

September 2013

2013 National Hispanic Science Network Speed Mentoring Luncheon

The purpose of "Speed Mentoring" is to provide an informal venue by which early career individuals (i.e. investigators, academics, etc.) receive career and/or personal advice from senior members in their profession. The concept is for mentees to have face time with someone in a similar profession who has been successful in their career trajectory. Typically the mentors are considered to be experts in their field and/or have experience in navigating challenges associated with specific situations/issues in their careers. Not only does this event serve as a mentoring mechanism but it facilitates an informal "networking" opportunity that otherwise may not be possible through other more traditional events. Overall, the idea of "speed mentoring" is for mentees to receive a quick but focused interaction with a mentor.

Guidelines

- Make sure to rotate seats when the timekeeper blows the whistle.
- Mentee should direct the conversation and interaction. No limits as to what can be discussed are placed. That is, mentees are able to discuss specific research related topics (i.e. specific aims, research mechanisms, elevator pitch) to more broad personal advice (i.e. how to balance a work and personal life, childrearing, etc.).
- Mentees are encouraged to seek advice or feedback on things that can feasibly be discussed during the allotted time that may be further discussed during additional networking events for the group.
- Mentees are encouraged to bring business cards to share with mentors.

Potential Questions for Mentors

Professional Career

1. What is something that you wish you would have known in transitioning from one career stage to another (i.e. grad student to post-doc or faculty)
2. What are the most important qualities that you look for in a potential job hire?
3. What advice would you give post-docs and early career faculty about negotiating start-up packages?
4. How do you decide whether to take a post-doc vs. tenure track position? What are the benefits/drawbacks to each?
5. How do I prepare myself for a competitive PhD program/Post-Doc position? What are some of the things faculty are looking for?
6. How do you handle authorship on papers?
7. What would be your primary advice for someone thinking of putting together an NIH application? What one thing would make that application successful
8. What lessons have you learned during your career that you think are the most important for me to know about in order to have a successful career as an NIH research scientist?
9. What are some characteristics you look for in a mentee?

Personal Career

1. How do you balance work and personal life?
2. How can a female job candidate handle inappropriate questions regarding her personal life (i.e. family, relationships children questions) when applying for jobs?
3. When is a good time to start a family?
4. What one specific challenge have you faced as a female in the job market? How did you overcome this obstacle?

Career Diva



Our Career Diva for this issue is **Cristina Mogro-Wilson, Ph.D.** As an Early Career Investigator, she has wisely avoided the fatal flaws of grant submission that Drs. Steffanie Strathdee and Thomas Patterson warn about in their presentation (see the article in this issue). We recently had the opportunity to talk with Dr. Mogro-Wilson about the strategies she has employed for securing research funding and the importance of exploring funding opportunities outside of the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Dr. Cristina Mogro-Wilson, is an Assistant Professor at the University of Connecticut in the School of Social Work. She teaches undergraduate courses in research methods and program evaluation and graduate courses in multivariate statistics I and II. Her research focuses on service delivery for children, youth, and at-risk populations at the organizational, state, and family level. Dr. Mogro-Wilson is interested in at-risk populations, including minority groups and substance using populations; she is also interested in the factors that promote resilience among these at-risk populations.

Could you share with us the research aims of your recently funded projects?

Currently, I have 2 funded research projects. I am co-PI on a federal grant from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Office of Adolescent Health (OAH), and Administration on

Children, Youth and Families (ACYF). The project title is "Teen Pregnancy Prevention through Responsible Fathering: A Randomized Controlled Trial of the FatherWorks Program." The FatherWorks Study is a randomized controlled community-based trial that is designed to reduce repeat fatherhood by providing motivation, opportunities and skills needed to change risk behavior. FatherWorks services include parenting education and individualized case management, behavioral health services, and educational and vocational support. Approximately half of our fathers are Hispanic and half are African American.

I am also the Principal Investigator (PI) of a second project titled "The Role of the Father in Puerto Rican Families," which is supported by a Dean's Research Award from the University of Connecticut. The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the important role in parenting that a father plays in Puerto Rican family life. This research explores the influence males play in parenting, and developing relationships with their child. We are conducting a series of focus groups in a highly dense Puerto Rican community in Hartford, CT.

How did you become interested in this research project? What experiences led you to investigating a teen pregnancy prevention intervention?

I am interested in these projects because of my work on parenting in Latino families. My focus is on strengthening Latino families and creating environments where children and youth can thrive. I am committed to focusing on resiliency for the Latino family by showing the strengths of the family, culture, and parenting practices among Latinos.

Could you share with us a little bit about how you got to where you are today? Did you have any mentors who helped you along the way?

While I was a doctoral student, a faculty member mentioned the NHSN summer research training institute, now known as the Interdisciplinary Research Training Institute (IRTI). I decided to wait until I was further along in my PhD program and applied once I had defended my proposal. I was a NHSN summer fellow in June of 2006 and I have gained so much from the interaction with NHSN mentors. I have had the opportunity to be funded to travel to NHSN meetings during my dissertation work and now as an Assistant Professor. These meetings have been incredibly valuable to me and my career.

In this issue of *El Faro*, we are discussing traditional grant mechanisms (e.g., R01, R03), but we would also like to highlight other avenues for research funding outside of NIH. Do you have any tips for early career faculty who are trying to navigate the system outside of NIH?

I would encourage early career investigators to search online for other funding opportunities that provide extramural funds outside of NIH (e.g., Department of Health and Human Services). These alternative funding opportunities could help to secure pilot data for a future application to the NIH. In addition, meeting with directors of institutes within your university can be extremely helpful. Often times, these individuals know of funding opportunities and announcements that may be in your interest area.

Are you collaborating with other researchers or organizations? How did you establish these collaborations? What challenges and benefits are there to collaborating with researchers from other fields who may have different terminologies and approaches?

One agency that I am collaborating with is the Institute for the Hispanic Family in Hartford, CT. I contacted them and asked to serve on their Board. This gave me a chance to interact with the director of the agency and to develop relationships, as well as staying current with

community issues. They have provided support to me in my research and allowed me access to the populations they work with.

What are your next steps for the future?

My next goal is to apply to NIDA for funding on a parenting intervention for Latino substance users.

Do you have any words of wisdom you would like to share with the NHSN early career members?

I think it is very important to find your passion and to continue to keep moving forward. Find people that can support you and keep you striving for more. Also, look for opportunities to make personal connections and friends along the way.

Featured Articles



Statement from Dr. Christina Lee to NHSN

Dr. Christina S. Lee (left) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Counseling and Applied Educational Psychology at Northeastern University, Bouvé College of Health Sciences. She has been a member of NHSN since 2012. In December 2012, Dr. Lee received a five-year R01 from NIAAA to compare the efficacy of two versions of motivational interviewing, one that has been culturally adapted to the needs and priorities of Latinos, and a second version that has not been adapted, within a large-scale randomized clinical trial. Project aims are to decrease alcohol consumption as well as alcohol-related negative consequences among Latinos. This project will also investigate acculturation stress as an influence on drinking behavior and

alcohol treatment response. Below she describes personal and professional experiences that led her to this area of research and offers tips for how to write a successful grant application.

I am committed to my research area, delivering state of the art, evidenced-based treatment to under-represented minority/immigrant groups to reduce risky health behaviors because of my personal history. As the daughter of first generation Asian immigrants, I witnessed and experienced many of the frustrations of not being in the "majority" group, saw how people of color use different strategies to cope in a new country, perceived the stresses of coming to a new country for families, and also appreciated inter and intra-group differences. Seeing how my parents and other people of color struggled made me want to use my work to give voice to them and to help to address their needs. When I worked as a substance abuse counselor in East Harlem, I saw how the burden of these stressors, often untended, culminated in visits to the hospital. Often, cross-cultural misunderstandings then negatively affected the quality of health care. I feel that such processes are common across groups. And the warmth, humanity, and resilience that I have witnessed in working with Latinos has not only been a heartening privilege, but one that has reminded me of my family's own process.

