

¡ÉXITO! Noticias

Latino Cancer Research Leadership Training

Increasing Latino Participation In Solving Cancer Health Disparities

Perseverance is the essence of Lizeth Tamayo’s character. Tamayo, who came with her family from Peru to the United States at age 4, went from not knowing how to buy school supplies to now being a graduate student and Susan G. Komen Fellow.

Tamayo is currently a master’s-degree student in public health epidemiology at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). As a Komen fellow at UIC, her research aims to better understand and eliminate health disparities in breast cancer.

To further her training and education, Tamayo applied for the [Éxito! Latino Cancer Research Leadership Training program](#).

Apply Now!
Encourage friends and colleagues to apply for *Éxito!* training and internships [here](#).

Éxito!, led by Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez at UT Health San Antonio with support from the National Cancer Institute, recruits 25 master’s-level students and professionals each year for a five-day summer institute to promote doctoral degrees and careers in Latino cancer.

Tamayo’s parents paved the way for her, making sacrifices and struggling with language barriers to give her a better life in the United States. Now Tamayo is paving the way for her cousins and sibling by excelling in

school. Her strong passion to solve Latino health disparities and break down cultural and language barriers will surely help her family and countless other Latino families like hers as she continues to grow as a researcher.

After *Éxito!*, Tamayo now is very confident that her future includes more research in cancer, and an MD/PhD.

“I think [*Éxito!*] has made me feel more sure of my choice to pursue a doctoral degree,” Tamayo said.

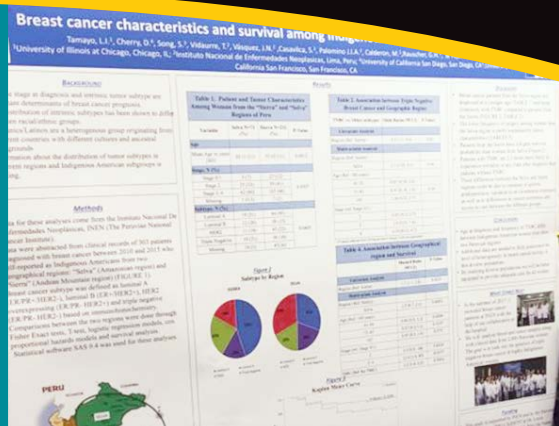


Table of Contents

- Message from the *Éxito!* Principal Investigators 2
- Training Opportunities 3
- News from the IHPR 4
- Latino Cancer News..... 5
- Éxito!* Alumni Photos..... 6
- Special Spotlight: Doctoral Student Achievements..... 7
- Spotlight: Doctoral Students 8-10
- Spotlight on Our *Éxito!* Interns 11-14
- Spotlight on Our *Éxito!* Alumni 15-30

Get Latino Health News @



A Message from *Éxito!* Principal Investigator

Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez

As Latino cancer health disparities continue to persist, the need grows for Latino cancer researchers, physicians, public health policy leaders. That's why *Éxito!* is here.

Of 151 *Éxito!* grads since 2011, I'm excited to report that more than 35% have applied to doctoral programs and more than 20% are now enrolled in a doctoral program!

The list of those accepted into programs is growing:

- Maria Brietzke – PhD in Global Public Health, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- Roger Figueroa – Illinois Transdisciplinary Obesity Prevention PhD/MPH Program, University of Illinois
- Marivelisse Soto-Salgado – DrPH in Social Determinants of Health, University of Puerto Rico School of Public Health
- Mary Vanellys Diaz-Santana – PhD in Epidemiology, University of Massachusetts Amherst
- Lizette Rangel – DrPH in Health Promotion and Behavioral Sciences, UT School of Public Health, Houston
- Laura Rubalcava – PhD in Clinical Psychology, George Washington University, DC
- Donaji Stelzig – DrPH in Health Promotion and Community Health Sciences, Texas A&M Health Science Center, School of Rural Public Health
- Becky Adeigbe – PhD in Applied Demography, University of Texas at San Antonio, School of Public Policy
- Mariana Arevalo – PhD in Health Promotion & Behavioral Sciences, University of Houston, School of Public Health
- Lizbeth Del-Toro – PhD in Community Health Education, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, School of Public Health
- Martha Garcia – PhD in Cell and Molecular Biology, University of Texas Medical Branch, School of Biomedical Sciences
- Melawhy Garcia – PhD in Health Behavior, University of California San Diego/San Diego State University
- Loida Tamayo – PhD in Health Services, Texas A&M Health Science Center, School of Rural Public Health
- Aditi Wahi – PhD in Health Behavior, University of California San Diego/San Diego State University
- Cindy Wittenburg – DrPH in Health Promotion and Behavioral Sciences, University of Texas School of Public Health, El Paso.
- Rosalie Aguilar – PhD in Translational Science, UT Health San Antonio
- Nicolas Lopez-Galvez – PhD in Environmental Health Sciences, University of Arizona
- Aixa Perez-Caraballo – PhD in Public Health-Epidemiology, University Mass Amherst
- Vanessa Torres – PhD in Health Services, University of Washington
- Sanae El Ibrahim – PhD University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- Beatriz Sosa-Prado – PhD in Public Health, University of California
- Alicia Nunez – PhD in Clinical Psychology, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- Angela Gutierrez – PhD in Community Health sciences, University of California, Los Angeles
- Natalicio Serrano – PhD in Public Health Sciences, Washington University in St. Louis
- Benjamin Aceves – PhD in Health Behavior and Health Promotion, University of Arizona
- Carola Sanchez Diaz – PhD in Epidemiology, University of Illinois at Chicago
- Jasmin Berrios – PhD in Educational Technology Leadership, Morehead State University
- Eduardo Zamora – PhD in Health Promotion and Education, University of Utah
- Nancy Vargas – PhD in Health Promotion and Health Behavior, Oregon State University
- Hena Din – PhD in Health Behavior, University of California San Diego/San Diego State University
- Alyssa De Santiago-Colunga, DrPh, Claremont Graduate University
- Shayda Dioun, PhD in Behavioral Science, UT School of Public Health, Houston
- Angie Poggi-Burke, PhD in Health Science, Nova Southeastern University
- Janet Sanchez, PhD in Health Services, University of Washington
- Alelí Ayala, PhD in health and sports sciences, University of Zaragoza (Spain)

These amazing people are rising in their ability to help stop cancer among Latinos by embracing culture as a vital piece to cancer control and prevention. You can join them!

