



**Increasing the Pipeline:
Latino Training Program for Cancer Control Research**

Year 3 Annual Report 2012-2013

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Acknowledgments

Éxito! Latino Cancer Research Leadership Training (*Éxito!*) is led by Principal Investigator Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez, director of the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (UTHSCSA).

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Éxito! was developed in collaboration with Dr. Rena J. Pasick of UCSF, where she serves as the principal investigator for the Minority Training Program in Cancer Control Research (MTPCCR).

The *Éxito!* NCI Project Director and the *Éxito!* support staff is Rebecca Adeigbe, Cynthia Wittenburg, and Cliff Despres, all of the IHPR.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Éxito! began in the fall of 2010 and aims to increase the number of Latinos pursuing a doctoral education and career in cancer health disparities (CHD) research. *Éxito!* is led by the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio under the direction of IHPR Director Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez and IHPR Deputy Director Mr. Kipling Gallion.

Éxito! was designed to encourage minority master's-level students and master's-trained health professionals to pursue a doctoral degree and a career in Latino cancer health disparities research. The *Éxito!* program has two components, a summer institute held annually in San Antonio, TX and internships awarded annually.

Éxito! recently completed Year 3 (Y3) and has 59 alumni (18 in Year 1 [Y1], 20 in Year 2 [Y2] and 21 in Year 3 [Y3]). Recruitment for Year 4 (Y4) will begin in December 2013 and is scheduled for the first week of June 2014.

For Y3, minor refinements were made to the *Éxito!* application and recruitment process. The application directions were improved for clarity and program recruitment strategies continue to evolve to ensure optimal program reach.

During Y3, *Éxito!* selected 21 participants to participate in the program and summer institute. Half of the participants were master's graduates and were working in the field of health disparities research. After attending the summer institute, participants experienced significant improvement in their self-efficacy to apply to a doctoral program and ability to overcome financial challenges associated with obtaining a doctoral degree.

Also during Y3, *Éxito!* offered nine paid internships to Y3 participants and Y2 and Y1 alumni. Results of the internship showed that internships provided participants with opportunities to improve their research skills and improved confidence to apply for a doctoral program.

Éxito! staff conducted an annual alumni survey to capture alumni progress toward applying to doctoral programs. Since launching in 2011, the program has 59 alumni—and 15 of the 16 that have applied to doctoral programs have been accepted and are currently enrolled.

In preparation for Y4, *Éxito!* will continue to refine program recruitment and communications and provide its participants and interns with useful networking opportunities, resources, tips, and alumni success stories.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The *Éxito!* Latino Cancer Research Leadership Training program (*Éxito!*) launched in late 2010 to increase the number of qualified Latinos pursuing a doctoral degree and a career in Latino cancer health disparities (CHD) research. Each year, *Éxito!* aims to recruit 20 qualified Latino master's-level students or master's-trained health professionals from across the US to attend a summer institute (SI) and provide interventions along the pipeline from master's-level to doctoral-level training by offering paid internships (related to Latino CHD) and hosting two doctoral student retreats (2010 and 2014).

ÉXITO! COMPONENTS

Summer Institute (SI). An annual five-day SI showcases the opportunities and need for Latino researchers in CHD research and provides participants with the motivation, skills, and resources needed to apply to and succeed in a doctoral program. This is accomplished by blending a series of speakers and presenters who share their personal career paths, research interests, words of encouragement and tools and tips for entering a doctoral program.

Paid Internships. Each year, program applicants and *Éxito!* alumni are eligible to apply for paid internships. Internships are designed to provide master's-level students and master's-trained health professionals—not currently enrolled in a doctoral program—with an opportunity to gain research experience and improve their research skills.

PREPLANNING AND SUMMER INSTITUTE APPLICATION DEVELOPMENT

Éxito! is an adaptation of the evidence-based training model developed by Dr. Rena J. Pasick at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). *Éxito!* has collaborated with the Minority Training Program for Cancer Control Research and has used their program as a framework while adapting, tailoring and replacing program material as needed.