In 2012, I received a R01 (2012-2017) from NIAAA to deliver motivational interviewing in both Spanish and English, to Latinos who drink at hazardous levels. My co-Investigators and mentors include NHSN members Dharma Cortés, Joanna Almeida, Lynn Hernández, and Hortensia Amaro. It is the one of the first randomized clinical trials funded by NIAAA to compare two active treatments, culturally adapted to un-adapted Motivational Interviewing (MI). We recently completed a MI training with 15 excellent, enthusiastic bilingual clinicians. We

hope to improve clinical care through the primary aim and by investigating the role of acculturation stressors as an influence on drinking behavior and other substances of abuse. Since we are delivering the treatments in both languages, we can explore the effects of translation and the potentially additive effects of cultural adaptation. This information will help tailor future interventions. I am proud to say we are conducting this research at a primary care site that serves an 80% Latino population in Boston; the project site Investigator is Dr. Pablo Hernandez. I also am starting a program in Integrated Care at the primary care site to improve clinical care there, and we are focusing on training bilingual clinicians. Other research interests include: phone/computer-versions of MI, the use of MI for HIV+, and behavioral change mechanisms in addiction treatment.

My advice to those applying for grants would be: Persistence Pays Off. I have always been guided by one thing, and that is my feeling that commitment to something that might benefit others, transcends the daily struggle. I do try to remember that. Approach and accept help from people who could guide you on your path. If you write a grant, make the idea small to start. (It always grows.) Often times, first grants are ambitious and bursting with too many ideas. Keep in mind that reviewers are busy people and they want to understand one simple idea well in order to evaluate it properly.

Although clinical trials are hard work, one thing that has motivated me is the positive community response to our work. I have always admired the strong unity and welcoming attitude exemplified by Latino folks towards their communities, including outsiders.

I have the same observation about the Latino scholars who have generously shared their expertise and time with me, all in the spirit of improving care for the Latino community (and just because they are good souls): Steven R.

Lopez, who taught me the discipline of clarity and rigor in thinking about cultural adaptations, Raul Caetano, with his gentle expertise on alcohol epidemiology among Hispanics, Margarita Alegría, whose ability to connect rigorous empirical studies with public health policy was eye-opening, and Hortensia Amaro for inspiring me with her cutting-edge intervention work in the community and for how she utilizes the knowledge to make policy changes. Of course, I could not end this list without mentioning Dr. Judy Arroyo at NIAAA, whose combination of scientific expertise and commitment to health disparities research benefits us all. All have gone over and above to accommodate my growth as a researcher and scholar.

Drug and HIV Risk among Latino Immigrant Day Laborers by Dr. Nalini Negi

Nalini Negi, Ph.D. (above right) is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Maryland, Baltimore. The aim of her research is to advance science by: (1) identifying modifiable etiological factors associated with the substance abuse of Latino sub-migrant populations, such as day laborers and transmigrants (migrants who travel back and forth between nation-state borders), and (2) informing culturally-responsive prevention and interventions targeting under-served ethnic/racial minority populations. To this end, she has published 27 articles in peer-reviewed journals, one book chapter and has released two edited texts entitled, "Social work practice with transnational populations" and "Social work practice with Latinos: Key issues and emerging themes". Her work has been recognized through several awards including the NHSN's National Award for Excellence in Research by a New Investigator, National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) Mentoring Award for Early Career Social Work Substance Abuse Researchers, as well as the Exemplary Faculty of the Year (2012-13)

Award by the Student Government Association at the School of Social Work, University of Maryland, Baltimore.

My program of research has been compelled by the paucity of empirical research regarding the disparities in health and treatment access of ethnic/racial minority populations, specifically, emergent drug using populations such as Latino transmigrants (migrants who move back and forth between borders) and day laborers. The National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) reports that despite the grossly disproportionate impact of drug abuse in minority populations when compared to Whites, there is a lack of knowledge about the factors and mechanisms that heighten risk and ameliorate these consequences among Latinos. NIDA further reports that even less is known about the etiology of substance abuse among migrant Latino populations. This gap in research is especially glaring when considering extensive theoretical documentation regarding the risk factors and barriers this population experiences—such as poverty, cultural and language barriers, and fear of deportation—that render them vulnerable to diminished psychological well-being, physical health problems and substance abuse/dependence. Furthermore, research has found that the majority of Latino transmigrants and day laborers are male adults who are isolated from their families for extended periods of time and may be more likely to drink, use drugs and engage in risky sexual behavior. To this end, my research aims to elucidate the etiology and mechanisms that confer risk of substance abuse among this hidden and vulnerable population.

The process of seriously thinking about NIH funding first started for me when I was a doctoral student and attended the NHSN Summer Research Training Institute (SRTI) headed by Dr. Avelardo Valdez. I strongly believe that this was a defining moment in my academic trajectory. Before then, I knew I was interested in research

with Latino immigrants, but thinking back, my ideas lacked specificity and focus. Senior mentors such as Drs. Bryan Page, Alberto Mata, Alice Cepeda and Avelardo Valdez were instrumental in guiding my nascent thinking to the next level. They asked me the hard questions that I had not asked myself as well as offered ideas on how to increase the innovation and significance of my research. I was astounded by the level of commitment that such seasoned NIDA funded investigators had for all of the NHSN fellows and I made it a point to make sure that I maintained my end of the mentoring relationship. I asked Dr. Valdez to be on my dissertation committee; I consistently asked Drs. Page, Mata and Cepeda for their time during national conferences to discuss my ideas and I maintained contact with them throughout by informing them of any milestone events through my doctoral program. I strongly credit them for my success in obtaining dissertation funding from two sources (the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health and the NIDA Social Work Research Development Program at the University of Texas, Austin), receiving an Outstanding Dissertation Award, and top honors for a dissertation in social work by the Society for Social Work and Research.

As a new investigator today, the networks that I began to develop as a doctoral student have continued to be invaluable. I recently received an R03 from NIDA to study drug and HIV risk among Latino immigrant day laborers in Baltimore. The emphasis of this study is on how the context of a new immigrant settlement (Baltimore) as well as individual and migration factors impact the drug use patterns of three groups of Latino immigrant day laborers: premigration drug initiators (current drug users who initiated use before migration), postmigration drug initiators (current drug users who initiated use in the U.S.) and non-drug users (no drug use in the last year). We are very excited about this study as this is one of the first studies,

to our knowledge, that directly examines the distinct patterns of drug use among those who initiate drug use premigration versus those who initiate use in the United States. Further, we believe that comparing patterns of use between these three groups will help identify distinct risk and protective factors that will have implications for interventions. This study received an impact score of 10. I have no doubt that this is largely attributable to the input and guidance I received from Drs. Valdez, Cepeda, Page and Anthony. These mentors not only provided me with input on my initial conceptualization but also read through my summary statements and gave me advice on how to address reviewer comments based on their experience with review committees. As a new investigator it can be difficult to "read between the lines" of a summary statement and to know how to address sometimes conflicting comments. Consultation with people who have a strong record of funding is then essential in preparing a response.

I firmly believe that the NHSN is an incredible network for both beginning and seasoned investigators. It offers an opportunity to network and brainstorm with some of the best and brightest minds in Latino drug research. I highly recommend those that are new to the network to be persistent in their efforts to connect with senior investigators as well as maximize the myriad opportunities available through the network.

Members in the Spotlight

Seth J. Schwartz, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Public Health Sciences in the Division of Prevention Science and Community Health, has been awarded a \$2.5 million, five-year grant from the NIH's National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism to test the validity of a two-question screening survey designed to identify underage drinking among children and teenagers.

"Underage drinking is a huge problem in the United States," said Schwartz, principal investigator of the Miami study, who noted that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports more than 5,000 teenagers die from automobile accidents each year, nearly half of which involve alcohol. "This study will evaluate the usefulness of the screening instrument in predicting alcohol problems in early adolescence, and by combining the student cohorts, will allow us to predict negative alcohol-related consequences up to seven years later." Read the entire article here.

Guillermo "Willy" Prado, Ph.D., Director of the Division of Prevention Science and Community Health, was recently promoted to Full Professor at the University of Miami Miller School Of Medicine in the Department of Public Health Sciences.

Dr. Prado has also recently accepted an invitation from the NIH-funded National Hispanic Science Network (NHSN) to serve on its National Steering Committee. "It's an honor to have been selected to serve on an organization that has done so much to foster the development of the next generation of early-career scientists working to reduce and eliminate Hispanic health disparities," said Prado, who inaugurated his leadership role at the 2013 Bi-Annual Steering Committee Meeting February 28-March 1 in New Orleans. "I, myself, was trained and mentored by the senior leadership of the NSHN, and I am grateful to be able to give back to the organization in this new capacity." Read the entire article here.

Charles Martinez, Ph.D., Associate Professor at the University of Oregon in the College of Education, has received two grants: an R24 from the National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) and a grant from the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (a German non-governmental

association) to improve the health and outcomes of Latino families in the US and Central America.

