Finally, arranging to meet at conferences that you are planning to attend is also another perfect way to reconnect and plan future collaborations.

One important thing you need to do during all of this process is build a good reputation of yourself. In all the internships, conferences or meetings, try to be at your best. If you don't know how, it is easy, be the kind of researcher you would like to work with.

Based on my own experience, these are the top 10 tips on how to establish and maintain working relationships with colleagues who reside in a different country.

- Attend and participate in international conferences.
- Connect with people on ResearchGate, Academia, LinkedIn, and other social networks.
- Join associations like NHSN.
- Contribute to your research field.
- Contact the authors you are interested in.
- Apply for internships.
- Build a good reputation.
- Collaborate with overseas researchers.
- Keep in touch regularly with those researchers you had a good relationship and keep them informed of how you are doing.
- Maintain the quality of your relationships.



**Antonio Pascale-Prieto, MD** is an Associate Professor of Clinical Toxicology at the Department of Toxicology, School of Medicine,

University of the Republic, Montevideo, Uruguay.

**Describe your journey as an international scientist. How did you establish working relationships with other scientists?**

In my capacity as Associate Professor of Clinical Toxicology and medical toxicologist my activities are divided between teaching, research and care, and treatment of drug users. In the Department of Toxicology I teach medical students and those completing their post-graduate education in Toxicology. I am also involved in research projects that examine

clinical features in overdose and withdrawal syndrome, and complications related to cocaine and other stimulants, particularly in Hispanic cocaine base paste (CBP) users. I also study the toxic effects of drug consumption, with a special interest on adulterants, alcohol-drugs interactions, for drug dependence, particularly during pregnancy.

The toxicological assessment of clinical cases is often liable to be reported through publication in a national or international peer reviewed journal. Our research is based primarily on projects related to our daily clinical practice with drug users. This allows me to establish relationships with other researchers through communication of such cases, emerging drugs, new patterns of drug use and/or unusual clinical presentations.

I maintain a close relationship with other medical specialties (psychiatry, internal medicine, cardiology, neurology, pediatrics), as well as other professionals (psychologists, social workers, nurses). I believe that clinical practice is one of the greatest strengths of my work since this allows me to apply my clinical skills when I am planning and designing a clinical study.

**What would you say is the most important aspect of creating a network with other scientists who are in a different country?**

First, I consider that sharing my clinical experience with other researchers is important. I have been part of multicenter studies where the epidemiological context was different and the findings were interesting. For example, from a toxicological approach, the composition of a drug can vary according to different continents, regions and countries, and this may be decisive for establishing differences in clinical features or acute complications of drug abuse, and in the addictive properties of these drugs. The findings from this study may help design future studies in order to understand these variations and increase the evidence for a problem related to

drug use. Second, the contribution and expertise of researchers from other countries and specialties from other fields may also contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon of drug abuse.

**In your opinion, what is the most challenging aspect of creating and maintaining work relations with scientists who reside in a different country?**

In relation with clinical trials, one of the most challenging aspects that remains is having an adequate knowledge of epidemiological aspects related to drug use in the countries involved in these studies. This is most relevant when dealing with multicenter studies. These findings are based on national and international databases which become an important tool for the clinical investigator. These sources of information allow for a more general approach to history and a deeper understanding of the context in which the problem is installed. These aspects include prevalence of drug use, consumption patterns, beliefs of drug users in relation to consumption, reasons for consultation, as well as morbidity and mortality related to drug use in this context. Fortunately, we have fluid communication tools to design studies such as internet which provides the possibility of virtual meetings between researchers. Perhaps the most challenging aspect of maintaining working relationships with other researchers from different countries is to pursue common objectives related to studies according to the needs that arise in the communities where they reside.

**Provide any advice to other fellow scientists. Share your story and any tips that you would like to offer.**

I think the best advice for fellow scientists is to believe in their projects and create “solid roots” to take them forward. A proper knowledge of the history of the topic to study or work, and a

good choice of a mentorship for their work based on their skills and experience in the field, are essential for achieving good results. The presentation of scientific work in national and international meetings provides the possibility to know people working in the same field and to begin creating a network for future studies. Personally, I remember two instances that were of great learning for me in relation to the gaining of knowledge and the possibility of creating exchange networks for future work and research studies: the 2009 North American Congress of Clinical Toxicology in San Antonio, Texas, and the 2012 NIDA International Forum and CPDD meeting in Palm Springs, California. Working daily with drug users in an emergency department or in rehabilitation centers combined with my knowledge in epidemiology and methodology has given me the skills to work well with others. My experiences have given me the opportunity to work with researchers in different fields who share similar research objectives. For example, I live in a Latin American country and I work with Latin American people; however, I am currently working with researchers living in different countries, but their population of interest includes Hispanic communities.