Application Development. For Y3, a preface was added to the application to ensure applicants clearly understood the purpose, objectives of the SI and outlined expectations the *Éxito!* staff had of those who attended. In addition, the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document was updated and continues to serve as a supplemental document answering general questions related to the SI and internship.

Internship Development. Nine paid internships were made available during Y3. Internships were conducted between June and November of 2012.

Internship Eligibility: *Éxito!* internships are available to applicants selected to participate in the *Éxito!* program as well as *Éxito!* alumni.

Internship Requirements: Applicants and *Éxito!* alumni interested in an internship are required to identify a well-qualified mentor from their home institution or organization. Together, the

potential intern and mentor are required to develop, agree to, and sign an internship work plan. The work plan is required to include the following:

- 1) Internship goals and objectives
- 2) Skills and knowledge to be gained
- 3) Intern duties and responsibilities
- 4) Required training to complete internship
- 5) Mentor/Intern communications
- 6) Proposed final product and PowerPoint presentation
- 7) Internship timeline

Internship Compensation: Interns and mentors were compensated for their efforts. Interns received \$5,000 and mentors received \$1,000. Payment was made after final reports were submitted and reviewed by *Éxito!* staff.

Evaluation Development. For Y3, *Éxito!* staff migrated all evaluations to a username and password free online survey format. No revisions were made to the evaluation survey instruments.

The following surveys are distributed and used to evaluate the *Éxito!* program:

Pre- and Post-SI Surveys: Completed by individuals accepted into the SI.

Alumni Survey: Completed annually by *Éxito!* alumni.

Internship Surveys: Completed by all interns and mentors participating in an *Éxito!* internship.

Internship Monthly Progress Reports: Completed monthly by all *Éxito!* interns.

PROGRAM RECRUITMENT STRATEGY

***Éxito!* Alumni.** *Éxito!* alumni were encouraged to share their experience with colleagues and mentors and asked to recruit individuals for the program. Alumni were given program flyers and brochures to distribute at their home institutions.

University Recruitment. Universities with large Latino student bodies from across the US offering master's- and doctoral-level public health and social science programs received the *Éxito!* program information. More than 55 universities and 240 faculty members received program information for Y3. Distribution of program information and recruitment efforts were also conducted during the 2012 APHA National Conference in San Francisco CA.

Student Organizations and Associations. Similar to university recruitment, *Éxito!* staff, identified student organizations and public health related organizations and societies with an interest in

cancer and/or public health. More than 40 student organizations and associations were identified and received our program information.

Electronic Communications. *Éxito!* continued its electronic communications for Y3. Program material was e-mailed to university faculty and student organizations on a monthly basis. Using a large database of e-mails of those interested in Latino cancer health disparities, *Redes En Acción* (a national Latino cancer research network funded by the NCI and headquartered at the IHPR) also delivered *Éxito!* communications on a monthly basis as part of the *Redes* news e-alert. These communications referenced the program application and alumni stories. All communications directed viewers to the *Éxito!* website to learn more.

Social Media. *Éxito!* continued its social media communications for Y3. The IHPR's social media campaign, called SaludToday is comprised of a blog and Facebook, Twitter and YouTube pages. These media channels were used to promote the *Éxito!* program. *Éxito!* staff also created an *Éxito!* group Facebook page which allows staff to share program information with other public health and cancer groups.

SUMMER INSTITUTE PLANNING AND COORDINATION

Summer Institute Speakers. Based on Y2 SI evaluations, the majority of speakers were invited back to present at the Y3 SI. Two new topics were introduced in Y3; Becoming a Scholar and Latino Representation in Higher Education. These two sessions were designed to provide participants with tools for becoming a scholar and navigating higher education systems as a minority student. Overall, the weeklong *Éxito!* SI featured 21 different guest speakers and eight different skill-building and self-reflection activities. Speakers were primarily Latino researchers, scientists, doctors and health professionals specializing in areas of Latino CHD research from the IHPR at UTHSCSA, UTHSCSA, the Cancer Therapy and Research Center (UTHSCSA's NCI-designated Cancer Center) and representatives from other institutions. Doctoral program representatives and doctoral funding representatives were also invited to discuss graduate programs, the admissions process and funding options.