Learn more or contact me at [here](#).



A Message from *Éxito!* Co-Principal Investigator

Dr. Rena J. Pasick

Dear *Éxito!* Alumni,

This message brings my warmest wishes to you and your families for a healthy, happy, and successful 2018!! Last year I wrote you that the year ending almost defied description. So what do

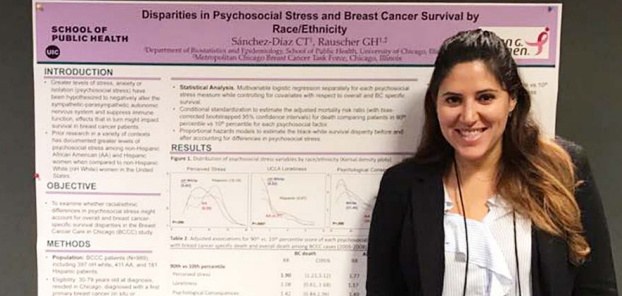
I say this year?! To defy description implies

being speechless.

This we cannot allow! We must find our individual and collective voices. We are facing the challenge of our lifetime... but together we will achieve justice and equity for all.

Yours in solidarity always!





Training Opportunities

Apply for a \$3,250 **Éxito!** Internship

Éxito! alumni not currently enrolled in doctoral programs are eligible to apply for an **Éxito!** internship. Internships are designed to help **Éxito!** alumni improve their research skills. Those considering applying for an internship are required to select a mentor from their home institution or cancer research center near them and create a 6-month internship work plan. Internships will take place between June–November 2018. We encourage all of our alumni to apply!

Find out more about our internships and complete the application from our website at www.exitotraining.org.

Deadline for applying for one of our \$3,250 **Éxito!** Internships is March 5, 2018

Decisions will be announced in late March 2018

Share the Experience

Encourage your friends and colleagues to apply to **Éxito!**

We are currently accepting applications for our 8th **Éxito!** Summer Institute on June 4-8, 2018, in San Antonio.

Apply at www.exitotraining.org by March 5, 2018.

We encourage you to have your qualified friends and colleagues apply!

We have **program flyers** available on our website or in hard copies if you would like to distribute them or place them in your work and university settings.

If you would like these or other resources, e-mail us at exitto@uthscsa.edu.

News from the IHPR

The Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at UT Health San Antonio, the team behind *Éxito!*, continues to investigate the causes and solutions to cancer and chronic disease disparities to improve Latino health in San Antonio, South Texas and the nation.

Here are a few IHPR cancer prevention initiatives currently underway:

Register Today for *Advancing the Science of Cancer in Latinos* Conference

This inaugural conference will unite health multidisciplinary researchers, professionals, community leaders, and students to tackle Latino cancer on many fronts on Feb. 21-23, 2018, in San Antonio, TX. The conference is sponsored by the Institute for Health Promotion Research at UT Health San Antonio and the UT Health San Antonio Cancer Center. [Register Now at LatinoCancer.com](http://LatinoCancer.com)

Redes En Acción: *The National Latino Cancer Research Network*

Redes En Acción is a national collective of researchers and advocates fighting Latino cancer by promoting Latino training opportunities, generating research, and supporting cancer awareness.

SMS Cessation Service for Young Adult Smokers in South Texas (*Quitxt*)

Quitxt is an evidence-based, culturally tailored Spanish and English SMS cessation service for young adult Latinos living in the San Antonio and Web media markets. This program will carry out an intensive radio, social and mobile media promotional campaign to recruit young adult cigarette smokers to this service. [Read here](#) how the program is expanding!

Rx for Better Breast Health

Rx for Better Breast Health is a study to teach breast cancer survivors how certain foods may reduce the risk of cancer recurrence.

Health4Kids

The Health4Kids Intervention Trial is a randomized controlled trial to improve children's body composition by testing a comprehensive, culturally and linguistically relevant, family-oriented intervention for overweight/obese Hispanic children (ages 6-11) in three pediatric clinics in San Antonio, Texas.

App to Help Breast Cancer Patients Stick to Therapy

This Komen grant is to develop a bilingual, culturally relevant phone app and patient navigation services to help San Antonio, Texas, breast cancer patients stick with their prescribed endocrine hormonal therapy, the most widely prescribed treatment for about three-fourths of all breast cancer cases.



Latino Cancer News & Articles

[Salud America! Research on Latino Family, Child Health](#)

Traumatic early experiences, unhealthy lifestyles, and low participation in preschool programs [impair Latino kids' social and emotional development](#), academic achievement, and overall health, according to a new *Salud America!* research review. Also, [1 in 5 Latino children show signs of depression](#), which often go untreated, according to a new *Salud America!* research review. [Latino families also lack support](#) for social services, education, and health, according to a new *Salud America!* research review.

[The Crisis of Cervical Cancer among Latinas](#)

Cervical cancer is highly preventable. That is why it's so alarming that Latinas are twice as likely to be diagnosed with cervical cancer as other women. In fact, Latinas' cervical cancer rates are 44% higher than non-Latinas. Latinas are also less likely to get screened, which could detect the disease at an early, curable stage.

[Paid family leave and health equity](#)

The U.S. lags behind other economies in guaranteeing workers paid family leave. ChangeLab Solutions has five big recommendations to change that. The first is "an expansive definition of covered employer and eligible employees, so that all employers are covered, regardless of their size, and so the policy applies to all employees irrespective of their salary, or whether they work part-time or full-time."

[How to Turn Latino Parents into Leaders in 12 Weeks](#)

Students do better academically and socially with parents who are active in their schooling. That is why one Georgia middle school started a free, bilingual 12-class program to help Latino parents become school leaders!

[Deportation and Mental Health](#)

Fear of deportation is a rising concern among many Latinos in the United States. People born here and people who have given up everything to move to the U.S., have to worry about being forced to leave the country after the Trump Administration rescinded the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and proposed use of "expedited removal." How does this fear impact a person's mental health?

