

## THE GRADUATE STUDENT PORTFOLIO REVIEW SESSION

In our effort to enhance our trainees' communications skills, they are requested to have a career portfolio, which is submitted twice a year. This helps them organize, track and store professional and personal documents relevant to their graduate studies and career and assist with RISE annual evaluations and discussions of their progress with their research mentors.

Our Program Coordinator, Jean M. Schmidt, gave the annual session on portfolio on August 11, 2023. After the presentation, the students were divided into three groups to receive feedback and tips from their senior peers on how to compile and organize their portfolio. They also shared suggestions given by their mentors to improve this.

We received very positive feedback from the students who found the session very informative!



## WELCOME TO THE NEW ACADEMIC YEAR 2023-2024

Welcome to the start of the new academic year! We hope you share our enthusiasm for the year ahead. Under our new grant, our RISE Program (now G-RISE Program) is entering the 16<sup>th</sup> year of support to selected students pursuing a PhD in Biomedical Sciences at Ponce Health Sciences University.



We are very pleased with what we have accomplished. Our trainees for the current year are: Yobet Pérez, Nashaly Irizarry, Paola Flores, Yadiel Rivera, Luinet Meléndez, Joel Orengo, Sheila Valle, James Torres, Lourdes Caro, Stephanie Hernández, Gretchen Albarrán & Dorca Marcano. The students attended a G-RISE orientation session on July 21 to review RISE requirements and assign mentoring teams. We encourage them to remain focused on their classes and research, to comply with the RISE Program criteria, and achieve their goals. We look forward to a happy and productive year!

## WELCOME TO OUR NEW TRAINEES!

The beginning of a new academic year brings new students to the PhD and G-RISE Programs! We wish them much success in this new journey and we thank current and new student (peer) mentors for their participation and willingness to help a fellow graduate in his/her personal and professional development. Join us in welcoming our new trainees, Lourdes Caro, James Torres, Gretchen Albarrán, Dorca Marcano & Stephanie Hernández!



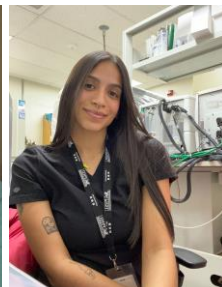
Lourdes M. Caro



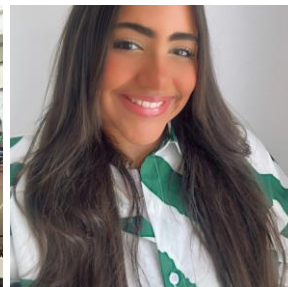
James Torres



Gretchen Albarrán



Dorca Marcano



Stephanie Hernández

**Lourdes M. Caro-Rivera** is originally from Rincón. She earned a bachelor's degree in industrial microbiology from UPR, Mayaguez and a post-bac from the University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry. She loves outdoor activities, spending time with her family and going to the beach.

**James P. Torres-Pinela** is originally from Ponce. He earned a bachelor's degree in biomedical sciences with a major in Biotechnology from the PUCPR-Ponce. His hobbies include spending time with family and friends, exercising, playing various sports such as volleyball and ping pong, and playing different instruments like the guitar and drums.

**Gretchen Albarrán-Acosta** is originally from Yauco. She earned a bachelor's degree in biology with a concentration in Genetics from UPR Ponce & Aguadilla. She loves traveling the island and finding new spots to explore. Her hobbies include hiking & camping as well as going to new brunch and coffee shops all around.

**Dorca E. Marcano-Jiménez** is originally from Humacao. She earned a bachelor's degree in general biology from UPR, Humacao and a master's degree in biotechnology from PUCPR, Ponce. Her hobbies include taking care of her pets, visit her family and going to the beach.

**Stephanie Hernández-Tirado** is originally from Yabucoa. She earned an associate degree in Technological Chemistry and a Bachelor of Science in Microbiology from UPR, Humacao. Her hobbies include jewelry making, listening to music/podcasts, and learning the French language.



## PORTER PHYSIOLOGY DEVELOPMENT FELLOWSHIP AWARD



We are pleased to announce that former G-RISE trainee, Jonathan López-Carrasquillo was recently awarded the Porter Physiology Development Fellowship Award from the American Physiological Society, effective September 1st, 2023. This fellowship will support part of Jonathan's thesis research which focuses on understanding the combined efficacy of probiotics and vitamin D to ameliorate colitis under the mentorship of Dr. Caroline Appleyard. Jonathan was accepted into the PhD Program in Biomedical Sciences at Ponce Health Sciences University in 2019 after completing his undergraduate studies at the Universidad Ana G. Mendez Recinto Gurabo. As an undergraduate Jonathan was able to participate in several research projects to study microbiome in forest ecosystems, where he had the opportunity to present their outcomes in local and national conferences and was awarded for his outstanding presentation.

Jonathan has presented his work at 2023 APS Summit, XIX Encuentro de Investigadores, Microbiology annual meeting and is coauthor on a systematic review article that focused on the use of Corticotropin releasing hormone antagonist as treatment for abdominal and pelvic diseases. Jonathan will continue to be involved with G-RISE as a peer mentor and we look forward to his continued success!