Summer Institute Logistics. Prior to the *Éxito!* SI, participants and speakers were required to confirm their flight and travel arrangements with the university's travel agents and *Éxito!* staff members. Given its convenient location near the San Antonio Airport and the IHPR at UTHSCSA, lodging arrangements for out-of-town participants were made at the Marriott Residence Inn and Courtyard Marriot Hotels in San Antonio. Participants and speakers were housed at the Residence Inn and the Summer Institute was conducted at the Courtyard, participants also received breakfast and lunch each day of the SI and a barbecue dinner on the third night.

Summer Institute Agenda for Y3.

Day 1: *What's Going on in Health Disparities, Including Cancer Control Research, and Why We (Latino/Hispanics) Are Here.* The kick-off day aimed to pique participants' interest and make a connection between their culture and personal history. Participants were presented with

information on health disparities and cancer control research within the Latino population and the importance of conducting culturally relevant and appropriate research.

Day 2: Reaching the “Hard-to-Reach”: The Range & Reach of Health Disparities and Cancer Control. This day aimed to provide participants with an overview of the different types of Latino health disparities and cancer intervention research currently available in underserved Latino communities.

Day 3: Why Culture Matters & Tools of the Trade. This day’s session addressed the social and cultural differences Latinos encounter that lead to disparities in cancer prevention, screening and treatments. In addition, participants heard from *Éxito!* alumni enrolled in doctoral programs and received tips and tools for applying to and completing a doctoral program.

Day 4: Hear from the Experts: How to Apply to Doctoral Programs. This day aimed to provide participants with the resources needed to apply, get accepted and thrive in a doctoral program. Participants heard from faculty, oncologist, researchers and graduate program admissions personnel.

Day 5: Stepping Out: Transition from Student to Researcher. The final day reinforced the advantages to networking, provided words of encouragement and concluded with a graduation ceremony.

SUMMER INSTITUTE APPLICATIONS

Each year the *Éxito!* staff aims to recruit 20 individuals to participate in the SI. Eligibility criteria is based on: (1) adequate graduate school grades (minimum “B” average); (2) self-identification as a Latino/Hispanic or minority working with Latino/Hispanic community; (3) institutional faculty recommendations; and (4) a written statement describing individual goals and expectations for the program.

Receiving and Screening. The application deadline was March 15, 2013; incomplete applications were not reviewed. Complete applications had to have the *Éxito!* program application, a personal statement, two letters of recommendations and current academic transcript. Internship work plans were also due on March 15, 2013.

Review and Selection. The overall quality of the application and potential to attain a doctoral degree in cancer control was determined by information and materials supplied in the *Éxito!* application. The review process began in March 2013 and was conducted by *Éxito!* team members: Dr. Amelie Ramirez, PI, Kip Gallion, Co-Investigator, Cliff Despres, IHPR Communications Manager, Rebecca Adeigbe, Program Coordinator, and Cynthia Wittenburg, Program Coordinator. Twenty-nine applications were received for Y3. Twenty-one individuals were selected to participate. Selected participants were sent a pre-institute packet, which included UTHSCSA institutional authorization forms, consent to participate form, travel information and a pre-institute survey.

ÉXITO! Y3 OUTCOMES

Pre-SI Survey. Prior to attending the SI, participants were asked to complete a pre-institute survey that collected demographic, academic, perception of barriers, perception of facilitators and academic self-efficacy information. The survey also asked questions about participants' likelihood to pursue a doctoral degree and a career in CHD research. The following summarizes the survey results:

Demographics: Twenty-two individuals were invited to participate in the Y3 SI. Participants represented different regions of the US. The majority of the participants were from Texas, California and Puerto Rico.

The average age of participants was 29; 18 participants were currently enrolled in a master's program and the average GPA for this year's class was 3.6. The majority of participants were born in the US (n=14), 14 identified themselves as single and 19 report not having children. English was the primary language for half of the participants.