Find Dr. Ramirez and the IHPR online!



[The Institute for Health Promotion Research](#) targets Latino health solutions.

[Redes En Acción](#) is a research network for Latino cancer.

[Salud America!](#) is a national Latino-focused organization that creates culturally relevant and research-based stories, videos, and tools to inspire people to start and support healthy changes to policies, systems, and environments where Latino children and families can equitably live, learn, work, and play.



Have you seen our Éxito! video?

See what alumni are saying about their experience during the Éxito! Summer Institute.



Éxito! Alumni 2017



Éxito! Alumni 2016



Éxito! Alumni 2015



Éxito! Alumni 2014



Éxito! Alumni 2013



Éxito! Alumni 2012



Éxito! Alumni 2011



Congratulations

Roger Figueroa **Éxito! Alumni 2012**



Roger Figueroa graduated with his PhD from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Currently, Roger is doing an NIH T32 Postdoctoral Traineeship at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Roger's goals are to become a research professor, make important contributions to obesity prevention science and public health, and mentor students of underrepresented and diverse backgrounds.

Melawhy Garcia **Éxito! Alumni 2012**



Melawhy Garcia graduated with her PhD in Health Behavioral Research from the University of California San Diego/ San Diego State University. Currently, Melawhy is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Women's Cardiovascular Research Center at UCSD.

Rebecca Adeigbe **Éxito! Alumni 2013**



Rebecca Adeigbe graduated with her PhD in Applied Demography from the University of Texas at San Antonio. She currently works as a Biostatistician with the U.S. Army Institute of Surgical Research.

Marivelisse Soto-Salgado **Éxito! Alumni 2011**



Marivelisse Soto-Salgado graduated from her doctoral program at the University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus, Graduate School of Public Health. Marivelisse is a research coordinator and epidemiologist at the University of Puerto Rico Cancer Center (UPR)/MD Anderson Cancer Center (MDACC) Partnership for Excellence in Cancer Research Program. Her goal is to become an independent faculty/ researcher member in an academic institution where she can study cancer prevention and control among minority populations and underserved populations. She would also like to focus on biological and socio-cultural factors that might influence the cancer burden.

Alyssa Colunga **Éxito! Alumni 2012**

Alyssa Colunga started her doctorate in public health at Claremont Graduate University.

Alyssa works as the Operations Manager for YWCA San Gabriel Valley and Strategic Innovations Officer for the Healthy Communities Resource Center. Alyssa is also involved with the California Accountable Communities for Health initiative and helps oversee one of 10 sites within the state. Alyssa states that *Éxito!* helped her understand that earning a doctorate was an achievable goal. She enjoyed how the program gave her real life examples of people with similar backgrounds as herself and are contributing to the field while leading successful lives personally and professionally.

Alyssa's top career goals:

1. *Earn a doctorate in public health*
2. *Become a public health consultant*
3. *Learn and continue to grow in her professional knowledge and experience*

To those considering applying to a doctoral program, Alyssa has this advice:

Don't hold back and set limits on yourself because of things you may perceive as barriers, many things can be overcome with some creativity!



Alyssa Colunga

Fun Facts

Anything new, fun and – most importantly – important to you that you would like to share?

Embarking on the journey of obtaining my doctorate full-time while also working full-time was a bit daunting and I wasn't sure how I could manage it all; however, with careful time management and a very understanding family I see that it is possible!

Best de-stressor?

Time with my husband, Eric and our Labrador Walter!

Favorite class so far?

Wealth, Poverty and Inequality



Angie Poggi-Burke *Éxito!* Alumni 2015

Angie Poggi-Burke was accepted at the Doctor of Health Science program at Nova Southeastern University. Angie works as a survey statistician at the U.S. Census Bureau. Angie states that *Éxito!* influenced her decision to apply for a doctoral program. Thanks to *Éxito!* she expanded her network of Latino professionals in public health and research, who also helped her during her application process

Angie's top career goals:

1. Get a promotion at her current job or a position at a public health agency
2. Continue teaching students as an adjunct professor
3. Write research articles on social determinants of health

To those considering applying to a doctoral program, Angie has this advice:

Have clear career goals and expectations, to stay positive and confident during the application process; if not selected, find a program that really fits into your lifestyle and research interests (it's a two-way street); pursue master's degrees or other certifications, such as Project Management, to boost your application!

To her fellow *Éxito!* classmates enrolled in a doctoral program, Angie says:

Practice work-life balance and don't forget the reasons why you started the program but also to accept that our goals can change!



Angie Poggi-Burke

Fun Facts

Anything new, fun and – most importantly – important to you that you would like to share?

I just came from a Mission Trip to Haiti, which increased my passion to help the underserved communities!

Best de-stressor?

A 30-minute deep tissue massage

Best study tip?

Turn off TV, phone, and any other device!

Favorite study snack?

KitKat



Shayda Dioun

Shayda Dioun *Éxito!* Alumni 2016

Shayda Dioun was accepted into the PhD in Behavioral Science program at UT School of Public Health, Houston. Shayda is working on a cancer survivorship care plan project that focuses on making sure cancer survivors are screened appropriately for early detection of subsequent cancer. Shayda states that *Éxito!* gave her the confidence she needed to apply for a PhD.

Shayda presented at the Second L. Kay Bartholomew Eldredge Student Poster Competition and at the annual symposium of the Mays Cancer Center at UT Health San Antonio. Shayda was also the recipient of the SPH Student Assistance Scholarship Fund and a Conference/Meeting Travel Scholarship. She was also nominated into the UT Health School of Public Health Alpha Iota Chapter of the Delta Omega Honorary Society in Public Health.

Shayda's top career goals:

- 1) Get a PhD
- 2) Work doing research
- 3) Have a teaching position at the graduate level

To those considering applying to a doctoral program, Shayda has this advice:

Do it! You never know what a school is looking for. Take the risk and apply and the right school will accept you!

Fun Facts

Anything new, fun and – most importantly – important to you that you would like to share?