"Both of these projects are the result of more than 15 years of our work with Latino families in Oregon and beyond," said Martinez. "Our center activities are focused on partnering with communities to develop and carry out research and programs aimed at harnessing protective strengths that improve family health and well-being within populations that that have been underserved by educational, health, and social service systems. Both of these projects allow us to do just that in very different contexts." Read the entire article here.

Erick Guerrero, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Social Work at the University of Southern California, was awarded a NIDA R21-R33 titled "Organizational Capacity to Eliminate Outcome Disparities under Healthcare Reform" to examine Mental health and HIV prevention service integration in substance abuse treatment and its impact on access and retention among racial and ethnic minorities.

Dr. Guerrero was also awarded a grant from LA county titled "Evaluating Cultural Competence Service Delivery in the Los Angeles County System of Substance Abuse Treatment" to examine the translation and implementation of culturally responsive practices among providers in L.A. County.

Guerrero G. E. (in press). Enhancing Access and Retention in Substance Abuse Treatment: The Role of Medicaid Payment Acceptance and Cultural Competence. Drug and Alcohol Dependence, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2013.04.005>

Guerrero, G. E., Marsh, J. C., Khachikian, T., Amaro, H., & Vega, W. A. (in press). Disparities in Latino substance use, service utilization and treatment outcomes: Implications for implementation of culturally-informed and

evidence-based interventions under health care reform. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2013.07.027>

Guerrero, G. E., Marsh, J. C., Duan, L., Oh, C, Perron, B., & Lee, B. (in press). Between and within racial and ethnic group disparities in completion of substance abuse treatment. *Health Service Research*, doi: 10.1111/1475-6773.12031

Melissa Torres, MSW, Graduate Research Assistant at Center for Drug and Social Policy Research at the University of Houston and Co-founder of the Latin American Initiative at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work has been honoured by the US Congress for her presentation at the US Department of Labor Women's Bureau Conference, and has served as a delegate to the UN Commission on the Status of Women for the last three years.

Merrill Singer, Ph.D., Senior Research Scientist at the Center for Health and Intervention and Prevention Professor in the Department of Anthropology at University of Connecticut has several recent publications.

Nnenna Weathers, Pamela Erickson and Merrill Singer. Condom use among at-risk African American young adults. *Journal of AIDS and HIV Research* 6(32):2400-2407, 2013.

Pamela Erickson, Louise Badiane, and Merrill Singer. The Social Context and Meaning of Virginity Loss among African American and Puerto Rican Youth in the Inner City. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* (in press), 2013.

Merrill Singer, Nicola Bulled and Bayla Ostrach. Syndemics and Human Health: Implications for Prevention and Intervention. *Annals of Applied Anthropology* 36(2):205-211, 2013.

Zita Lazzarini, Carol Galletly, Eric Mykhalovskiy, Dini Harsono, Elaine O'Keefe, Merrill Singer, and Robert J. Levine. Criminalization of HIV

Transmission and Exposure: Research and Policy Agenda. *American Journal of Public Health* 103(8):1350-1353, 2013.

Merrill Singer, William Tootle and Joy Messerschmidt. Living in an Illegal Economy: The Small Lives that Create Big Bucks in the Global Drug Trade. *School of Advanced International Studies Review of International Affairs (SAIS Review)* 33(1): 121-133, 2013.

Merrill Singer, Bayla Ostrach, and Jacqueline Evans. "Pharmapatienthood": The Patient Constructed in Direct-to-Consumer Drug Advertising. *Anthropology* 1(1):101 doi:10.4172/antp.1000101, 2013
Marion Carter, Linda Hock-Long, Joan Marie Kraft, Dare Henry-Moss, Kendra Hatfield-Timajchy, and Merrill Singer. Strategies for managing the dual risk of STIs and unintended pregnancy among Puerto Rican and African American young adults. *American Journal of Public Health* 102(3):449-456, 2012.

Merrill Singer. Anthropology and Addiction: An Historic Review. *Addiction* 107(10): 1745-1755, 2012.

Bayla Ostrach and Merrill Singer. At Special Risk: Biopolitical Vulnerability and HIV Syndemics Among Women. *Health Sociology Review* 21(3):258-271, 2012.

Linda Hock-Long, Dare Henry-Moss, Marion Carter, Kendra Hatfield-Timajchy, Pamela Erickson, Amy Cassidy, Mark Macaуда and Merrill Singer. Condom Use with Serious and Casual Heterosexual Partners: Findings from a Community Venue-based Survey of Young Adults. *AIDS and Behavior* 17(3):900-913, 2013.

Melanie Domenech Rodriguez, Ph.D. was promoted to Full Professor at Utah State University.

Hortensia Amaro, Ph.D., Dean's Professor of Social Work and Preventive Medicine and Associate Vice Provost for Community Research

Initiatives at the University of Southern California received the Ernest R. Hilgard Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Psychological Association's Society for General Psychology at the association's annual meeting in August.

Dr. Amaro has also recently co-authored 4 peer-reviewed publications and was an invited panelist and keynote speaker at the American Psychological Association Convention, Honolulu, Hawaii, August 2013.

Dr. Amaro was recently appointed to the Institute of Medicine, Committee on the Assessment of Resiliency and Prevention Programs for Mental and Behavioral Health in Service Members and their Families.

Wallis, F., Amaro, H., & Cortes, D. (2012). *Saber es Poder: The cultural adaptation of a trauma intervention for Latina women*. In G. Bernal & M. Domenich Rodriguez (Eds.), *Cultural adaptations: Tools for evidence-based practice with diverse population*. Washington, DC: APA Press.

Ulibarri, M.D., Raj, A., & Amaro, H. (2012). *Love, sex and power revisited: The integration of a gendered context in HIV prevention among Latinas*. In K. Organista (Ed.), *HIV prevention with Latinos: Theory, research, and practice*. Oxford University Press.

Guerrero, E.G., Marsh, J.C., Khachikian, T., Amaro, H. & Vega, W.A. (2013). *Disparities in Latino substance use, service use, and treatment: Implications for culturally and evidence-based interventions under health care reform*. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*. Available on line: DOI information: 10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2013.07.027.

Amaro, H. & Escobar, S., Koh, M., Nieves, R.L. (2013). *The neurobiology of addiction: An educational group curriculum for women and men in recovery from addiction*. Institute on Urban Health Research, Northeastern University

and Boston Public Health Commission, Boston, MA.

Invited Panelist, *Living History: A Celebration of the 40th Anniversary of the Committee on Women in Psychology*, American Psychological Association Convention, Honolulu, Hawaii, August 2013.

Invited Panelist, *Why you should consider becoming a journal editor*. Sponsored by the Division of the Psychology of Women and the Committee on Women, American Psychological Association Convention, Honolulu, Hawaii, August 2013.

Keynote Address, *Hilgard Lifetime Achievement Award: Role of Community Context in Mental Health and Addiction Research: Implications for Psychology*. American Psychological Association Convention, Honolulu, Hawaii, August 2013.

Victoria Ojeda, Ph.D. was appointed as UC San Diego's Campus Director for the UC multi-campus MS degree program in Global Health

Ian Mendez, Ph.D. was awarded a Postdoctoral Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Awards (F32) earlier this year by NIDA.

Dr. Lourdes Baezconde-Garbanati, Dr. Sheila Murphy at the University of Southern California and a multidisciplinary team of co-investigators received the George Mason University 2013 DC Health Communication Conference Top Research Presentation Award for their research comparing narrative versus non-narrative health messages in reducing cancer-related health disparities in knowledge, attitudes and behaviors.

Miryam Gerdine will be presenting a poster titled "Examining the Impact of Health Information Technology (HIT) in Latino Communities" at Evaluation 2013, October 16-19, in Washington, D.C.

Rafael Perez-Figueroa will presenting his scientific work during the American Public

Health Association 141st Annual Meeting and Exposition taking place November 2-6. He will be conducting 2 oral presentations:

"Acceptability of pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV prevention among young men who have sex with men in New York City: Attitudes and perceptions" scheduled for session 5173.0, PrEP and HIV prevention on Wednesday, November 6, 2013 at 12:30 PM.

"Acculturation as a correlate for unprotected sex among Puerto Rican drug users in New York City" scheduled for session 3047.0, The role of contextual and cultural factors on substance use, violence, and sexual risks on Monday, November 4, 2013 at 8:30 AM.

