



# ¡ÉXITO! Noticias

## Latino Cancer Research Leadership Training

### Increasing Latino Participation in Solving Cancer Health Disparities

**J**ose Ramos never gives up. He learned how to persevere from his mother, who survived breast cancer.

So, after becoming the first in his family to graduate high school and college, he's aiming high for an MD/PhD. He is currently studying global disease as a master's student at Columbia University. He has an internship with the Brazilian Health Association to work on community-based cancer and disease research.

He recently took another big step—he applied for *Éxito!*

#### Apply Now!

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

Ramos is one of more than two-dozen 2016 grads of the *Éxito! Latino Cancer Research Leadership Training* program, which annually recruits 25 master's-level students and professionals for a five-day summer institute to promote doctoral degrees and careers studying Latino cancer.

*Éxito!* (English: Success!) is led by the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at UT Health San Antonio and funded by the National Cancer Institute. The *Éxito!* summer institute enhances understanding

of: the power of research to affect change; research methods, theory and interventions; cancer control; and networking and skills to successfully apply to a doctoral program.

"The [*Éxito!*] summer institute has inspired me to believe in all possibilities," Ramos said. "I am more than ever convinced that a dual MD/PhD is more than possible. *Si se puede!*"

Participants also are eligible to apply for paid internships.

"Training Latino researchers will increase the number of Latinos in cancer control research, which will increase work being done to reduce Latino cancer," said Dr. Amelie Ramirez, director of *Éxito!* and the IHPR.



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## A Message from Éxito! Principal Investigator

### Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez



Latinos earn just 3.9% of all science and engineering doctoral degrees conferred.

That's why our *Éxito!* program is so important.

Of 126 *Éxito!* grads since 2010, I'm excited to report that more than 25% 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, University of Texas 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, University of Texas Health Science Center at 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

It is individuals like these—and like you!—who will pursue a doctoral degree and perhaps help stop cancer—from the inside, embracing culture as a vital piece to cancer control and prevention.

Contact me [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 2017!!

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What a year this has been—almost defying description.

I believe our work is more important than ever before! We will not be deterred by doubters and haters... because our mission to conquer inequities is just!

May we find continued strength in the support we bring to one another.

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 2017. 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](http://www.exitotraining.org).

**Deadline for applying for one of our \$3,250 Éxito! Internships is March 6, 2017**

*Decisions will be announced in late March 2017*

## Share the Experience:

# Encourage your friends and colleagues to apply to Éxito!

We are currently accepting applications for our 7th Éxito! Summer Institute on June 5-9, 2017, in San Antonio.

**Apply at [www.exitotraining.org](http://www.exitotraining.org) by March 6, 2017.**

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, please e-mail us at [exito@uthscsa.edu](mailto:exito@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:

### ***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.

### ***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.

### ***Entre Familia: Educating Hispanic Adolescents and their Families on Cervical Cancer and HPV Vaccination***

*Promotoras* delivered *Entre Familia* (EF), a cervical cancer prevention, education, and outreach program to Hispanic families. Eligible program participants were Hispanic adults with boys and/or girls ages 11-17 years old who lived in Hidalgo County.

### ***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

### BILINGUAL RESEARCH ON SUGARY DRINKS AND LATINO KIDS

Latino infants were twice as likely to be fed sugary drinks than their non-Latino peers, and three of four Latino kids have had a sugary drink by age 2, which contributes to their high obesity rates, according to a new package of research from *Salud America!*, a national obesity prevention network under Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez at UT Health San Antonio. Read the research, infographics, and an animated video in [English](#) or [Spanish](#).

### COOKBOOK AIMS TO PREVENT CANCER WITH UNIQUE RECIPES

The new Rx Cookbook: Cancer-Fighting Recipes, Restaurants & Markets aims to help people reduce their cancer risk with recipes based on an anti-inflammatory diet, developed by a chef and researchers at UT Health San Antonio. The Rx for Better Breast Health study, led by Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez and others, gave local breast cancer survivors cooking classes, counseling, and biomarker assessments to test the effects of an anti-inflammatory diet on preventing cancer recurrence.

### BREAST CANCER CAN BE MORE FATAL TO CERTAIN LATINAS

For Latinas of Mexican or Puerto Rican descent, breast cancer is more likely to be fatal than for other U.S. Latinas, *SaludToday* reports. The research, conducted by the Avon Foundation for Women, was the first of its kind on this particular population. Breast cancer mortality rates differed for Cubans, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Central and South American women with breast cancer in the United States.