I just got back from traveling to NYC and Montreal Canada for spring break during the blizzard. It was a great experience especially being born and raised in Texas and having seen snow a few times during my lifetime.

Best de-stressor?

Exercising in some kind of way. I played tennis all my life up until college. I recently started playing with friends again and I love it!

Best study tip?

Don't wait till the last minute to start working on an assignment or studying! I like to plan things so I don't get stuck writing a 30-page paper the day its due or start studying for an exam the day before. Plan early and you will appreciate it later!

Favorite study snack?

Carrots!

Favorite class so far?

Economic and Social Determinants of Health





Jose A. Ramos
Éxito! Alumni 2016

Jose Ramos received his MPH from Columbia University. Jose would like to pursue a dual MD/PhD degree. As part of his internship, Jose focused on patient-physician gender, language, and ethnic background concordance and knowledge of breast cancer screening among Dominican Latinas. The study was to better understand these gaps by examining the impact of health care factors, specifically patient-physician gender, languages spoken, and ethnic background concordance on knowledge and recency of mammography screening among Latinas (predominantly Dominican women).

Jose said the *Éxito!* Internship gave him the opportunity to participate in cancer-related research and statistically see the impact that physicians have on patients' health outcome and knowledge regarding breast cancer. He's also grateful for having the opportunity to work in research with his mentor and invest in a concept that was completely foreign to him: patient-physician interactions. As a result, Jose would like to further study the association of patient-physician concordance variables on liver and colon cancers among Latinos. Just like his mentor, Jose aspires to mentor and nurture students in the exact way his mentor inspired and nurtured him.



Yuritzzy A. Gonzalez Pena
Éxito! Alumni 2017

Yuritzzy Gonzalez Pena graduated with her MPH from Oregon State University. During her *Éxito!* internship, Yuritzzy examined Acute Lymphoid Leukemia and socioeconomic indicators in Hispanic children living in California.

Yuritzzy states that *Éxito!* gave her the opportunity to improve her skills as a researcher. She learned to work with Census and SEER databases, which she is sure will be beneficial. The *Éxito!* internship also made her realize that she was more interested in GIS and cancer than she thought, which helped her narrow her interest in cancer. Yuritzzy would like to increase access to clinical trials, reduce stigma, and work on cancer prevention. Other benefits she received from her internship was having a new mentor and a cohort of researchers. It also helped her improve her research skills from literature review to writing a manuscript. Yuritzzy also felt that the internship gave her the opportunity of owning her project (her research question, her manuscript) and build her resume.



Lizeth I. Tamayo
Éxito! Alumni 2017

Lizeth Tamayo is doing her master's in Epidemiology at the University of Illinois at Chicago. As part of her *Éxito!* internship, Lizeth focused on the perceived risk of breast cancer and breast health communication among Latina women. The study examined if Latinas' risk perception about a breast cancer diagnosis was related to how likely they were to communicate about breast health and to whom (e.g., blood relatives vs. general public), and if this relationship varied by the type of breast health intervention women experienced.

Lizeth said the greatest benefit from her internship was the opportunity and funding provided by the *Éxito!* program to get her own small data while still working on her mentor's parent grant. It also gave her the opportunity to learn more about qualitative methods. Her internship experience has shown her that it is important to look at research through different lenses. As an epidemiologist in training, Lizeth has had heavy training with quantitative methods, so learning how to tie in observational/interview data was really important and eye-opening for her. Lizeth is a Susan G. Komen Fellow and has always focused on cancer throughout her MPH program, and will continue to do so. Prior to the internship, Lizeth knew she wanted to pursue a PhD, but the internship definitely showed her that she was making the right choice.



Filiberto Leon ***Éxito!* Alumni 2017**

Filiberto Leon is currently working on his master's degree at UT San Antonio. During his *Éxito!* internship, Filiberto evaluated the feasibility and acceptability of delivering diabetes education content using m-Health technologies to community residents who are at risk for diabetes. Filiberto said the *Éxito!* internship brought out the best in him and tested him in a lot of areas. It allowed for personal growth and helped him network and work with many people in the field. Filiberto also said the *Éxito!* internship made him aware of his strengths and weaknesses.

Filiberto found the *Éxito!* internship enlightening because he realized the impact he was making on people's lives. The internship also gave Filiberto insight into the kind of work he would be doing if he begins a doctoral program. Additionally, Filiberto feels that the *Éxito!* internship enabled him to be more prepared for a doctoral program because it would help him continue to strengthen his skills. For this reason, Filiberto recommends the *Éxito!* internship for anyone who is seeking to grow and strengthen their skills as a scholar. Filiberto is also extremely grateful for having the opportunity to work with his mentor, who he found to be a fantastic role model and leader.



Arielle Guzman ***Éxito!* Alumni 2017**

Arielle Guzman is currently doing her MPH at Loyola University. During her *Éxito!* internship, Arielle focused on evaluating the impact of the affordable care act on cancer detection and treatment in an urban-safety net hospital.

The purpose of the study was to obtain initial insights on the early impact of the ACA by conducting a retrospective observational study to examine shifts in the insurance status and mode of detection among underserved breast cancer patients. Arielle said the *Éxito!* internship was a highly professional experience that challenged her to display initiative and independence. Her greatest benefit for participating in the *Éxito!* internship was establishing relationships with other investigators on her team. Her research team included epidemiologists and an oncologist working at Mt. Sinai Hospital, a professor and breast cancer research expert at Loyola University (her mentor), and a qualitative research expert from University of Illinois at Chicago. Arielle led meetings with this team, underwent trainings led by the members, and even had outings and lunches with them. This has allowed her to improve her communication skills and learn a great deal from them. After her internship, Arielle became even more aware of disparities faced by minority women, specifically regarding breast cancer care. She said: "While research is making great strides in reducing these gaps, other new investigations and innovative medicine are continuing to benefit a population that traditionally does not include Latino and African American patients. With the political climate changing the healthcare environment and threatening access to healthcare and insurance, public health research will continue to be very important, moving forward. I would like to continue the growth and understanding I have already developed in breast cancer disparities." Arielle would like to pursue an MD or a PhD, but would ideally pursue a joint MD/PhD with research focusing on public health.