Jason Burrow-Sanchez recently published a book called "ADAPT: Advancing Decision Making and Problem Solving for Teens)"

ADAPT (Advancing Decision Making and Problem Solving for Teens) is a small-group intervention for middle and high school students who are at risk for substance use, aggression, truancy, and poor school performance.

Marisela Agudelo, Ph.D., a Postdoctoral Fellow at Florida International University's College of Medicine, recently received a K99 award titled "EtOH-induced Immunomodulation: Role of Histone Deacetylases and Cannabinoid Genes"

Christina Lee, Ph.D., an Associate Professor at Northeastern University's Institute on Urban Health Research, has received R01 funding to deliver culturally adapted motivational interviewing to heavy drinking latinos (NIAAA). Her co-investigators include NHNS members Dharma Cortes, Joanna Almeida and Hortensia Amaro.

José Szapocznik, Ph.D., Professor and Chair of Public Health Sciences at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, is ranked among the top NIH-funded investigators, making him the third highest funded public health investigator in

the world and No. 100 out of more than 36,000 investigators in all fields worldwide.

Cristina Mogro-Wilson, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Social Work at the University of Connecticut, has received 4 grants/awards.

Federal Grant, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) and Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF). "Teen Pregnancy Prevention through Responsible Fathering: A Randomized Controlled Trial of the FatherWorks Program." Co-PI: Cristina Mogro-Wilson, Ph.D., & Co-PI: Judith Fifield, Ph.D., 2013-2015, total funding is approximately \$4.2 million over 5 years, with UConn Health Center/UConn SW receiving approximately \$975,000 over 5 years to conduct the evaluation.

University of Connecticut, School of Social Work, Dean's Research Award. "The Role of the Father in Puerto Rican Families", PI: Cristina Mogro-Wilson, Ph.D., funded 1 year from April 2013-March 2014, total funding \$5,000.

Private Agency Grant, Archdiocese Drug Abuse Prevention Program (ADAPP) of New York. "Evaluation of mutual aid group work for substance abuse prevention and treatment for youth in Bronx, N.Y." PI: Joan Letendre, Research Methodologist: Cristina Mogro-Wilson, Ph.D., funded August 2011-2013.

Private Agency Grant, Lesbian Health Fund. "Predictors of Hazardous Drinking, Depression, and Suicidality among Sexual Minority Women" PI: Cheryl Parks, Statistical Methodologist: Cristina Mogro-Wilson, Ph.D., funded August 2011-2013.

Monica Ulibarri, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California, San Diego, was recently awarded a pilot grant from NIH to examine risk factors for commercial sexual exploitation (sex trafficking) of adolescent girls in San Diego County.

Dr. Ulibarri was also awarded an Academic-Community Partnership Pilot Grant from UC San Diego Health Sciences, Clinical and Translational Research Institute and received the APA Minority Fellowship Program Early Career Award for distinguished contributions to the field of racial and ethnic minority psychology through research at the 2013 American Psychological Association Annual Convention in Honolulu, HI.

Ulibarri, M.D., Hiller, S.P., Lozada, R., Rangel, G.M., Stockman, J.K., Silverman, J.G., Ojeda, V.D. (2013). Prevalence and characteristics of abuse experiences and depression symptoms among injection drug-using female sex workers in Mexico. *Journal of Environmental and Public Health*, 2013, 11. doi: 10.1155/2013/631479. <http://www.hindawi.com/journals/jep/2013/631479/>

McDougal, L., Strathdee, S.A., Rangel, G., Martinez, G., Vera, A., Sirotnin, N., Stockman, J.K., Ulibarri, M.D., Raj, A. (2013). Adverse pregnancy outcomes and sexual violence among female sex workers who inject drugs on the US-Mexico border. *Violence and Victims*, 28(3), 496-512.

Rolon, M.L., Syvertsen, J.L., Robertson, A.M., Rangel, G.M., Martinez, G., Ulibarri, M.D., Servin, A., Strathdee, S.A. (2013). The influence of having children on HIV-related risk behaviors of female sex workers and their intimate male partners in two Mexico-U.S. border cities. *Journal of Tropical Pediatrics*, 59(3), 214-219.

Robertson, A.M., Syvertsen, J.L., Martinez, G., Rangel, G.M., Palinkas, L.A., Stockman, J.K., Ulibarri, M.D., Strathdee, S.A. (2013). Acceptability of vaginal microbicides among female sex workers and their intimate male partners in two Mexico-U.S. border cities: a mixed methods analysis. *Global Public Health*, 8(5), 619-633.

Virmarie Correa Fernandez, Ph.D., completed her postdoctoral fellowship at the Department

of Health Disparities Research at MD Anderson and was promoted to Instructor on Sept. 1, 2013.

Lisbeth Iglesias-Rios, MA, MPH, a predoctoral candidate in the University of Michigan's Department of Epidemiology in the School of Public Health, was highlighted by the University of California, San Francisco UCSF- Legacy Tobacco Documents Library for her recent publication.

Iglesias, L., & Parascandola, M. (2013). A Historical Review of R. J. Reynolds' Strategies for Marketing Tobacco to Hispanics in the United States. *American Journal of Public Health*. May 2013, Vol. 103, No. 5, pp. e15-e27.

New Member Interviews

Jodi Berger Cardoso, PhD
Research Scientist Member



Dr. Jodi Berger Cardoso is an Assistant Professor in the Graduate College of Social Work at the University of Houston.

Why did you decide to join the NHSN?

I joined NHSN so that I could network and collaborate with interdisciplinary researchers who are committed to improving the health and well-being of Latino immigrants and their children. As a junior faculty member, I have still a great deal to learn about the research process and hope that NHSN will allow me to connect with researchers in various stages of their career.

When and why did you become interested in Hispanic health research?

During graduate school, I received training in health disparities while working on an R01 funded by the National Institute on Child Health and Development. The study identified factors that influence the health and development of Mexican American children from birth through age 5. My interest in this area started while I was a Peace Corps Volunteer (1999-2002) in Santo Domingo, Ecuador-serving in the Children and Youth Services At-Risk Program and as a clinician working with Latino immigrants and their children in New York and Houston.

What is your ultimate dream in terms of your career? Have you already accomplished this?

It is well documented that risk does not occur in isolation. Rather, it is both the accumulation and the specific combination of risk factors that challenge healthy development and social functioning. My ultimate career goal is to apply the knowledge that I have gained from community and epidemiological data towards the development of a multi-risk prevention approach that focuses on reducing the migration and acculturation stressors that impact behavioral health outcomes in Latino immigrants and their children.

What is the most important lesson you learned as a graduate student?

In graduate school I learned to approach deadlines in a steady and consistent manner. I also actively engage my peers and mentors in each step of the research process. I find that this pushed me to think outside of my own comfort zone and approach social problems from a more dynamic perspective.

What do you do for fun?

While I love to travel and dance salsa, my favorite activities are those I do with my 2.5- year old daughter, Audrey Karina.

Irma Cisneros
Graduate Student Member



Irma Cisneros is a Graduate Student in Biomedical Sciences at University of North Texas Health Science Center.

Why did you decide to join NHSN?

As a graduate student it is important for me to be involved in organizations where I can communicate my love for science with other researchers and students who share the same passion. Fortunately, the area I currently work in is relevant to the research that many individuals participate in, who are members of NHSN.

When and why did you become interested in Hispanic health research?

I have always been interested in Hispanic health research however; I have recently attended health disparities conferences with emphasis on Hispanic health problems ranging from cancer, diabetes and HIV/drug abuse. As a Hispanic myself, it is important for me to engage in research that can help make advancements in this particular field.

Briefly describe your current line of research.

I am currently working on evaluating synergistic effects of METH abuse and HIV-1 CNS infection on primary human astrocytes in the context of METH-associated transient hyperthermia. Identification of a METH receptor in astrocytes is imperative in the evaluation of its downstream effects. Currently I have identified astrocyte

TAAR1 as a potential therapeutic target for METH that is regulated following METH and HIV-1ADA treatment.

What is your ultimate dream in terms of your career? Have you already accomplished it?

As long as I can remember I have wanted to work with tropical and emerging diseases. Working on my dissertation has allowed me the opportunity to work with infectious diseases including HIV-1. However, recently I have come to realize that many illnesses are in my family that includes a plethora of autoimmune disorders such as multiple sclerosis, lupus and inflammatory bowel disorders. While I would like to continue virology research, I would also like to learn more about autoimmune disorders in the Hispanic population.

What is the most important lesson you learned as a graduate student?