### LATINO KIDS MORE OPEN TO SMOKING

Latino kids are more likely to start smoking and develop a daily habit than other kids, according to a National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities study. The study examined “smoking susceptibility,” which precedes smoking behavior, of almost 144,000 non-smoking youth ages 9-21 from 1999 to 2014.

**Find Dr. Ramirez and the IHPR online!**



***Redes En Acción*** research network for Latino cancer

***Salud America!*** research network for Latino childhood obesity

***SaludToday*** interactive blog and social media campaign to raise awareness about Latino health issues and foster change



**Have you seen our Éxito! video?**

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



**Éxito! Alumni 2016**



**Éxito! Alumni 2014**



**Éxito! Alumni 2015**



**Éxito! Alumni 2013**



**Éxito! Alumni 2011**



**Éxito! Alumni 2012**



## **Mary V. Diaz Santana** ***Éxito!* Alumni 2011**

**M**ary V. Diaz Santana is currently doing her PhD in epidemiology at the University of Massachusetts' Graduate School of Public Health. Mary is a research assistant working on phthalates exposure and breast cancer, phthalates exposure and weight change and acculturation and cancer screening among Hispanic populations with a specific focus on assessing this association between Hispanic subgroups.

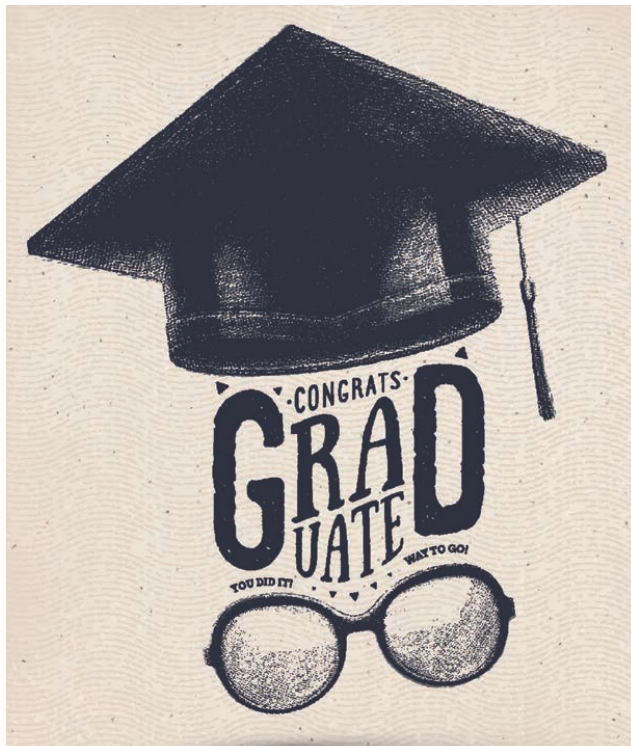
Mary was awarded a two-year, **\$73,688 award** under the Research Supplements to Promote Diversity in Health-Related Research Program by the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

"These analyses will deepen our understanding of how phthalates relate to breast

cancer risk, in addition to offering clarity on environmental causes of the ongoing obesity epidemic," Mary told Umass Amherst. "As phthalate exposure is both high and chronic, even a modest increase in weight or fat mass gain associated with phthalate exposure would have a substantial public health impact."

Mary would like to focus her research and career on reducing the burden of cancer and other chronic diseases among Hispanic populations and become a professor in epidemiology.

She states that *Éxito!* helped her realize how Hispanic populations suffer a disproportionate burden of chronic disease and that there is a dearth of researchers that can address this public health issue.



## **Martha Ivette Garcia** ***Éxito!* Alumni 2011**

**M**artha Ivette Garcia recently became the first *Éxito!* alumni to graduate with a doctoral degree after earning her PhD in Cell and Molecular biology from the University of Texas Medical Branch, School of Biomedical Sciences.

## Carola Sanchez Diaz Éxito! Alumni 2013

Carola Sanchez Diaz started her doctoral program in Fall 2016 at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Carola was awarded the Susan G Komen fellowship for her first three years of her PhD program. She also had an oral presentation, "Unawareness of HIV infection among men who have sex with men in Puerto Rico: NHBS 2008-2011," at APHA 2015. Carola said *Éxito!* helped give her the tools and motivation to apply for a doctoral program in cancer.