Perception of Barriers and Facilitators: Participants were asked to identify challenges and obstacles faced during their educational careers; seven agreed and two strongly agreed that they experienced challenges/obstacles based on their ethnicity; the majority did not perceive their gender (n=11), age (n=14) or religious beliefs (n=17) to be challenges or obstacles during their academic careers.

Educational Background: The majority of participants indicated their parents had a bachelor's degree (fathers=9; mothers=7). More than half of the participants (n=15) strongly agreed that their families expected them to complete a bachelor's degree, eight agreed and two strongly agreed they were expected to receive a master's degree and one strongly agreed and five agreed they were expected to receive a doctoral degree.

When asked why they enrolled in a master's program the most reported responses were, "*I have an academic interest in health disparity and cancer research*" and "*I want to advance my career development*". Over half of the participants (n=13) said they were confident or very confident that they would apply to a doctoral program in the next year and 21 indicated being very confident or confident that they would apply to a doctoral program in the next five years. Having the ability to reduce health disparities in their community and the opportunity to conduct research were the main facilitators for pursuing a doctoral degree.

Educational Self-Efficacy: Over half of the participants felt that they had the skill to apply to a doctoral program (n=18), could get accepted into a doctoral program (n=15), could obtain an acceptable GRE score (n=15), could accomplish their academic goals (n=22), felt their culture would be an asset in a doctoral program (n=18) and had adequate social support to pursue a doctoral degree (n=17).

Summer Institute Surveys.

Day 1: The key presenter for SI's first day, Dr. Carmen Tafolla, San Antonio's Poet Laureate, was invited to return and present the core message for the SI—the importance of culture in Latino research—with her one-person performance, “Miracles, Medicine and Mi Cultura.” Participants also heard personal career pathways from current Latino cancer health disparities researchers. Participants recognized the importance of conducting culturally appropriate research. Personal stories shared by the speakers were also inspiring and provided insight for participants on how to balance school, careers and family. Overall, participants reported having an improved perspective on pursuing a doctoral program at the conclusion of Day 1.

Attendee Recommendations: SI activity objectives should be identified at the beginning of each activity to ensure participants understand the purpose of activities.

Day 2: To illustrate the types of cancer health disparities and intervention research, participants heard from individuals currently involved in biological cancer formation research and epidemiology, as well as researchers currently participating in breast cancer survivorship research and community-based participatory research. Participants indicated that a very thorough representation of science, research, and programming was presented throughout the day. A good balance existed between education and inspirational speakers, allowing participants to understand the depth and diversity of cancer research and envision future research possibilities.

Attendee Recommendations: Provide more examples of the types of CHD research conducted in Latino communities.

Day 3: Day 3 began with participants sharing their current involvement in health disparities and cancer research, while also explaining the type of research they would like to conduct after completing a doctoral degree. A writing specialist reviewed and critiqued each participant's personal statements and offered basic tips on creating an appealing personal statement. A speaker from the National Cancer Institute also informed students about pre- and post-doctoral fellowship and funding opportunities through the organization. Overall, participants felt the information shared about pre- and post-doctoral funding was very insightful, and having their personal statements critiqued by a professional reviewer was beneficial. In addition to the resources provided, participants benefited from hearing their peers current involvement in health disparities and cancer research and their research aspirations. Day 3 also featured a barbecue social event hosted by *Éxito!* PI Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez to allow participants to further network with each other and professionals in cancer and health disparities. Participants rated this event as “excellent.”

Attendee Recommendations: Invite researchers conducting research for different cancer sites.

Day 4: To provide participants with the information and resources need to apply, get accepted and thrive in a doctoral program, participants heard from a series of current doctoral students/graduates and were given insight on balancing work, school, qualifying exams and their

research work. In addition, while keeping with the overall goal of piquing interest in cancer research, participants were given information on the importance of race and ethnicity in biomedical research and clinical practice, and were later asked to reflect and share with the class how they came so far and who motivated them to continue in their pursuit of higher education. While participants heard information on a variety of different topics, they reported that the information provided was very enlightening.

Attendee Recommendations: Invite recent doctoral graduates to talk about the graduate admissions process and career opportunities with a doctoral degree.

