

My decision to become the first member of my family to pursue an advanced degree was not only driven by a desire to understand the basic biology of life, there were other equally important factors that motivated me into this journey. During my time at UPRM and US universities, I witnessed very few women and minorities occupying faculty positions, a reality that shocked and concerned me deeply. As a young Hispanic female, I was well aware of the obstacles and social pressures women and minorities are constantly exposed to in any professional career, and even though I thought I was well trained to be successful in academia, my confidence was shaken and I wondered how many others were equally or even better trained than I was and were not able to reach the professorate level. Realizing this as an undergraduate, I felt the need to prove that any Hispanic woman with the desire to pursue a career in STEM can be successful; I strived for academic excellence and finished my biology degree with a perfect academic record. However, pursuing academic excellence was only part of my goal as an undergraduate. I was also very invested in becoming a leader and advocate of minorities in science by participating in activities that promoted science education and impacted the broader community of Puerto Rico. As a leader of the National Biological Honor Society, I helped organize scientific symposiums, workshops, and seminars to educate undergraduates about research opportunities in and out of UPRM, how to prepare good application materials for summer programs and graduate school, and how to communicate scientific research clearly in English via poster or oral presentations. The broader puertorican community was also impacted by our efforts; we exposed high school students to research labs, recruited volunteers to judge elementary school science fairs, and organized a biotechnology summer camp for middle school and high school students.

Once at Yale, I decided to continue my efforts and joined the Yale Minority Scientist Research Network (YMSRN) and the Women in Science at Yale (WISAY) organizations. Through YMSRN I have gained perspective on the implications of being a minority in STEM, particularly at the higher professoriate level. By traveling to minority conferences with YMSRN, my goal is to aid in the recruitment of minority students into pursuing higher degrees in science. As part of WISAY, I am a mentor of an undergraduate female student in

science. The goal of WISAY mentoring is to help increase the success of young women entering scientific fields by building and fostering valuable mentoring relationships between women in science at all career levels. I have hopes that this experience will not only shape me into becoming a great mentor, but that throughout my mentorship I can inspire other young females into pursuing careers in STEM. I am also part of other organizations that represent the interests of Hispanics and minority students, like the Latinx Graduate Network and CienciaPR, a nonprofit organization committed to the advancement of science in PR and with promoting science communication, science education, and scientific careers. To engage in the greater New Haven community, I volunteer on weekends at the Haven Free Clinic as a Spanish interpreter. This Yale-affiliated clinic provides uninsured adults in the Fair Haven neighborhood with primary care, wellness education, and assistance in securing health care.

I am applying to the Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship because being awarded this fellowship will allow me to continue my graduate studies at a leading cutting-edge research institution and thus set a stronger foundation for a career in academia. I have hopes of running a successful lab and collaborate with universities in PR and other Latin-American countries. I plan to ease the accessibility of Hispanic students with limited resources into research programs at major US institutions. One of my greater goals is establishing a second research laboratory in PR to target in a more efficient manner the needs of Puerto Rican students interested in STEM and help advance science knowledge at both the university level and at the middle school/high school level where there is minimal education about careers in science right now. These efforts will also contribute to the diversification of the scientific community by preparing these students to be strong candidates for PhD programs at global science leading institutions and hopefully follow careers in academia. I believe the qualities I have demonstrated in my experiences as a student of excellence, independent researcher, community leader, and advocate for women and minorities in science set a precedent for the greater things I will accomplish as a science educator and global leader in STEM.