### Carola's top career goals:

1. Complete her PhD.
2. Become a researcher with a focus in cancer and other chronic diseases to decrease health disparities among the Latino population in the United States and Puerto Rico.



Carola Sanchez Diaz



## Fun Facts

### Best de-stressor?

*Beach, a good book and going out with friends.*

### Favorite study snack?

*Coffee and popcorn.*

### Favorite class so far?

*Methods in Epidemiology and Organic Chemistry.*



## Benjamin Aceves Éxito! Alumni 2014

**B**enjamin Aceves was accepted to the University of Arizona for his PhD in Health Behavior and Health Promotion. Currently, Benjamin is part of a research team that is evaluating the impact of the national nutritional guidelines for public schools in Mexico. He is responsible for analyzing the data and publishing findings in journals. This experience, as well as his time with *Éxito!*, helped prepare Benjamin for becoming a strong doctoral candidate and excel in a doctoral program. Benjamin said having the opportunity to conduct research in Mexico strengthened his beliefs that we must partner more with our neighbors on obesity and cancer prevention because of the numerous commonalities. Benjamin was also the recipient of the Fulbright-Mexico, Public Policy Initiative Award (2015-2016).

### Benjamin's top career goals:

1. *Become a professor.*
2. *Receive a federally funded public health grant.*
3. *Create a non-profit involving low-income communities in CBPR projects.*

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

Make sure you pick the program that matches your research interest. Do not focus so much on the name of the school. This will help ensure that you are passionate about your work. Also, being comfortable in the location. The environment of the school is just as important as the skills you will gain from the program.



Benjamin Aceves

## Fun Facts

### Best de-stressor?

*Exercising, cooking, and relaxing outside and reflecting.*

### Best study tip?

*Study with at least one person.*

### Favorite study snack?

*Any fruit with Tajin (low-sodium).*



**Natalicio Serrano**

## **Natalicio Serrano** **Éxito! Alumni 2015**

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**N**atalicio started his PhD in Fall 2016 in Public Health Sciences at Washington University in St. Louis. Natalicio is a graduate research assistant on a large randomized controlled trial designed to promote physical activity in church-going Latinas. Natalicio states that *Éxito!* gave him the push he needed to pursue a doctoral education, which was a necessary step in achieving his career goals.

### **Natalicio's top career goals:**

- 1. Eliminate/reduce health disparities in disadvantaged populations.*
- 2. Mentor students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.*
- 3. Lead chronic disease prevention efforts of his own.*



Nancy Vargas

## Nancy Vargas Éxito! Alumni 2015

**N**ancy Vargas started her PhD in Health Promotion and Health Behavior at Oregon State University in Fall 2016. She is currently helping conduct qualitative analysis of physical activity barriers and enablers among pregnant WIC women. Nancy says the best part of *Éxito!* was connecting with other attendees who continue to communicate with and encourage each other to apply. She also states that learning about the lack of Latinos in PhD programs overall pushed her to get her degree to become a professor who conducts research for the community and also teaches the next generation of Latino researchers. Nancy was the Health Science Commencement Speaker, CSU Fullerton, May 2016 and received the Health Science Outstanding Graduate Student Award, CSU Fullerton, May 2016. This award recognizes outstanding academic achievement, community/university service, and professional promise in public health. Nancy was also the recipient of the Diversity Advancement Pipeline Fellowship, Oregon State University (2016).

### Fun Facts

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

*It's my first time away from home and I'm honestly surprised I haven't been homesick. I think it has to do with the positive environment at my school. My classmates are very open about their academic struggles, which makes for a very supportive environment. A group of us celebrated Thanksgiving together so we wouldn't be alone for the holidays. It gave us an opportunity to get to know each other better. In addition, I have a very supportive faculty and advisor (Dr. Cynthia Mojica; I met her at *Éxito!*). Furthermore, Dr. Lilia Espinoza, who encouraged me to apply to *Éxito!* and doctoral programs, still continues to provide support, guidance, and life advice.*

**Best de-stressor?**

*Petting my cat or doing jigsaw puzzles.*

**Best study tip?**

*Study when you are most alert. For me that means studying in the mornings.*

**Favorite study snack?**

*Avocado anything, avocados are life!*

**Favorite class so far?**

*A physical activity course I'm taking for fun in which I learn to survive in the Oregon Wilderness. As part of the class, we had an outdoor excursion for three days where we had to use our skills to navigate the area, make fire, and build tarp and debris shelters.*