Patience! Things seldom work the first time and troubleshooting is commonly needed. I have also learned that what seems like a mistake may actually lead you into a new direction therefore as a researcher you need to be open-minded and willing to think outside the box. You need to be creative.

What do you do for fun?

As a graduate student I have learned that time is precious commodity. I have a husband and three young children. I spend my time away from the lab with my children and am eager to encourage them to live a healthy and active lifestyle. We go to movies, ride our bikes, involved in running 5Ks and spend time doing art and crafts.

**Miryam Gerdine, MPH
Research Partner**



Miryam Gerdine is a Management Analyst for the Office of Legislation at the US DHHS Health Resources and Service Administration.

Why did you decide to join the NHSN?

This Winter, I'm applying to doctoral programs and I was looking for a collegial, supportive and inspiring group of Latino scientist, researchers to keep me motivated. Also, in 2006, while still completing my graduate degree, I was very fortunate to be selected a NHSN Fellow, so I was very familiar with the high quality of science produced by the members.

When and why did you become interested in Hispanic health research?

My interest in research started in graduate school and specifically interested in Community-Based Participatory Research. While in graduate school, I studied the principles and completed literature reviews on how Latinos have and have not been engaged in CBPR. For the last, eight years, I have volunteered at a community clinic www.proyectosalud.org and hope for future CBPR opportunities with the clinic.

Briefly describe your current line of research.

My current line of research is in how we can use technology (Electronic Health Records, mobile health; tele-health among others) to eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities. My most recent publication is the "Understanding the

Impact of Health Information Technology in Underserved Communities and those with Health Disparities," a congressionally mandated report which I served as the HRSA Government Task Lead.

What is your ultimate dream in terms of your career? Have you already accomplished this?

My dream is to complete my doctoral degree and to continue contributing to the science of how we work with the Latino community to improve the health of Latinos. I also dream of being a positive role model in academia and providing senior leadership to strengthen and build the Latino health workforce. My first assignment at HHS (1996) was working on the Healthy People 2000 Progress review on Hispanic Americans, and since then I feel like each year, I make small contributions to the science but now being a member of the NHSN and taking action towards obtaining a doctoral degree-my dreams are just getting bigger. Gracias NHSN for this very positive support.

What is the most important lesson you learned as a graduate student?

Planning ahead and time management. Graduate school is intense especially if you're in the quarter system; the weeks go by very fast. Make schedules and divide up your work; also let your ego step aside and seek out help from your peers or TAs. I had a study group for my Biostatistics courses.

What do you do for fun?

A good friend from Nicaragua introduced me to yoga in 2005. Since then I have been an addict of yoga. One of my favorite poses is the Triangle Pose. It makes me feel so good and happy. Yoga helps me to relieve stress. My parents and now husband always know when I have not practiced. In our first year of marriage, my same friend led a partner yoga class and my husband joined me. □I was also very lucky to practice with my sister

in Costa Rica for a week long yoga vacation at Pura Vida.

**Christine Spadola, MS, LMHC
Graduate Student**



Christine Spadola is a Doctoral Student in Florida International University's Robert Stempel College of Public Health and Social Work.

Why did you decide to join the NHSN?

I was fortunate enough to be selected as a fellow for the 2013 Interdisciplinary Research Training Institute (IRTI) that I heard about through Dr. Bryan Page and Dr. Mario De La Rosa. Joining the NHSN was the next natural step after participating in such an educational and amazing training.

When and why did you become interested in Hispanic health research?

I grew up in a rural, homogenous area of NJ and moved to Miami for college. (By the way, there really are rural areas of NJ that aren't near an exit; I promise!) Being surrounded by such rich diversity since the age of 17 was one of the best learning experiences I could have been afforded. Having been involved in intervention and health research in Miami since 2002, I quickly became aware of how one's culture and environment can shape many risk and protective factors. Hispanic/Latinos are the largest minority group in the U.S. Thus, Hispanic health research is

integral in developing effective, culturally tailored and culturally appropriate interventions.

Briefly describe your current line of research.

I am currently researching alcohol use disorders among racially and ethnically diverse young adults who had bariatric surgery. More specifically, I am looking at predictors of problematic drinking post-surgery such as pre-surgical food addiction, and co-morbid mental health conditions like depression and anxiety.

What is your ultimate dream in terms of your career? Have you already accomplished this?

I would love to be able to have a faculty position at a university where I am able to conduct research and also work with students. I also would love to maintain a small private psychotherapy practice. I think all three are rewarding, and the combination of all three would be especially fulfilling.

No- I have not accomplished this just yet!

What advice would you give to a fellow graduate student on how to handle stress?

Be easy on yourself. We are often our own worst critic. While it's helpful to have an internal motivator that makes you push harder each time, it's also important to recognize your accomplishments (however small or insignificant they may seem). The basics also apply even more when faced with stress-- ample sleep, exercise and proper nutrition. Most importantly, I would advise graduate students to surround themselves with positive people and to remember to laugh often.

What do you do for fun?

Travel. I try to save up for one big trip per year. I'm about to hike the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu with my friend from 5th grade!

Tariana Little
Graduate Student



Tariana Little is a Doctoral Student in the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences at University of Massachusetts Medical School.

Why did you decide to join the NHSN?

I applied to join the National Hispanic Science Network because of a personal and professional mission to collaborate across disciplines to achieve positive health outcomes for all Latinos. I was also supported to apply to NHSN by one of its members, Dr. Steven R. López, who led the NIMHD Minority Health and Health Disparities International Research Training Program's Latino Mental Health Research Training fellowship of which I was part in 2011.

When and why did you become interested in Hispanic health research?

I discovered research three and a half years ago at the University of Massachusetts Boston, when my advisor approached me to be a research apprentice on his study investigating spirituality and cancer-related health. During the summer, I interviewed and translated for Spanish-speaking women seeking breast cancer screening in a hospital-led, church-based intervention in East Boston. Witnessing the various factors affecting health, I was both curious and confused. Research became personal that fall semester when, upon taking a course on ethnographic inquiry, I conducted qualitative interviews with

Latinas (n=9) on their perceptions of mental health. I had witnessed mental illness in my family and had always wondered why medication was preferred over therapy, and why my aunt's schizophrenia was seen as a disability bordering on infirmity. In my interviews participants spoke about stigma and lack of education about mental illness in the Latino community, as well as the prevalence of depression and the myriad reasons for poor mental health outcomes. This project was influential to the direction of my education because it provided the opportunity to merge a personal passion with a professional interest. I developed this project into my honors thesis and presented at the 2011 Massachusetts Statewide Undergraduate Research Conference. A year later, I reframed my work by applying principles of community health and social determinants of health, and I was awarded the 2012 UMass Boston Kingston-Mann Student Research Awards for Excellence in Diversity/Inclusion Scholarship.

Briefly describe your current line of research.

I am currently a research assistant on a NIH-funded, large prospective study that uses an ecological framework to examine the impact of culturally specific sources of stress and resources on mental health services utilization among Latinos in Lawrence, MA. This project allows me the meaningful opportunity to study mental health and draw upon community-based participatory research with a greatly understudied population that is also of my heritage, the Dominican community. Additionally, this work will inform my doctoral dissertation.

What is your ultimate dream in terms of your career? Have you already accomplished this?

For me, research is a way to solve real-life problems and positively shape the future of my community. I aspire to become a multidisciplinary, independent scientist and professor with strong connections to the

community and government agencies. Knowing how transformative education has been in my life, it is also my mission to teach and empower minority students. My current epidemiologic doctoral work at the University of Massachusetts Medical School is a foundation towards developing a multifaceted career trajectory of research on Latino health promotion. In 2012, by the time I graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, I had been fortunate to be part of several collaborative research projects, present at national conferences, participate in competitive national and international health disparities research training programs, and collaborate on a published article. Every day I am living my ultimate dream: being meaningfully challenged, surpassing or reaching my goals, and discovering new ones.

What is the most important lesson you learned as a graduate student?

As the first in my family to go to college, the most important lesson I have learned as a graduate student is to have confidence in myself. This means taking ownership of and respecting my identity and abilities. Graduate school tested my self-confidence; my first semester was a dark period. Immediately I was anxious because I felt like I had to always prove myself. I went from being one of the best students in my university, surrounded by supportive faculty and friends, to entering a different world. At the most fundamental level this transition brought me back to my experience as a METCO student in Massachusetts: a school far from home, classmates with different, more privileged life experiences, and a chance at serious education. My background fits those of the populations under study, and I am not only the youngest student, but also the only Latina, in my program. Oftentimes I felt alone, isolated. Not even family could help.