Sonia Fragoso ***Éxito!* Alumni 2017**

Sonia Fragoso is completing her MPH at UT Health School of Public Health. As part of her internship, Sonia worked on secondary data analysis on sun protective behaviors among Latinos using results from the health information national trend survey. Sonia said the *Éxito!* internship experience strengthened every skill and has prepared her for a doctoral program. It also allowed her to broaden her understanding of the research process, the intricacies of public health, and how contributions in reducing health disparities among vulnerable populations can create positive, lasting effects. The internship shaped and sharpened her in every aspect of research including (but not limited to) coding and manipulating data, data analysis, writing, qualitative and statistical research, and time management. The *Éxito!* Internship also solidified her interest in pursuing a doctoral degree as well as a career in cancer research. Sonia says she feels the internship along with her mentor gave her the knowledge, tools, and confidence in continuing a career in cancer research. In participating in the *Éxito!* internship, the greatest benefit Sonia says she had was her mentor. Her mentor gave her so much knowledge about the ins and outs of statistical programs, life as a researcher, and conducting research itself. Sonia says her mentor is genuinely interested and hopeful for her successes and pushed her to think for herself, share ideas and implement them, become a better writer, investigator, and researcher overall. Sonia also had the opportunity to submit an abstract on skin cancer to the first Advancing the Science of Latino Cancer conference set for February 2018 in San Antonio under the direction of Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez at UT Health San Antonio. In addition, she will be conducting a Cumulative Experience at the Institute for Health Promotion Research as a requirement for her graduation in the following months, as well as contributing as a co-author of a manuscript.



Claudia Sanchez Lucas ***Éxito!* Alumni 2017**

Claudia Sanchez Lucas is conducting her MPH at UT Health Houston. As part of her internship, Claudia conducted a systematic review of self-perceived risk for developing diabetes. Claudia said she is grateful for the experience that the *Éxito!* internship provided her and for allowing her to meet individuals that value work ethic. Claudia enjoyed working with individuals with positive leadership who value the Latino culture. This is the ideal environment and climate that Claudia would like her career setting to be like.

Claudia said the *Éxito!* internship taught her that each student is different and everyone learns at difference paces. The greatest benefit for her was identifying her comfort zone and research interest. The *Éxito!* internship allowed Claudia to define her interest in the area of research. It also influenced her interest to pursue a behavioral sciences PhD program.



Paulina Monteon Garcia

Éxito! Alumni 2017

Paulina Monteon Garcia is currently working on her MPH at California State University Long Beach. Paulina's *Éxito!* internship aimed to increase human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine uptake via general health messaging in Los Angeles County. Paulina had the opportunity to work on a HPV research project that emphasized the importance of teenagers getting vaccinated.

Paulina said the *Éxito!* internship gave her the opportunity to work in a cancer research field. As a result, Paulina is specifically interested in working with Latinos and African-Americans. She also said the greatest benefit in participating in the *Éxito!* internship was making connections and networks that are interested in cancer research within Cedars Sinai. Paulina is excited to continue her work with her mentor, Dr. Vidal, and use a portion of the data that they will collect from the HPV project for her thesis. Paulina also feels she has made great connections with experts that can assist her in the future and provide advice. Paulina definitely wants to pursue a doctorate degree in the future.



Elidia Tafoya

Éxito! Alumni 2017

Elidia Tafoya received her MPH from San José State University. Elidia's *Éxito!* internship aimed to understand and evaluate the study objectives from a recently completed clinical trial using a randomized controlled study of vismodegib with photodynamic therapy (PDT) treatment versus vismodegib with intermittent vismodegib with non-PDT treatment in patients with basal cell carcinoma.

As part of her internship, Elidia had to generate research articles and review data from the study to write a published, peer-reviewed article on the use of oral Vismodegib therapy using PDT versus non-PDT for patients with basal cell nevus syndrome. Elidia is grateful for having the chance to practice and have opportunities after her master's program. She said it has been an amazing experience, and she would not have been able to do this without the *Éxito!* Program guiding her to pursue an internship. Elidia learned from her mentor that it is possible to make strides at any point in life; and to make connections with people that we already know. Elidia said she was able to believe in herself again, and gained a new perspective about being a woman, a minority, and a first-generation higher education achiever. As communicated by her mentor, it always feel good to empower women in science because there are not many of them in the field.



Mari Elizenda Benavidez

Éxito! Alumni 2012

Mari Elizenda Benavides is currently a senior quality data analyst. Mari would like to receive her Cancer Tumor Registrar Certificate and work with kids in an obesity prevention program.



Mariana Arevalo

Éxito! Alumni 2011

Mariana Arevalo is a research fellow in the process of completing her PhD. Mariana's current goals are to graduate, get a post-doc and become a professor at a cancer center or university. Currently, Mariana focuses on increasing minorities into clinical trials. Mariana won second place for her poster, "Using Social Networks to Explore the Types and Sources of Social Support Related to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after a Traumatic Experience," at the 2017 L. Kay Bartholomew Eldredge Student Poster Competition in Houston, TX.



Benjamin Aceves

Éxito! Alumni 2014

Benjamin Aceves is currently a Graduate Research Assistant the University of Arizona. Benjamin's current goals are to become a professor, researcher and program director. His current research focuses on chronic disease prevention among Latinos. Benjamin was also the recipient of the Hispanic Scholarship Fund Award, the Community Advisory Board Award, and the Graduate Public Health Fellowship.



Kaylee Rivera
Éxito! Alumni 2014

Kaylee Rivera is a professional Research Associate and Business Experience Lead (Health Links nonprofit). Kaylee's future career plans are to further engage the community in business initiatives to create healthy and safe environments that people can live, work and play in. She also sees herself pursuing a doctoral degree if she decides that teaching at a university is where she would like to be. Her top career goals are to: Create partnerships between business and community organizations to have bigger impacts on individual health and safety; educate people on health promotion related activities; and develop a way to impact nutrition status at schools for both the staff and the students. Kaylee moved to Denver last year and loves it.