### Nancy's top career goals:

1. Obtain PhD
2. Obtain teaching position in her home state.

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

*Just apply! I didn't think I was going to get into any program but I ended up getting into four programs out of seven. Take time to visit schools and programs. OSU was not my first pick before school visits, but once I spoke to faculty and talked to students I knew the environment was what I needed to succeed. My first school ended up being my last pick after school visits. Second, find someone that is going through the process or has gone through the process. I was very lucky to have Angela Gutierrez, *Éxito!* and CSU Fullerton alum, to be there for me when I was ready to give up after being told by a potential advisor not to expect to make change in the world, that I would always be seen as a lesser student due to my ethnic background, and that I probably will never finish my dissertation because Latinas usually don't. He was the first person and program I visited and I felt very disillusioned and didn't want to apply. After talking it through with Angela, I refused to accept his statements. She encouraged me to visit her school and I had a positive experience. As a result, I continued to visit schools. I came to conclude that yes, the statistics are against me but they have been against me all my life, I'll continue to defy the odds. It's going to take more of us Latinas to create change at the community, research, and academic level to support the wellness of our Latino communities. We need you!*

**To her fellow *Éxito!* classmates enrolled in a doctoral programs Nancy says:** If you're thinking about doing community health work, get involved in the community early on. This is especially true if you are unfamiliar with the area. Take time to establish relationships and build connections so you can conduct your research in the community down the road.



## Shayda Dioun *Éxito!* Alumni 2016

Shayda Dioun is a public health student at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. During her *Éxito!* internship, Shayda conducted secondary data analysis to explore the association among language preference and country of origin with intentions to get genetic testing for breast cancer susceptibility among Latinas living along the Texas-Mexico border. Data had been previously collected in another study by the Institute for Health Promotion Research at UT Health San Antonio and UT Pan American.

In addition, Shayda also participated in the submission of two abstracts, one to the Annual Cancer Therapy Research Center (CTRC) Symposium in San Antonio, TX and to the L. Kay Bartholomew Eldredge Student Poster Competition hosted by the Health Promotion and Behavioral Sciences department of the University of Texas School of Public Health in Houston.

Thanks to her *Éxito!* internship experience, Shayda feels more prepared to begin her career path in public health and has a better understanding of her skillsets. The internship also strengthened her interest in health disparities research, and she has applied to several doctoral programs in public health focusing on cancer research and health disparities.



## David Rivas *Éxito!* Alumni 2016

David Rivas is studying epidemiology and biostatistics as a master's student in public health at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV).

During his *Éxito!* internship, David examined prostate cancer-specific survival among distinct Hispanic ethnic groups: Mexicans, Cubans, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, and Central and South Americans. David used Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Results (SEER) data from 2004 to 2011 to determine if survival disparities exists among Hispanic ethnic groups in comparison to the main reference population in the U.S., non-Hispanic Whites and non-Hispanic Blacks.

David's *Éxito!* internship project provided him the opportunity to collaborate with Dr. Paulo Pinheiro, an expert in the field of cancer health disparities research and gain valuable experience and knowledge.

As a result of the *Éxito!* internship, David's confidence in his technical writing, interpretation of statistical analysis, results, and literature review skills have improved. He also states that *Éxito!* sparked an interest in pursuing a PhD degree and helped bring a research career into perspective. David has better understanding of what it takes to obtain and be successful in a PhD program.



## Stephanie McCoy *Éxito!* Alumni 2016

Stephanie Yuki McCoy, a native of El Paso, Texas, received her master's of education degree in health behavior and health education at the University of Texas at Austin. As part of her *Éxito!* internship, Stephanie conducted a literature review to identify pediatric cancer disparities, including among Latino populations.

During the *Éxito!* internship, Stephanie was able to research new topics like child cancer disparities, bilingualism, and coping. She was also able to meet, talk, and work with current doctoral students in the lab. Stephanie is grateful to have the opportunity to work Dr. Erin Rodriguez, who provided her with advice and tips she used when applying for doctoral programs. Stephanie said she enjoyed this experience, was able to learn more about cancer disparities among Latinos, and will continue working in Dr. Rodriguez's lab.



**Maria Alvarez**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2016**

**M**aria Alvarez, who has a master's degree in health education and health behaviors from Teachers College Columbia University, is a clinical research coordinator in the Hematology and Oncology Department at Columbia University Medical Center (CUMC).