Taken together, this new situation impacted my confidence and subsequently my perceived competence. In class I would keep quiet, second-guess my answers, and not participate as much. But it was comforting to realize that I am not the only student to ever feel this way in graduate school. My friends who are also in competitive schools and are some sort of "minority" in their programs have felt this way too. By the second semester, I did very well academically and felt more confident in my skills.

What is the most important quality you look for in a mentor?

What I find most important in mentorship is the professional-personal dynamic that can characterize it. Everyone has a reason, motive or mission for carrying out health disparities research, and I enjoy learning about my mentor's background. Moreover, I value being able to open up about my life, fears and fantasies alike. It makes me feel like I am being treated as a whole person.

Where do you see yourself five years from now?

To predict the next five years, I would have to reflect on the past five. In 2008, I was just starting community college and had vague ideas about life goals and what to do with a social science degree. A "PhD" was not even in my vocabulary. Since then, through supportive mentors and extraordinary opportunities, life options have widened for me. The path I am pursuing today, I never knew was possible because five years ago, I never knew it existed. Thus, five years from now I will certainly have my PhD and may likely be fulfilling dreams I have not yet begun to see.

What is your cultural background and how did it influence your choice of career and/or research area?

Despite the rapid growth of Latinos, and the projection that by 2050, a quarter of the US population will be Latino, the current state of

research on Latinos is grossly under-developed. This presents a challenge to policy, academia, and public health, but a critical opportunity to intervene. My experience as a research assistant in diverse projects has allowed me to study issues affecting Latino subgroups: cancer screening among Central Americans in East Boston, MA; depression among indigenous women in Mexico; parent-adolescent sexual health communication among Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in Springfield, MA; cancer care among in Vieques, Puerto Rico; and mental health among Dominicans in Lawrence, MA. These experiences have been enriching because they exposed me to the shared struggles of US Latinos but also their specific realities. To me, this knowledge is critical to cross-cultural collaborations among Latino researchers. As the daughter of Dominican and German immigrant parents, my background as a biracial, bicultural young woman who has steadfastly worked to improve the conditions of my life and of those around me places me in a unique role to better understand the people with whom I seek to work.

What advice would you give to a fellow graduate student on how to handle stress?

First, know that graduate studies and stress are inextricable. Second, be relieved to know that that stress is manageable. Although it feels like every move is critical and that we must know everything all the time, in reality we are students and are not expected to be experts (yet!). Take deep breaths. Find friends and family you can confide in; share with them your successes and failures. Write out your feelings. Listen to your favorite music. Remember that a dissertation is not a magnum opus, but an entry passport. Sometimes we stress over papers and deadlines, forgetting that our disciplines are esoteric and that humanity faces much larger issues. Lastly, never forget how far you have come. If you survived all that, you can survive graduate school!

What do you do for fun?

I like to watch documentaries on just about anything, from the prison industrial complex to food policy to wildlife. Reading and writing have always been life passions; I love creativity with words. I also enjoy eating, be it exploring restaurants or hosting brunches or dinner parties. Luckily my husband is a musician, so going to live music shows is always on the agenda.

Julie Levison, MD, MPhil, MPH
Research Scientist Member



Julie Levison is an Instructor at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital.

Why did you decide to join the NHSN?

My faculty advisor, Dr. Hortensia Amaro, introduced me to the NHSN and encouraged me to apply for membership. I read about the diversity of interests of the members and mechanisms for support through NHSN, so I thought the NHSN would be an ideal forum for academic interchange with peers and mentors also working in health disparities and Hispanic health research as well as a source of collaborations and mentorship.

When and why did you become interested in Hispanic health research?

As a college student, I volunteered at Maria de los Santos, a community-based health clinic in North Philadelphia that serves a predominantly Latino community. In working with patients, I

witnessed the challenges and complexities of life in an urban, resource-limited setting. There were challenges related to poverty, such as access to health care and insurance, substance abuse, violence/trauma, and low educational attainment. Language barriers and cultural disconnect from the medical system exacerbated these challenges. After college and before medical school, I spent two years at Oxford University pursuing a thesis-based master's degree in history. This opportunity gave me an invaluable historical perspective on public health particularly with respect to the US-Puerto Rico relationship. In my thesis, I examined leprosy control in Puerto Rico just as the US annexed the island to understand the factors that influenced public health policies towards a highly stigmatized condition. I also recovered archival material from patients who wrote about the experience of forced isolation. That approach of understanding the larger context of roots of disease while trying to uncover the patient/human perspective is what I have tried to carry forward with my work. With that foundation, I went into medical training and since then have been focused on HIV, another highly stigmatized disease, in marginalized populations. My research focuses on improving HIV care in Latino immigrants.

Briefly describe your current line of research.

Maintaining regular HIV care is essential for adherence to HIV medications, reduction in risky behaviors, and achieving optimal clinical outcomes. However, barriers to HIV care make retention in care difficult for a large proportion of HIV-infected patients especially immigrants. How to address these barriers through culturally-relevant interventions is not well-known. My research centers around defining and addressing barriers to retention in HIV care for Latino immigrants. I use a mixed-methods approach, employing large patient data registries to examine HIV outcomes in Latinos as

well as qualitative research in the community and with health care providers so that interventions focus on improving retention in HIV care for Latino immigrants and are informed by community preferences.

What is your ultimate dream in terms of your career? Have you already accomplished this?

My ultimate dream is to continue to work as a physician and researcher, caring for patients with infection and advancing public health research by developing novel interventions to improve health disparities for Latinos with HIV. Over the years, I want to further develop strong multi-disciplinary collaborations and academic-community partnerships. Ultimately, I hope that this work will help expand how physicians define their responsibility as not just related to the biological but also to a larger commitment to their patients within the context of society in order to be truly effective in preventing and treating disease.

What is the most important lesson you learned as a graduate student?

Persistence. Remember and honor your origins (both personal and professional) and what initially inspired you towards your work.

What do you like to do for fun?

Spend time with my family, run, paint and dance for sure.

Christopher Salas-Wright, PhD, MSW, MA
Research Scientist Member



Christopher Salas-Wright, PhD, MSW, MA is a Postdoctoral Fellow at Brown University's Center for Alcohol and Addictions Studies.

Why did you decide to join the NHSN?

As a researcher interested in the prevention of substance use among Latino adolescents, NHSN was a natural fit. NHSN is comprised of a community of scholars who are committed to advancing the field of drug abuse research and offers many great opportunities for early career researchers. I had my eye on NHSN for several years and was very excited when the opportunity to become a member presented itself!

When and why did you become interested in Hispanic health research?

Between 2000 and 2006, I had the opportunity to live and work in El Salvador, Central America. During that time I gained experience working in the fields of youth development, addictions treatment, and international higher education. That experience inspired me to pursue graduate education that could help me to become more proficient in my work in Central America. Along the way I began to think about research and realized that very little research was being conducted among the populations of interest to me in El Salvador. As I began to appreciate how research might be of help to communities in El Salvador, it became clear to me that I wanted to try to make a contribution by helping to address the research gap in Central America.

Briefly describe your current line of research.

My research focuses on the etiology and prevention of substance use and associated risk behavior, particularly among Latino youth in both the United States and in Latin America. Within that broad domain, specific areas of research include: the etiology of adolescent alcohol and drug use; the intersection of substance use and HIV risk behavior; the examination of the dynamics of youth violence and juvenile delinquency; and the role of

religiosity and spirituality in positive youth development. Currently, I am in the early stages of working to develop preventative interventions for substance use and HIV risk behavior among adolescents residing in high-violence communities in El Salvador and across the Americas.

What is your ultimate dream in terms of your career?

I would love to carry out a large scale research study in Central America that could help establish a better understanding of the etiology of substance use and related risk behaviors in the lives of youth living in marginalized communities. Building upon that, I would love to develop an intervention that could help to prevent substance use and related risk behavior among Central American youth.

What is the most important lesson you learned as a graduate student?

The most important lesson I learned as a graduate student was that it is really important to be intentional about balance. There is always more work that can be done and it is really easy to fall into a pattern of work that can lead to neglecting other aspects of life (i.e. family, friends, health). When I am intentional about (trying to) find a balance between my work and the other parts of my life, my work is typically better and I am happier.

What is the most important quality you look for in a mentor?