Maria Lizette Rangel
Éxito! Alumni 2012

Maria Lizette Rangel is currently working on her doctorate of public health at UT School of Public Health. Maria is program coordinator for the Active Living after Cancer program at the MD Anderson Cancer Center Department of Behavioral Science. Maria's career goals are to finish her dissertation this year, start a post-doc in cancer survivorship, and begin more research on cancer survivorship



Melissa Nanette Martinez
Éxito! Alumni 2013

Melissa Martinez is currently an account supervisor for a media agency. Melissa's career goal is to become a department manager related to operations.



Griselda Rubio **Éxito! Alumni 2014**

Griselda Rubio is currently a director at a cancer center. Her goal are to apply to a doctorate program in Cancer Epidemiology or Cancer Control/Prevention.



Christina Olson **Éxito! Alumni 2014**

Christina Olson is a health program coordinator with Imperial County Public Health Department. She is currently working with policy change in the way the community addresses health as a collective across sectors. Christina would like to focus a couple more years in her current position and then decide what type of doctoral degree would be the best fit for her. Christina's top goals are to be happy, lead teams, and mentor and inspire others.



Ramon L. Concepcion Torres **Éxito! Alumni 2012**

Ramon L. Concepcion Torres is a research associate at IRIS Educational Media in Eugene, Ore., where Ramon provides support in developing two training curricula that are culturally adapted for Latino-Spanish speaking families. The first program, *Padres Preparados: A Cultural Adaptation of an Evidence-Based Parenting Intervention (Prepared Parents)*, addresses the Latino achievement gap through a parent intervention designed to increase school readiness skills in preschool children. The second project, *Mis Hijos y Yo (My Children and Me)*, is a multi-media program that provides Latino parents with education materials to protect children from risks associated with divorce and familial separation. Both programs were awarded funding for a second phase of study by the National Institute of Health. Ramon's goals are to have economic stability, investing in retirement and education.



Sanae El Ibrahimy
Éxito! Alumni 2013

Sanae El Ibrahimy is a PhD student at the University of Nevada Las Vegas. She works as a healthcare analyst. Her dissertation project focuses on prognosis disparities among Hispanics with diabetes and colorectal cancer. Her top career goals are to enter academia, publish, and gain expertise



Jenny Castillo
Éxito! Alumni 2012

Jenny Castillo is a program coordinator in the Division of Cancer Prevention and Population Sciences at UT MD Anderson Cancer Center. Jenny's goals are to obtain a doctoral degree in public health and become principal investigator of public health programs.



Diana Flores
Éxito! Alumni 2012

Diana Flores works as a health and program advisor. Diana's current goal is to obtain more research experience in infectious disease or a cancer-related area with an emphasis in epidemiology. She would also like to be able to delve more heavily into public health-related research, gain further data analysis skills, and make a difference in improving the health of others. Diana also traveled to Latin America where she co-presented workshops on the manuscript writing process. She also had the opportunity to use her Spanish and network with a diverse community of people. The project that Diana assisted with during her *Éxito!* Internship was recently published by the Journal of Community and Supportive Oncology, for which she is a co-author. Diana completed her first half-marathon in the hilly city of San Francisco last year.



Johana Bravo
Éxito! Alumni 2013

Johana Bravo is a research assistant with KU Work Group for Community Health and Development, focusing on evaluation and community development. Johana plans to get a few a few years of work experience before applying for a doctorate degree.

Johana's goals are to obtain a leadership role in non-profit board focus on Latino health/cancer disparities and obtain a PhD. Johana moved to Raleigh, N.C., and is excited to get involve with the Latino community and research in this new area. She also presented at a recent APHA conference.



Delana Gonzales
Éxito! Alumni 2012

Delana Gonzales currently works as a health care/program manager. Delana's future career plans are to continue to advance in her current role and build on her skills. Currently, she's applying to leadership programs. She would like to focus on leadership roles and how she can expand them in her work environment and within the community. Delana secured \$1.2 million in funding to screen for Hepatitis C in baby boomer patients from the Cancer Prevention Research Institute of Texas for University Health System. She was also named Student Learning Assistant Center Employee of the Semester for Spring 2016 at San Antonio College.



Steven Lopez
Éxito! Alumni 2012

Steven Lopez is manager of the Health Policy Project at UnidosUS (formerly NCLR). As manager, he leads the organization's health policy efforts to increase the opportunity and ability of Latino children and families to achieve optimal health and thrive. Steven's work primarily focuses on two priority areas: 1) the intersection of nutrition, hunger, and childhood obesity and 2) health coverage and care for vulnerable populations including the low-income, children, and immigrants. Steven also had the opportunity to represent UnidosUS and present at a briefing on the Affordable Care Act at the White House. Steven was also co-author on an article, [*Latino children's coverage reaches historic high, but too many remain uninsured.*](#)



Mayra Serrano ***Éxito!* Alumni 2013**

Mayra Serrano is a cancer researcher and manager. Mayra's career goals are to get her doctorate, increase her CPBR work, and publish. Last year, Mayra also received a promotion and now manages her department. Mayra presented a poster at APHA 2016 and had an oral presentation at AACR 2017.



Angela Gutierrez ***Éxito!* Alumni 2014**

Angela Gutierrez is currently a PhD student at UCLA and a graduate student researcher. Angela is the co-principal investigator on a community-engaged research training initiative among promotoras in Los Angeles. She is also the principal investigator of a follow-up study that examines the community-engaged capacity building research initiative and its impact among the promotoras who participated in the research initiative. Through her employment at the Center for Health Policy Research, Angela works with community organizations and community clinics in Los Angeles to promote community-clinic linkages and to increase clinical preventative services among aging and underserved populations. Angela was recently awarded a supplement award through the National Institutes of Health. Through this NIH research, she will evaluate the National Research Mentor Network's cultural responsiveness. Her career goal is to become a professor. Angela also said *Éxito!* influenced her career goals, and helped her understand that a doctoral degree is an achievable goal, and helped her understand the need for increased diversity and minority representativeness among researchers.