Maria's *Éxito!* internship project was to assess the association of parents' beliefs and knowledge about the HPV vaccine with their intention to comply with the recommendations regarding vaccine as factors for parents reported having their child vaccinated. The findings of this study are consistent with others regarding health beliefs and stages of change regarding having a child receive the HPV vaccine. It is one of the few studies of a mixed Latino parent sample, and one of the few to show an association with number of years in the United States.

Maria states that the *Éxito!* internship was a lifetime experience and recommends it to any young professional with the driving force to achieve practical science and theories for health improvement. Due to the *Éxito!* Internship, Maria has reinforced her interest in continuing with this sense of doing well for others.



**Gabrielle Castellanos**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2016**

**G**abrielle Castellanos, a native of San Antonio and a graduate of Health Careers High School, earned her bachelor's degree in biomedical science at Texas A&M University. She is now pursuing a master's degree in Allied Health Education and Administration.

As part of the *Éxito!* internship, Gabrielle performed secondary data analysis on sun protective behaviors among low-income Latina women along U.S.-Mexico border. The data used was part of a pilot study conducted by the Institute for Health Promotion Research at UT Health San Antonio and UT Pan American to examine the decision-making process among Latinas regarding intentions to get genetic testing for breast cancer risk.

During her internship, Gabrielle enjoyed learning how to use statistical software and learning how everything comes together. She found the process fascinating and very beneficial to understand the steps toward receiving results.

Gabrielle will also be presenting a poster regarding the findings of this study at the CTRC cancer symposium in San Antonio. In the following months, Gabrielle will pursue a career concentrated on health promotion and implementation with a goal of diminishing Latino health disparities. In the foreseeable future, Gabrielle plans on pursuing a doctoral degree in the same field.



## Mercedes Watson Garcia

### *Éxito!* Alumni 2016

**M**ercedes Watson earned a master's degree from San Diego State University.

As part of her *Éxito!* internship, Mercedes developed categories that describe the barriers/challenges that low-income, Hispanic metastatic breast cancer patients encounter in their life due to their cancer.

The *Éxito!* internship provided Mercedes her first opportunity to analyze data. Mercedes also states that researching different articles expanded her knowledge on cancer research and reinforced her views on the importance of having that data.

Mercedes would like to apply for her certification as a licensed clinical social worker. She's also considering a PhD in the future. Mercedes would like to continue to work on cancer control research in her community and provide manuscripts regarding the health disparities that her Latino community encounters.



## Kendra Cruz

### *Éxito!* Alumni 2016

**K**endra Cruz earned a degree in genetics and is working on her master's degree in public health.

Kick Buts, a text-message program is designed to engage current tobacco users that are trying to quit with a series of structured and interactive text messages through mobile communication over a six month-period. The name was redefined to *Patéalo* to resonate more with the Latino participants. As part of the *Éxito!* Internship, Kendra outlined the specific procedures and results from *Patéalo* and showed how data was collected and analyzed to report the study findings.

Kendra said her *Éxito!* Internship provided a rich experience that allowed her to look at research through a more holistic approach. Interviewing *promotoras de salud*, research assistants, co-investigators and the principal investigator helped her look at every aspect of the program and how each individual played a crucial role in the development and success of *Patéalo*. This encounter was very eye-opening and helped Kendra realize she has taken all the opportunities that have come her way to strengthen her research skills. Kendra can now see herself furthering her education and contributing to cancer research.



**Mari Elizenda Benavidez**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2012**

**M**ari Elizenda Benavides is currently a clinical IT navigator, a liaison between providers and a patient analytic software. Mari would like to receive her Cancer Tumor Registrar Certificate. Her top career goals are to work in cancer registry, help children fight childhood obesity and continue working with patient analytics.



**Maria Lizette Rangel**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2012**

**M**aria Lizette Rangel is currently working on her doctorate of public health at the University of Texas 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 graduate with her DrPH, obtain a post-doctorate fellowship at MD Anderson, and have a cancer-related position upon graduation from her post-doc.

Maria's current research is focused on the adaptation of biobanking and clinical trials education to improve cancer research, the impact of acculturation in cancer screening, and the use of behavioral informatics in cancer prevention and survivorship. Maria states that *Éxito!* provided her with more information about various topics related to cancer, such as cancer survivorship. This past year, Maria had three abstract posters and wrote a book chapter (under review): "The Wellbeing and Participation in New Social Networks following a Daycare Fire in Hermosillo, Mexico."