Day 5: The final day of the SI provided participants with information on the importance of networking and researching potential doctoral programs based on the program's current research and faculty interest. At the conclusion of the program, participants went through a graduation ceremony and created a goal-setting "graduate timeline" for themselves that will later be mailed back to them as a reminder and encouragement to continue pursuing their doctorate degree. Participants appreciated the insight provided by the speakers pertaining to the application review process and how to initiate networking with doctoral program faculty.

Attendee Recommendations: Allow the speaker panel more time to answer questions and provide more time and better explanation for the goal-setting activity.

Post-Summer Institute Survey.

Pre/Post SI Results: After attending the SI, participants completed a post-SI survey which collected information on their academic self-efficacy and likelihood to pursue a doctoral degree and a career in cancer research. During the SI, one individual left the program early so the final alumni count for Y3 changed to 21.

Participants were asked to select whether they agreed or disagreed with statements related to self-efficacy towards applying to and completing a doctoral program. Participant's efficacy towards the following statements significantly increased after attending the Summer Institute. *"I have the skill to apply to a doctoral program"* ($p < .05$) and *"Financial challenges will not stop me from applying to a doctoral program"* ($p < .00$).

Participants were asked to select how confident they were that they would (1) apply to a doctoral program in the next year, (2) apply to a doctoral program in the next five years, and (3) how confident they were that they would pursue a career in cancer research. Participant's confidence towards applying to a doctoral program in the next five years significantly increased ($p < .04$) as did their confidence in pursuing a doctoral degree in the next year and career in cancer research; however, the increase in was not significant.

SI Experience Results: The majority of participants felt the SI objectives met their needs (strongly agree=13; agree=7), 17 strongly agreed the SI motivated them to overcome barriers

that would prevent them from obtaining a doctoral degree and 16 indicated the SI enhanced their self-confidence.

Participants also had an opportunity to provide SI logistical feedback. Sixteen strongly agreed the program offered new information, 17 stated the program offered practical information and advice and participants strongly agreed (n=14) and agreed (n=7) that the speaker selection was appropriate.

In addition, participants indicated the SI increased their interest in pursuing a doctoral degree ($p < .02$) however the SI did not appear to affect their interest in pursuing a career in cancer research ($p < .44$).

***Éxito!* Internship Outcomes.**

Nine internships were awarded during Y3 of the *Éxito!* program however only seven successfully completed their internships. Four of the seven interns performed secondary data analysis using various cancer and obesity-related datasets, two performed literature reviews and one conducted original research.

Internship pre/post results: Interns were asked to complete a pre- and post- internship survey to capture their research related skills and internship experience. Interns were asked to rank their skills towards conducting literature reviews, writing, time management, interpersonal skills, computer skills, statistical research skills, qualitative research skills and conceptual skills. Responses were based on a five-point likert scale (1=excellent thru 5=poor). Overall there were significant improvements seen in interns reported writing ($p < .03$) and conceptual skills ($p < .05$).

Internship experience results: All interns reported a good internship experience (2 as excellent, 4 as very good and 1 as good). When asked about their intentions to apply for doctoral programs, five of the seven were confident they would apply for a doctoral program in the next year and indicated their participation in the *Éxito!* internship affected their decision. In addition, three interns were very confident they would pursue a career in cancer health disparities research, three were confident and one was unsure; four of the interns stated participating in the *Éxito!* internship influenced their decision.

Mentor's feedback: At the conclusion of the internships mentors were asked to evaluate their interns overall performance and motivation to pursue a doctoral degree and career in cancer health disparities. Five of mentors indicated their intern maintained very high and high levels of communication with their mentors and four mentors felt their interns completed their proposed work, displayed improved self-confidence and welcomed new and creative ideas. The majority of mentors felt their intern had the potential to attain a doctoral degree (n=5) and possessed the motivation to advance in cancer research (n=6). Prior to beginning the internships three mentors indicated their interns were highly motivated to apply to a doctoral

program and at the conclusion of the internship five mentors reported their interns were highly motivated to apply to a doctoral program.