Laura Rubacalva ***Éxito!* Alumni 2011**

Laura Rubacalva is currently working on her PhD at the Chicago School of Professional Psychology. Laura's top career goals are to become a clinician, professor, and a traveling lecturer. Her current research and dissertation focuses on the weight-loss surgery population and those struggling with obesity. Laura always knew she wanted to work in cancer prevention after attending *Éxito!* because she saw the need for Latino researchers. Laura recently had a son, and said this will not impede her from finishing her program.



Christina Carmona

Éxito! Alumni 2013

Christina Carmona recently became a Lead Infection Control Practitioner with a consulting company in San Antonio that provides IC services to healthcare facilities all around the country. Christina is responsible for overseeing three healthcare facility's infection control and prevention programs. Her responsibilities include, monitoring staff day-to-day activities, annual reports and data, weekly visits to all sites, and ensuring that the customers are happy with the services they are receiving. Having found her niche in infection control, Christina plans to continue to learn and expand in the field of epidemiology and infection control and prevention. In the future, she would like to apply to an epidemiology PhD program. Christina's future career goals are to move up in management within the company she works for; continue to expand her knowledge and proficiency in infection control; to be a strong, efficient, conversant leader for her team, company and the hospitals that she provides services to. When she is not working, Christina keeps busy with her three kids and their sport and school activities. Her oldest son will be attending middle school next year, which is exciting and bittersweet for her.



Edianys Velez

Éxito! Alumni 2011

Edianys is a project specialist/business analyst. Her top career goals are to continue at her current company and move upward in project management and/or business management. She would also like to complete her Public Health Bioinformatics certificate program and Business Analyst Certification. Lastly, Edianys would like to reapply for PhD/DrPH. Edianys received the Business Unit Excellence Award and Business Unit Key Contributor Award.



Maritza Pulido

Éxito! Alumni 2014

Maritza Pulido is an interim director of Student Outreach Services. Maritza would like to possibly pursue a career in counseling, obtain an MS in counseling or continue a career in higher education/student affairs.



Carola Sanchez Diaz

Éxito! Alumni 2013

Carola Sanchez Diaz is a doctoral student at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Carola's career goals are to graduate with her PhD, become a cancer researcher with a focus on health disparities, and become a professor. Carola is working on the implementation and improvement of a patient navigation program focused on minorities in the Chicago area.

Carola has a Susan G Komen fellowship. She also presented a poster at the 2017 ASPO's annual meeting in Seattle. Carola said *Éxito!* has been one of the best experiences she has ever had, the program not only motivated her to not give up and pursue a PhD, but she also had the opportunity to meet many wonderful empowered people/friends that also motivated her to keep working hard.



Diana Santiago

Éxito! Alumni 2011

Diana Santiago is a registered nurse. Diana is a coordinator in charge of teaching inmates duties to assist other nurses working on medical floor at the prison. Her future career goal is to obtain a doctoral degree in mental health or a certification in forensic nursing. Diana was named Nurse of the Quarter in June 2016.



Vanessa Estrada

Éxito! Alumni 2014

Vanessa Estrada is a registered dietitian/lecturer and study coordinator. Vanessa would like to get into a DrPH program and work in public health and nutrition as some sort of consultant or administrative capacity. Eventually, she would like to work for the USDA in health and nutrition. Vanessa's future career goals are to become the director of a health and wellness initiative or collaborative, become a consultant to research collaborative and health/wellness/nutrition initiatives, lecture at conferences, and become a program specialist or higher in the USDA in a health and nutrition division.



Jacquelyn Toledo
Éxito! Alumni 2014

Jacquelyn Toledo is a director of leadership development. Jacquelyn's goals include narrowing down her research interest; learn more information about potential schools/universities offering doctoral programs; and create her C.V. Jacquelyn is now engaged to a lovable, caring, and trusting man in her life. In addition, her three children continue to grow healthy, strong, and are doing great academically. Jacquelyn is also excited that community health workers in Massachusetts continue to thrive and are getting ready for State Certification.



Monica Aguilar
Éxito! Alumni 2013

Monica Aguilar is a senior health educator. Her top career goals are to continue working in public health and the underserved community, work in maternal and child health and become a director in maternal child health.



David Rivas
Éxito! Alumni 2015

David Rivas is a graduate research assistant. David's future plans included enrolling in a doctoral and MD program. David's career goals are to improve the health of his community, focus on research, and gain as much experience as he can.



Jacklyn Samano
Éxito! Alumni 2016

Jacklyn Samano is a population management coordinator. Jacklyn plans to continue her work and research in chronic disease prevention, but would also like to work with hospitals and community organizations to create platforms of communication that will allow for all communities to collectively address social determinants of health. Her top career goals are public health policy consultant, county department of public health director, and hospital administrator. Jacklyn graduated last May from with her MPH from Claremont University. Jacklyn is also the recipient of the Randall Lewis Health Policy Fellowship and Delta Omega Honor Society.



Brenda Frutos
Éxito! Alumni 2016

Brenda Frutos is a research associate. Brenda's goals include getting more involved in grant writing/administration, acquiring more experience in program design/implementation, and submitting an IRB research proposal.



Paloma Suarez
Éxito! Alumni 2016

Paloma Suarez is a senior nutritionist and breastfeeding coordinator for a WIC program. Paloma would like to pursue a PhD degree that can move her on a path toward influencing policy and ultimate federal research around nutrition policies that will have an impact and wellbeing of her people. Her career goals are to work for the FDA, work for the USDA, and work for the United Nations. Paloma was the recipient of one of the 40 Under Forty awards. The award is a community award recognizing young Berkshire County professionals that demonstrated commitment to business success, personal growth, and community involvement. They received 150 nominations and only chose 40 people for the award. Paloma is particularly proud to be contributing to positive nutritional change in the Latino community in her area.



Mercedes Watson

Éxito! Alumni 2016

Mercedes Watson is a patient navigator and social worker. Recently, she has applied for her license in clinical social work. Her top career goals are to obtain her LCSW, continue to complete cancer related research, and work on cancer related research and the use/effects of medicinal marijuana. Currently, Mercedes has a publication pending approval.



Noemi Fernandez

Éxito! Alumni 2016

Noemi Fernandez is a therapist. She is currently working on her hours to receive her license with the Board of Behavioral Sciences. Noemi is also planning on applying for her PPS credentials, which will allow her to work on school campuses. Noemi's top goals are to complete her licensure, complete her credential program, and practice therapy.