**Aditi Wahi**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2012**

**A**diti Wahi's is currently project director in a health-related quality of life research study among cancer patients. Her future education and career goal is to become a social worker in oncology.



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

**L**aura Rubacalva is currently working on her PhD at the Chicago School of Professional Psychology. Her expected graduation is Fall 2017. Her current research and dissertation focuses on bariatric psychology. Laura wants to become a professor or have a private practice in clinical psychology. Laura states that *Éxito!* supported her in understanding that she can accomplish life goals and be in school at the same time. *Éxito!* also helped her create a professional support network that still supports her today.



## **Andrea Fernandez** **Éxito! Alumni 2015**

**A**ndrea Fernandez is currently a project coordinator at the Institute for Health Promotion Research at UT Health San Antonio, and wants to continue working in cancer-related research in order to better understand cancer research. She also wants to investigate barriers to cancer prevention, to design culturally relevant cancer prevention campaigns, and to be able to connect with cancer patients, survivors, and family members of those diagnosed with cancer. Andrea presented a research poster at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP) conference earlier last year. Her research subject was sexual risk taking and condom negotiation behavioral skills.



## **Maria Priscila Brietzke** **Éxito! Alumni 2011**

**M**aria Brietzke is a PhD student and research assistant on projects that examine adolescent stress and mental health in Latino and immigrant communities. She collaborates with NC's schools of Public Health, Public Policy, and Media and Journalism. Her top career goals are to contribute to public health initiatives to improve mental health and mental health services in underserved communities, provide support and mentorship for young researchers from underrepresented groups, and contribute to the understanding of social and behavioral factors that shape mental health. Maria states that *Éxito!* solidified the fact that it is important for minorities to have a voice in the research that involves their communities. As a Latina working toward a career in research, Maria sees herself as one of those voices. She is excited to work with people from all backgrounds who have devoted their lives to improving minority health and promoting health equity. Maria has one publication currently in press in the *Journal of Adolescent Research*, "Stress and coping: Latino adolescents coming of age in a new immigrant destination."





## Angela Gutierrez

### Éxito! Alumni 2014

**A**ngela Gutierrez is currently a PhD student at UCLA and a graduate student researcher at the Center for Health Policy Research. She is currently working with the Center for Health Policy Research at UCLA to develop a Universal Assessment Tool (UAT) for the State of California. The purpose of the UAT is to better assess the needs of individuals enrolled in the following programs: In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS); Multipurpose Senior Services Program (MSSP); and Community Based Adult Services (CBAS). Angela is also a co-principal investigator for a *promotora*-researcher training initiative in Los Angeles. *Éxito!* influenced Angela to see that a doctoral degree is an achievable goal. Angela states that she is incredibly thankful, as she is loving being challenged, and growing from her participation at the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health's doctoral program. Her career goals are to become a tenure-track faculty member and researcher.



## Marievelisse Soto-Salgado

### Éxito! Alumni 2011

**M**arievelisse Soto-Salgado is currently in a doctoral program at University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus, Graduate School of Public Health. Marievelisse 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. She coordinates all BEBiC activities, is involved in the statistical consultation of all U54 research projects, and has authored and co-authored 30 publications within the BEBiC. In addition, she also assisted residents in the early stage study design, study implementation, and post-data collection activities of their research projects. Her long-term career goal is to become an independent faculty/researcher member in an academic institution where she can conduct research on cancer prevention and control among minority populations, with a specific focus on social determinants of health. Marievelisse states that *Éxito!* gave her an extra push to pursue her professional goals.



## Vanessa Torres

### Éxito! Alumni 2013

**V**anessa Torres is currently working on her PhD in health services at University of Washington. Her top career goals are to complete her doctoral program, pursue a tenure-track position in academia, and conduct research and implement interventions with a community-based participatory research approach to promote healthy lifestyles among underserved Latino communities. Vanessa is also working as a research assistant with Dr. Inida Ornelas on an NIH-funded R34, testing an intervention to reduce unhealthy drinking among Latino immigrant men. Vanessa is also the recipient of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Diversity Supplement Award for 2015-2017. As part of the diversity supplement award, she is conducting qualitative interviews to determine best practices for recruitment and retention of Latino immigrant men for future health services research. Vanessa states that *Éxito!* was a very empowering experience. She was very motivated to apply to a PhD program. *Éxito!* also gave her the tools and the confidence to pursue her career goals. For the first time, Vanessa states that she saw herself as a researcher and an academic.