## DR. GARCÍA RINALDI FOUNDATION SUMMER PROGRAM 2023

Dr. García Rinaldi Foundation is a non-profit organization established in 1993. It has stood out for maintaining an activity of service to the Puerto Rican community through financial aid programs for patients, educational programs, prevention programs, conducting and promoting research with the purpose of contributing to the reduction of death from cardiovascular disease in Puerto Rico and contributing to quality of life. It promotes education to encourage high school and undergraduate students to pursue a health career.

Since mentoring is such an important component of our G-RISE Program, we want to recognize our 3rd year G-RISE trainee, Yadiel Rivera, who brilliantly mentored a group of participants from the Foundation's Summer Program 2023, for the second consecutive year, in the Research Component, from May 25-August 12, 2023. His mentees were able to complete a written work and deliver a presentation about his research project titled "Effect of Chronic Stress on the Ovarian Cancer Tumor Microenvironment". Congrats, Yadiel! Your commitment is truly inspiring!



(L-R) Yadiel Rivera & Fabiola Fuentes



Carlos Méndez, Yadiel Rivera & Shan Ramos



Yadiel Rivera, Ramón Misla & Francés Aponte

## SEMINAR TO DISSEMINATE OUTCOMES FROM THE ANNUAL RISE RETREATS



Our G-RISE Program Director was invited to share outcomes from the G-RISE program's annual retreats during the PHSU-PRI seminar series on August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Dr. Appleyard described how the retreats were initiated at the request of students in 2013 under the former R25 grant, with the aim to promote team building, improve collaborations and enhance communication skills. These off-site yearly retreats provide a venue for enhancing soft-skills

which will be required by trainees in whatever scientific field they end up in, and the particular theme each year is chosen based on student and advisory committee input and identified area of need. Over the past eleven years there have been nine in-person retreats and two held virtually due to pandemic restrictions. Retreat themes are addressed through short presentations, case studies, live podcasts, webinars, focus groups, role play, and breakout sessions with various team building exercises to practice communication skills, and identify abilities, knowledge, values, and behaviors. Wellness activities are included in each retreat regardless of the main theme. Trainees give short presentations and serve as discussion leaders on topics related to the central theme. Expert guest speakers are invited from various fields and backgrounds to give workshops and participate in discussion sessions with the trainees. Feedback from the trainees demonstrates the importance of including ice-breakers, interactive games and team activities as well as opportunities to interact informally in their free-time. These interactive retreats help to provide trainees with the skills needed to succeed in their graduate and professional lives which are usually not taught in their PhD curriculum and suggest healthy practices and coping skills for dealing with stressors.



## Understanding the relationship between skills and values when writing an Individual Development Plan (IDP)

On August 4, 2023, Dr. Annelyn Torres Reverón led an enlightening professional development session for our RISE Trainees. The session delved into the critical components of Individual Development Plans (IDPs), offering invaluable insights into their definition and importance in the career-building journey. One of the session's highlights was the emphasis on exploring the unique blend of skills and values of each trainee. Dr. Torres Reverón adeptly guided the participants through introspective exercises that helped them uncover their strengths and align them with their personal values, thus paving the way for a more holistic approach to career development. Through engaging in hands-on activities, Dr. Torres Reverón further assisted participants in crafting tailored IDPs that align with their aspirations and personal growth. This transformative experience empowered our trainees to chart a purposeful course for their professional journeys. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Annelyn Torres Reverón for her guidance and expertise, which have undoubtedly contributed to the growth and enrichment of our G-RISE Trainees.



By: Nashaly Irizarry (4<sup>th</sup> year G-RISE trainee)

## PRACTICAL APPROACH TO MOLECULAR BIOLOGY COURSE 20232

By: Grissell Tirado, PhD



This August, the RISE Lab offered the course “Practical Approach to Molecular Biology” which offers 1st-year PhD students experience in research technical skills. Students perform techniques like PCR, gene cloning, Western-Blot, cell transfection among others, while learning the concepts behind those techniques. Other skills learned during the course are how to keep a good laboratory notebook and prepare written laboratory reports. The course includes a journal club where students acquire skills to interpret scientific papers and do oral presentations. This practical course strengthens the curriculum of the Ph.D. in Biomedical Sciences and advances the goals of the G-RISE Program in supporting the Trainees in their successful integration to the research laboratory setting.

## EXTERNAL TRAINING UPDATES AND FEEDBACK

Our fourth year G-RISE trainee, Nashaly Irizarry, led an inspiring session on External Training Updates and Feedback on August 18. She shared valuable insights from her participation in the 2023 Summer Program in Neuroscience, Excellence, and Success (SPINES) at the Marine Biological Laboratory (MBL). This intensive 3-week course, held in Falmouth, Massachusetts, is tailored for graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and early career faculty, focusing on enhancing success in neuroscience research careers.

Nashaly's experience at SPINES emphasized the significance of the collaborative network cultivated within the program. Her account of the program highlighted the importance of this network-building aspect, making it one of the most cherished components of her time at the Marine Biological Laboratory. We extend our gratitude to Nashaly for generously sharing her transformative journey with us. To learn more about the Summer Program in Neuroscience, Excellence, and Success (SPINES) and its offerings, visit the official program page at <https://www.mbl.edu/education/advanced-research-training-courses/course-offerings/summer-program-neuroscience-excellence-and-success>.



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