I have several wonderful mentors who have made a tremendous difference in my development as a doctoral student, postdoctoral fellow, and now as an early career faculty member. Of course, a mentor needs to be a talented scholar, be readily accessible, be someone you like, and conduct research in an area that is of interest to you. But what I have come to most appreciate from my mentor is the capacity to provide necessary, detailed, and

critical feedback while at the same time helping me to believe in my own capacity as a scholar. In this way, my mentor has helped me to improve my skills while at the same time beginning to accept the fact that - while I have much to learn - I also have things that I can offer as a researcher and educator.

Carlos Mejias-Aponte, Ph.D.
Research Scientist Member



Carlos Mejias-Aponte, Ph.D. is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Neuronal Networks Section's Integrative Neuroscience Branch.

Why did you decide to join the NHSN?

I decided to join because of NHSN's mission of increasing easing the amount, quality, and dissemination of interdisciplinary translational research, and fostering the development and advancement of Hispanic scientists to promote future leaders. I am looking forward to establish new connections with other Hispanics working in the field of drug addiction and collaborate together toward this mission.

When and why did you become interested in Hispanic health research?

I do basic research in drug addiction. Although my research does not involve working daily with Hispanic, drug addiction and its social consequences have a great impact on the health of many Hispanics. It is my hope that my basic research contributes to find new addition

treatments, and therefore, helps our communities.

Briefly describe your current line of research.

My research program focuses on how the physiology of dopamine neurons is modulated by changes in the peripheral nervous system. Afferent inputs from peripheral organs are integrated in brain by the nucleus of solitary tract (NTS), the parabrachial complex (PB), and the insular cortex (IC), regions that belong to the central autonomic system. These regions send output signals to brain regions involved in the process of reward including dopamine neurons in the midbrain. DA is a neurotransmitter that encodes the incentive value of abused drugs as well as fats, salt and sweets. I use anatomical, electrophysiological, pharmacological and genetic approaches to dissect and study the function of these brain circuits.

What is your ultimate dream in terms of your career? Have you already accomplished this?

I would like to establish my own research lab and being successful as an independent researcher. Currently, I am a postdoc, there is a long path to accomplish my goal.

What is the most important quality you look for in a mentor?

A good mentor should be a good listener with excellent social and problem solving skills. A person who know his or her limitations and is willing to give advice when is within his or her knowledge or refer you to others when he or she feels that is the best advice that he or she can give you to find a solution to the mentee's need.

What advice would you give to a fellow graduate student on how to handle stress?

Take time to establish your priorities. Have time to work in your long-term goals daily and schedule time in your calendar. Work on them before the daily stress of your routing get into

you. Accomplishing goals is one of the best stress relievers.

What do you do for fun?

I like to travel with my family and experience new places. We usually take 3 or 4 short trips a year to place that we can go driving. We stayed two or three days and return home with new experiences. We usually do not go to the same place twice; although rarely, we had too much fun that sometimes we come back to a certain places after two or three years.

**Sergio Pereyra, MS, LAMFT
Graduate Student**



Sergio Pereyra, MS, LAMFT is a Graduate Student at Brigham Young University.

Why did you decide to join the NHSN?

I did not know about the NHSN until a mentor (NHSN member) told about the program. He suggested that I join and after getting more information about the program, I was excited to join.

When and why did you become interested in Hispanic health research?

I became interested in Hispanic health research when I got into graduate school and was introduced into the world of research. With limited empirical information existing in the field on Hispanic Health, I became even more excited to focus my energy on such research.

Briefly describe your current line of research.

My current line of research involves the influences of relationships on the mental health of Hispanic children and youth, specifically regarding substance abuse. I also want to focus on protective factors and strengths of Hispanic families that help them stay away from harmful substances and behavior.

What is your ultimate dream in terms of your career? Have you already accomplished this?

Currently, my ultimate dream in terms of my career is to have a healthy balance between research, teaching and therapy at an academic institution, focusing clinically and research wise on the Latino population.

What is the most important quality you look for in a mentor?

The most important quality I look for in a mentor is an unselfishness. This includes a genuine interest in helping me progress professionally and always looking for opportunities to help me grow and improve my own qualifications. If the mentor is able to ask themselves the following question, I think it will help them demonstrate this unselfishness: "If I could do it all over again, what would I wish my mentor taught me or helped me with?" - this would then hopefully give them insight as to how they can be a better mentor.

What is your cultural background and how did it influence your choice of career and/or research area?

In terms of my cultural background, I consider myself "Mexican/Argentine" (Mother is from Quahuila, Mexico and father is from Córdoba, Argentina) even though I was born in the U.S. I cannot deny American (U.S.) influences in my culture and how I am, but I am very proud of both heritages. My cultural background has fueled my passion for working with the Latino population and focusing on Latino research; I feel I need to give back to my people and feel honored to do so.

What do you do for fun?

For fun- Most of the free time I get is spent with my family. I love to be with my wife and playing with my 2 year-old son. I also love playing basketball (good stress reliever) and dancing (Latin) with my wife- bachata, cumbia, merengue, banda, duranguense, etc.

Maciel Hernandez
Graduate Student Member



Maciel Hernandez is a Graduate Student at the University of California, Davis.

Why did you decide to join the NHSN?

I received an invitation to join NHSN. Honestly, at first I wasn't sure what NHSN was about but when I finally got around to researching more about the organization I was impressed by its interdisciplinary network and emphasis on mentoring for career success.

When and why did you become interested in Hispanic health research?

I grew up in a rural town in California where 97% of the population is Latino. In this rural community, we face challenges regarding educational attainment and have limited access to health services. That's why I am interested in Hispanic health research but I cannot pinpoint when I became interested because these are issues I grew up learning about either directly, or indirectly through my family and peers' lived experience.

Briefly describe your current line of research.

I research how family, school, and cultural processes promote positive development (e.g., academic and psychological well-being) among Mexican American adolescents. My main interests are to promote culturally relevant research on how to improve academic and psychological well-being.

What is your ultimate dream in terms of your career? Have you already accomplished this?

My dream career is to teach and research at a university that welcomes students from diverse backgrounds. I'd like to continue to research issues that are relevant to my Mexican American community and make research tangible to students so that they apply that knowledge in their respective disciplines and careers.

What advice would you give to a fellow graduate student on how to handle stress?

Grad school is stressful - but so are other things. I keep my grad school stress in perspective and seek family and friends to keep me grounded. Seek those who will be positive models in your life. Have a life outside of school.

What do you do for fun?

Music is my outlet for fun, whether it be singing, playing guitar, listening to live music, or dancing to a good beat.

Karina A. Gattamorta, Ph.D.
Research Scientist Member



Karina A. Gattamorta, Ph.D. is a Research Assistant Professor at the University of Miami's School of Nursing and Health Studies.

Why did you decide to join the NHSN?

I was a fellow at the Interdisciplinary Research Training Institute during the summer of 2013 where I was exposed to the great work being conducted by many NHSN members. Due to my interest in research related to Hispanic drug abuse, I was motivated and encouraged to join the NHSN.

When and why did you become interested in Hispanic health research?

I began my career as a special education teacher and a school psychologist working largely with Hispanic youth and adolescents. Because of this experience, I was inspired to conduct research related to disparities experienced by Hispanic youth. Initially, my interests were related to measurement invariance and issues related to detecting biased items in assessment and measurement instruments. I currently teach at the School of Nursing and Health Studies where I have been fortunate enough to participate in research related more broadly to health disparities affecting Hispanic adolescents and in particular, drug abuse.

Briefly describe your current line of research.

I am interested in examining psychiatric diagnoses and gender as they relate to a variety of drug related behaviors and treatment outcomes. I am currently working on a large research project examining the effect of a culturally-informed family-based treatment for adolescents with substance abuse disorders.

What is your ultimate dream in terms of your career? Have you already accomplished this?

My ultimate dream is to build a successful program of research related to health disparities of Hispanic adolescents and continue to be able to teach and conduct research.

What advice would you give to a fellow graduate student on how to handle stress?

In my experience, organization is the key to success as a graduate student. If you can keep yourself organized and prioritize your tasks, it will help significantly reduce stress.

What do you do for fun?

I am the busy mom of two girls: a toddler and a preschooler. Having fun means spending time with my family and watching them grow.

Megan Armstrong, Ph.D.
Research Scientist Member



Megan Armstrong, Ph.D. is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Physiology at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center.

Why did you decide to join the NHSN?

I entered the substance abuse field within the last year and wanted to ensure that I was participating in a wide variety of experiences that would foster my career development. My decision to join NHSN was based on the organization's strong focus on translational research, cultural competency, and reducing health inequity in underserved populations.