**Monica Aguilar**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2013**

**M**onica Aguilar is a data manager at the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) / California State University Long Beach Center for Latino Community Health, Evaluation and Leadership Training. She is also a lecturer at California State University Long Beach, Health Science Department. Her top career goals are to pursue a doctorate in public health, graduate with a doctorate in public health, obtain a tenured position, teach courses in public health, and conduct research in Latino health and nutrition.



**Roger Figueroa**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2012**

**R**oger Figueroa is currently working on his PhD at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Roger's goals include completing his PhD program, landing a post-doctoral traineeship position, becoming a research professor, and serving as consultant or health provider in the practice sector. His research interests include childhood obesity prevention and the promotion of physical activity across the lifespan. Currently, Roger is working with a multi-disciplinary team to investigate the understudied roles of family childcare settings and their providers on child health outcomes, particularly looking at enabling factors of preschoolers' physical activity in this context. As a secondary interest, he's studying public perceptions about the obesity epidemic, as well as of its causes, consequences and potential solutions among individuals in the U.S. and global cultures. Roger states that *Éxito!* happened at a pivotal stage of his academic career and its meetings, available resources, and network helped him navigate his PhD program.



**Atenia Ruiz**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2014**

**A**tenia Ruiz wants to pursue a PhD in maternal and child health. Atenia wants to learn skills that are applicable to research and the private sector, and draft manuscripts and oral presentations of research. Atenia spends her time working on research, networking, and learning new skills. She also received the Nevada access grant twice, 2015-2016 and 2016-2017. Atenia presented a poster at UNLV in March 2016 on pediatric obesity.



**Griselda Rubio**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2014**

**G**riselda Rubio recently became a certified tumor registrar and currently manages the cancer registry at Doctors Hospital of Laredo. Her goals are to become a more proficient tumor registrar, establish a small business in cancer registry services, and transition into a professional academic setting.



**Christina Olson**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2014**

**C**hristina Olson works with Imperial County Public Health Department as a health program coordinator. Christina would still like to pursue a doctorate degree but wants to take some time to figure out what she would like to focus on. Christina's top goals are to be happy, improve the health of her community and find a job that makes her want to go to work every day.



**Delana Gonzales**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2012**

**D**elana Gonzales currently works as a program manager where she manages health care programs and grant submissions. Delana's education career plans are to enroll in additional course work to support her professional career. She's currently taking an online course to build on her research methods skills. Her top goals are to build her career trajectory, continue to develop her research skills to support her career, and network as much as possible. Delana presented a poster, "The Power of the Seed: A CBPR Project," at the IIMS Community Engagement Symposium, engaging patients, families, and communities in all phases of translation research for health improvement.



**Nancy Esparza**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2015**

**N**ancy Esparza is currently a program director. Nancy plans to research opportunities to attend a doctoral program and work in an organization where she can grow and utilize her skills to the fullest potential. Her top career goals are to work for an organization that serves vulnerable populations and is interested in affecting policy in a positive way. Nancy had several presentations during the last year, including a medical interpreter training program.



**Rossybel Perales**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2012**

**R**ossybel Perales currently works as a program manager. She would like to continue to work in public health research with a primary interest in cancer and health disparities and excel at her job. Rossybel also had several papers published this year.



**Jenny Castillo**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2012**

**J**enny Castillo wants to pursue a PhD in public health and run her own health programs. Her top goals are to become a manager and obtain her CHES certification. Jenny is a principal dancer with Fiesta Noche Del Rio Dance Company. Her project at work won the CDC U.S. **TB Elimination Champions award.**



**Mariana Arevalo**  
*Éxito!* Alumni 2011

**M**ariana Arevalo is a pre-doctoral fellow in the process of completing her PhD. Mariana would like to teach and do research at an academic institution, help decrease health disparities in the U.S., and get tenure. Mariana states that *Éxito!* helped strengthen her goals. Mariana worked together with Rosybel Amorrortu in writing a manuscript for publication and is happy to have the opportunity to work together with other *Éxito!* alumni. Mariana presented a poster at the Society of Public Health Education in April, "Increasing Minority Participation in Clinical Trials: Using Intervention Mapping to Develop RECRUIT." She also has several publications under review. Mariana has also been the recipient of several awards, including second-place winner in HPBS student poster competition in honor of Dr. L. K. Bartholomew, Society of Public Health Education (SOPHE) 21st Century Student Scholarship and Interdisciplinary Concentrations Conference Travel Scholarship by the University of Texas School of Public Health.