Overall the *Éxito!* internships provided interns with opportunities to improve their research skills. The majority of interns indicated they would be applying to a doctoral program in the next year and indicated *Éxito!* program influenced their decision.

Annual Alumni Survey.

Thirty-eight alumni received the annual alumni survey in April 2013 (2011 cohort n=18; 2012 cohort n=20) and 32 alumni completed the survey (84% completion rate).

The alumni survey collected alumni contact information and asked questions about their SI experience, applying for doctoral programs, doctoral program acceptance, current academic and employment status and intention to pursue a career in Latino CHD research.

Summer Institute Experience: The majority of the *Éxito!* alumni (n=25) strongly agreed the *Éxito!* program exposed them to the need for Latino researchers in the field of CHD research, 26 strongly agreed that *Éxito!* exposed them to the importance of CHD research, 20 strongly agreed that *Éxito!* exposed them to a spectrum of CHD research areas and 19 strongly agreed *Éxito!* influenced their interest in Latino CHD research.

When asked what alumni gained by participating in the *Éxito!* SI the three main responses were: (1) encouragement to pursue a career in Latino CHD research (2) reinforced my decision to obtain a doctoral degree and (3) realized the contribution I can make to the research field if I obtain a doctoral degree.

Academic Status: Of the 32 respondents, 16 have applied to doctoral programs, of which, 15 have been accepted into a program. Of the 16 alumni who have not applied to a doctoral program, six have indicated they are confident they will apply to a doctoral program in the next year and 11 individuals are very confident or confident they will apply in the next five years.

Employment Status: Eighteen *Éxito!* alumni are employed full time; 11 currently work in a field directly related to cancer and eight strongly agree they will pursue a career directly related to cancer if they obtain a doctoral degree.

ÉXITO! NEXT STEPS

Potential Enhancements. The *Éxito!* team had the opportunity to recruit and graduate three years of alumni (17 in Y1, 20 in Y2 and 21 in Y3). Y1 was formative, Y2 yielded significant improvements in the SI and recruited applicants and Y3 was dedicated to refining the program. For Y4, the following adjustments and refinements will be made: The *Éxito!* application will be

made available online, new universities, faculty and organizations will be identified to receive *Éxito!* program information and the alumni network engagement will continue to evolve to become even more interactive.

In addition, there will be a few updates made to the internship. The internship application and internship related documentation will stress the importance of proposing and conducting projects with realistic outcomes based on the time allotted for internships. Two scheduled calls will be made during the six-month internship between interns, mentors and *Éxito!* staff to ensure progress is being made towards completing proposed deliverables.

Program Promotion. For Y4, program recruitment will continue through the use of electronic and social media program promotion, we will continue to encourage alumni to recommend the program to their friends and colleagues and outreach to student organizations and associations and universities with large Latino student bodies will continue. The *Éxito!* program now has successful role model stories of alumni (<http://www.exitotraining.org/testimonials>), stories about alumni matriculating into doctoral programs and intern results (<http://ihpr.uthscsa.edu/sites/ihpr-drupal/files/upload/ExitoNewsletter2013.pdf>), video testimonials for program alumni (http://youtu.be/m2nPu2IM_HU) and a program overview video (<http://youtu.be/S9ccgtQciQ>). All of our alumni information, role models, and testimonials infuse all program recruitment efforts.

Summer Institute. Daily activities will continue to be revised to promote networking among the participants and better understanding of the program goals.

Recruitment Goals. For Y4, we anticipate an increase in received applications and will accept the 20 most qualified individuals to participate in the SI. In addition we will offer internships. Y4 applicants and *Éxito!* alumni will be eligible to apply for an internship.

Evaluation. As part of the grant, alumni will be asked to complete the annual evaluation to track alumni progress in applying to and enrolling in a doctoral program. In addition, Y4 participants will be required to complete the pre-, post- and summer institute surveys and interns (and their mentors) will be required to complete a pre- and post-internship survey and monthly progress reports.

2013 Summer Institute. The 4th *Éxito!* SI will be held the first week of June 2-6, 2014.