Marisabel Román-Afanador

Éxito! Alumni 2016

Marisabel Román-Afanador is a graduate research assistant. She graduated last June from her master's program from the University of Puerto Rico, Medical Science Campus. Marisabel's next step is to apply for a doctoral program. She is currently working on getting as much field experience as possible before applying and starting that next chapter. Her top goals are to get a doctoral degree, and acquire field experience in a research/academic area related to sexual health and/or mental health research and services. Marisabel submitted abstracts to a local forum, the 37th Annual Research and Education Forum MSC, and for APHA's Annual Meeting.



Rosie Salazar
Éxito! Alumni 2016

Rosie Salazar is a lecturer at CSULB's Health Science Department. Rosie would like to continue implanting her health program in underserved communities, foster excellent cultural competent public health professionals, and mentor graduate students to pursue careers relating to cancer. She would also like to work with and change public health policies on needed environments, build community organizations, and continue to advocate for improvements in health equity. Rosie's top goals are to obtain her CHES, get a grant for ActiVir and implemented in communities, and have CVS proposal be accepted by the city of Long Beach, Calif.



Karen Aguirre
Éxito! Alumni 2016

Karen Aguirre is a graduate research assistant at the Institute for Health Policy and Research. She is also a district office intern for Illinois Rep Juliana Stratton. Karen's future careers goals are to obtain a PhD in health policy with a focus on equitable policy making (breast cancer health disparity) or become a Latina senator. Karen wants to advocate for Latino health at the state or federal level, complete her PhD, and teach at a university at one point. Karen was selected to interview with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute for their Health Fellowship in DC. Karen was also the recipient of the Scrimshaw Latino Family Health Scholarship Award at the University of Illinois at Chicago and the 2016 Leadership Challenge Annual Meeting Scholar at APHA.



Jose De Jesus
Éxito! Alumni 2016

Jose De Jesus is a community health educator. His future careers goals are to get his PhD or DrPH, get published, and work at NCI.



Stephanie McCoy

Éxito! Alumni 2016

Stephanie McCoy is a health educator for City of Austin Health Department. Her future education/career plans are to apply for a DrPH program by 2018, present at conferences, and publish articles on her work with the City of Austin Public Health Department. Ultimately, Stephanie would like to open a clinic specifically tailored for immigrants in her hometown, El Paso. Recently, Stephanie received the Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE) Horizon Award at the national conference in Denver.



Yadira Montoya

Éxito! Alumni 2016

Yadira Montoya is a coordinator in community engagement. She recently applied to a doctoral program and is awaiting a decision. Yadira's top goals are to secure funding for LA BROCHA (Latinas/os con Alzheimer Buscando Refugio y Optimismo Cuando Hacen Arte), complete a manuscript on organ donation for research among Latinos, and attend an Alzheimer's caregiving conference. Last year, Yadira became a founding member of LA BROCHA, a project whose goal is to offer art workshops to families who have a loved one with Alzheimer's disease or dementia.



Zandra Perez

Éxito! Alumni 2016

Zandra Perez is an L&D Clinical Manager. Zandra's main goal is to pursue a doctorate. She's currently trying to narrow down a program.



Richard Gamarra

Éxito! Alumni 2016

Richard Gamarra is an intern analyst, a health educator, a research fellow and a teaching assistant. Richard would like to get a DrPH or PhD in cancer epidemiology, and work for a health center conducting cancer-related research, such as St. Jude's hospital or Memorial Sloan Kettering. Richard's top goals are to earn a doctorate, launch his own cancer research studies, and do public research that will lead to a reduction in Latino cancer-related health disparities. Richard is also the recipient of the Tow Foundation Public Health Fellowship, the Hispanic Scholarship Fund Scholar, and the Heilbrunn Scholarship.



Rosario Silva

Éxito! Alumni 2016

Rosario Silva is a research intern at Washington University in Saint Louis. Rosario would like to attend medical school or get her PhD in public health.



Angelika Gutierrez

Éxito! Alumni 2016

Angelika Gutierrez is a program assistant for ICAP's population-based HIV impact assessments project. Angelika graduated with her MPH last May and is planning on putting it to use for the next two to three years. She will then possibly apply to a PhD program. Angelika would like to work with PAHO on health initiatives throughout Latin America, conduct research in Puerto Rico to bring to highlight the impacts of the political status on the healthcare system of the island, and go back to school for a doctorate. Angelika was also the recipient of a \$5,000 scholarship from Univision Becas.



Gabrielle Castellanos

Éxito! Alumni 2016

Gabrielle’s future career goals are to focus on health administration or health promotion. Throughout her professional career, Gabrielle aspires to help others, continue to learn, and promote health in all walks of life. Gabrielle graduated last May from the University of Houston in Allied Health Education and Administration.

She was also inducted into Phi Kappa Phi.



Maria Alvarez

Éxito! Alumni 2016

Maria Alvarez is a clinical research coordinator, where she works with patients in cancer research as part of the recruitment for clinical trials. Maria would definitely like to continue with her education, hold an executive leadership position, and apply learning and methodology. Her personal project is to take care of her family. Maria completed her *Éxito!* internship December 2016—for which she is very proud because the overall process for her was intense.



We want to hear from all **Éxito!** Alumni!

Join the [Éxito! Alumni Facebook Group](#) and the [Éxito! Facebook Fan Page](#) to share your successes and stay up with your connections!

Visit Alumni Group



Visit Fan Page



About This E-Newsletter

This E-newsletter is produced annually by the *Éxito!* team, which is directed by the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR), a part of the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics in the School of Medicine at UT Health San Antonio.

Please send news items or story ideas to exito@uthscsa.edu.

Editors: Arely Perez and Cliff Despres

The Institute for Health Promotion Research

UT Health San Antonio
7411 John Smith, Suite 1000
San Antonio, TX 78229

Office: (210) 562-6500

IHPR website: ihpr.uthscsa.edu

Éxito! website: www.exitotraining.org



University of California
San Francisco