When and why did you become interested in Hispanic health research?

My interest in Hispanic health research began when I shifted from graduate student to post-doctoral fellow. I have developed an appreciation

for and desire to conduct Hispanic health research under the mentorship of Dr. Patricia Molina. Furthermore, my experiences in the culturally diverse city of New Orleans have opened my eyes to the under-representation of the Hispanic population in psychosocial and behavioral research and have driven me to pursue this in our current projects.

Briefly describe your current line of research.

My current line of research is related to understanding patterns of substance use disorders in underserved individuals with HIV/AIDS. Specifically, I am interested in the predictors of and consequences related to substance use in both psychosocial and physiological contexts. My efforts are currently focused on adapting an evidence-based intervention, translating findings from investigators in Physiology, to reduce alcohol use and improve overall wellbeing in individuals with HIV/AIDS.

What is your ultimate dream in terms of your career? Have you already accomplished this?

I'm continually working towards my ultimate career dream. My ideal career is one that encourages research and practice that will positively impact the quality of life of the populations that I serve while optimally balancing work with "life".

What is the most important lesson you learned as a graduate student?

The most important thing I learned as a graduate student is that passion about your work is critical. Working towards my Ph.D. in clinical psychology was incredibly challenging, but I learned to live for the moments that I had break-throughs with my therapy patients. I came to appreciate the power of the "this is why I do what I do" moments that made everything worth it.

What advice would you give to a fellow graduate student on how to handle stress?

The best advice I can give to a graduate student about handling stress is to make sure that you are actively balancing your work with other aspects of your life. One thing is for sure - If you do not prioritize yourself, your relationships, your hobbies, no one else will do it for you. It's important to constantly evaluate and keep this in check. I was very engaged in my work; however, I also volunteered for a charity that is important to me, I spent time on weekends with friends, I planned appropriately to travel to visit my family, and I took care of myself physically and emotionally. I knew that if my quality of life was not good, my work and productivity would not be either!

A Note from the Co-Editors



Welcome to the Fall 2013 issue of *El Faro: La Voz de la Red!* The theme for this issue of *El Faro* was inspired by the release of the Impact of Sequestration on the National Institutes of Health Fact Sheet. Following the automatic spending cuts and reductions to the NIH budget this year, NIH expects to fund 650 fewer grants than it did the previous year. Additionally, NIH Director Francis Collins has reported that the success rate—the number of proposals receiving funding divided by the number of proposals reviewed—could drop as low as 14% or 15%. We know many have faced research funding challenges. As it can be easy to become

discouraged in this funding climate, we wanted to share inspiring stories of what NHSN members have been able to accomplish this year despite these challenges. In this issue, our contributors discuss their path to obtaining research funding, the mentors that supported them on their journey, and lessons learned along the way.

The two featured articles highlight recent research projects aimed at reducing health disparities facing Latinos and culturally adapted interventions that may help certain populations. Dr. Christina Lee shares how she recently joined the NHSN, her success in receiving an R01 Award for a study investigating the Delivery of Culturally Adapted Motivational Interviewing to Heavy Drinking Latinos, and the support she received from her NHSN mentors and Co-Investigators in developing this project. Dr. Nalini Negi shares her path from graduate school to a tenure-track faculty position and the key factors that contributed to her recent R03 Award for her Drug and HIV Risk among Latino Immigrant Day Laborers in Baltimore study.

As always, we like to use this venue to highlight recent accomplishments of our members. In the *Nuestra Voz* section, Dr. Marisela Agudelo shares the real challenges of applying for grant funding but also provides an incredible story of what can be accomplished with persistence and the support of a team of dedicated mentors. We would like to congratulate her on receiving a K99/R00 or Pathway to Independence Award and encourage NHSN members who are considering applying for this mechanism to read her story. In the Early Career article for this issue, Dr. Miguel Cano discusses his experience as an early career researcher, an IRTI fellow, and his recent R25 Award from the National Cancer Institute (NCI).

In every issue, we update the Members in the Spotlight and New Member Interviews sections. Our goal for the Members in the Spotlight section is acknowledge the accomplishments of

our NHSN members, including recent awards, honors, and publications. The New Member Interviews allow us to introduce a few new NHSN members. We hope these sections allow you to establish collaborations, celebrate accomplishments, and extend your network.

We look forward to seeing you all at the upcoming NHSN Annual International Conference. In this issue we are excited to preview the mentoring and networking activities that have been organized by the NHSN Early Career Leadership Committee (ECLC). More details about these activities are available in the conference program.

We would like to thank everyone who took time to share their research and accomplishments with us. If you would like to contribute to a future issue, either with ideas or content, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Warm regards,

Felisa Gonzales and Meghan Lally

Nuestra Voz



Dr. Marisela Agudelo is a Research Associate in the Department of Immunology at the Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine. She has been a member of NHSN since 2012. Early this year, she received a K99/R00 award from NIAAA. This mechanism provides up to 5 years of support to help early career researchers become independent investigators through training, mentorship, and research. The primary aim of

her research project is to study the effects of alcohol and the role of epigenetic mechanisms such as histone deacetylation on the modulation of cannabinoid genes in human immune cells. Below, she shares details regarding her career trajectory and offers grant application tips to other early career scientists.

My scientific journey started by serendipity. As a junior student at the University of South Florida looking for a summer job and reading all the bulletin boards on campus, this particular add caught my attention: "Interdisciplinary Summer Internship for Minority Students". I applied and soon started my summer internship at Dr. Thomas Klein's lab in the Department of Immunology at USF College of Medicine. My project involved analyzing the effects of the cannabinoid, THC, on dendritic cell function. At the time, I had no idea what THC meant, what a dendritic cell was, or how the immune system worked; but that summer I learned more than I was expecting and found myself submerged in immunology research. After finishing the internship, I continued to volunteer and stayed in contact with the faculty, staff, and students in the department. They inspired and encouraged me to apply for the Ph.D. program. In 2003, I embarked myself into the Ph.D. journey under the mentorship of Dr. Klein. He was strict with his students and I felt he was particular stricter with me. We used to have one-on-one meetings every Monday and lab meetings on Friday. Today, I look back and thank him for everything. He not only taught me to be an independent, responsible scientist, but to set up high standards.

In 2009, after graduating with a Ph.D. in Medical Science, I joined Dr. Nair's lab in the Department of Immunology at FIU HWCOC. Dr. Nair showed me the other face of science: the business side. He taught me the importance of grant writing and networking. As soon as I joined his lab, he asked me to design a project, encouraged me to

think on new ideas, and write grants. As a postdoctoral fellow in his lab, I submitted several unsuccessful applications to the Foundation for Alcohol Research, Peter F. McManus Charitable Trust, FIU Office of Research, and NIH. Finally after attending a grant writing workshop at the CPDD meeting, Dr. Nair and I realized the proper mechanism for my career status and project was the K99 mechanism. As soon as I got back to the lab, I worked on refining my project. Then, I submitted my first K99 application. After a long agonizing wait, I received a non-fundable score, but that did not discourage me from trying again. Although it was not funded, I focused on the fact that I had gotten a score!! And that was already a step ahead from my previous grant submissions. Therefore, after taking into consideration the reviewers comments and improving the application, I went for that second chance. To date, this K99 award from NIAAA is my proudest scientific accomplishment. In this project, I combined some component from my prior work on cannabinoids with alcohol research. Overall, the major goal of this project is to study the epigenetic mechanisms of alcohol effects on the immune system from alcohol users and non-users, and the role of cannabinoid genes in the alcohol-induced immunoregulatory process.

I would like to thank both of my mentors Dr. Klein and Dr. Nair for their outstanding support throughout my career, the FIU Division of Research, specially, Dr. Andres Gil, for his support and commitment to minority scientist like me, and last, but not least, the NIAAA, program officer, and reviewers who supported my ideas. I also would like to give a special acknowledgement to some of the female scientist in the field that in one way or another have made a positive impact in my career and I consider my scientific role models, Dr. Patricia Molina, Dr. Sulie Chang, and Dr. Shilpa Buch.

The best advice I can give to all the colleagues out there is to establish good everlasting relationships with your mentors, senior scientists, and colleagues; to learn the tools of grant writing by attending workshops, reading program announcements and guidelines, and by just writing and submitting your ideas; to establish a hard working routine; and most importantly to never give up on your ideas, projects and career. All of these strategies may sound easy to follow, but they will take years of hard work, commitment, and perseverance, which will pay off at the end.