**Carla Rosales**  
*Éxito!* Alumni 2013

**C**arla Rosales currently works as a research assistant. Carla would like to continue doing research in hypertension and diabetes. She's currently working on animal and translational studies looking at the renin-angiotensin system. Carla also had a publication, "Vasopressin/V2 receptor stimulates renin synthesis in the collecting duct," in the *American Journal Physiology-Renal Physiology*.



**Johana Bravo**  
*Éxito!* Alumni 2015

**J**ohana Bravo is a research assistant at the KU Work Group for Community Health and Development. Johana is part of the evaluation team for a Latino health initiative in Wyandotte County, Kansas. The objective of the project is to improve the environment (corner store, restaurants, parks) for residents to have more/better access to healthier lifestyles. Johana plans to get a few years of work experience before applying for a doctorate degree. She would like to focus on Latino health disparities, particularly cancer and other chronic diseases. Her top career goals are to find the right industry for her, start a non-profit focusing on Latino health, and obtaining a doctorate degree in community health. Johana's team presented at their state public health conference and also submitted an abstract for APHA.



**Helen Palomino**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2012**

**H**elen Palomino is a medical social worker. Helen's top career goals are to become certified in oncological special work and enroll in a PhD or DrPh program.



**Angelina Velazquez**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2015**

**A**ngelina Velazquez hopes to obtain a PhD. Her future goals are to find employment as a scientist working on health research, volunteer at a hospital or clinic with cancer patients, and get admitted into a doctoral program to become an excellent investigator.



**Claudia Velazquez**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2015**

**C**laudia Velazquez would like to obtain a doctoral degree. Claudia's future goals are to become a medical scientist, entrepreneur, and speaker.



**Maritza Pulido**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2014**

**M**aritza Pulido is an associate director of student services and outreach, bridging the K-12 education system and higher education. Maritza would like to complete a doctorate degree in education administration or in Latin American studies. Her goals are to become an executive director of a non-profit, a higher education administrator, and a teacher (K-12 or higher education). Maritza is also a lecturer at SF State and is teaching Health and Social Movements in the United States 20th Century, where students examine history and issues around health and social justice. Examples of movements are the Young Lords, the Black Panthers and immigrant and labor rights.



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

**M**ayra Serrano is a cancer researcher and manager. Mayra would like to pursue a doctorate in public health. Her other career goals are to get an R01 grant and get more publications. Mayra also got married last year.



**Diana Aguirre**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2015**

**D**iana Aguirre is a community health center coordinator and graduate research fellow. Her career goals are to become a project manager, get published, and teach.

Diana visited Washington, D.C. for the first time last year for the National Conference on Health Disparities, where she presented a research poster on her thesis findings.

Diana also received the Travel Scholarship from Hispanic Opportunities for Graduate Access and Retention.



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

**R**amon L. Concepcion Torres works for IRIS Educational Media as a research associate. Ramon's goals are to become financially stable, as well as expand his education and family. Ramon has been working on two phase II federal grants: *Padres Preparados*, an evidence-based parenting intervention for Latino families, and *Mi Nueva Familia*, a media-based culturally relevant parenting education program for divorced Latino families.



**Alicia Nunez**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2014**

**A**licia Nunez is currently a PhD student in clinical psychology at the University of Nevada Las Vegas. Alicia is a graduate research assistant conducting research on cross-cultural neuropsychology and psychometrics. Alicia would like to complete her graduate training in clinical psychology, become a licensed clinical psychologist, and conduct research addressing ethnic health disparities. Alicia states that *Éxito!* encouraged her to continue pursuing a graduate education at the doctoral level. Moreover, attending the *Éxito!* Summer Institute provided her with additional tools to better prepare for the graduate school admission process.



**Eva Rodriguez**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2015**

**E**va Rodriguez is a women's health manager in public health, specializing in sexual and reproductive health. Her future career plan is to attend medical school.

Eva was selected as a co-chair for the NYC LARC Access TaskForce, a NYC-based volunteer coalition of sexual and reproductive health professionals with the aim of increasing access to long-acting, reversible contraception to all people in NYC.

Eva wants to have a positive effect among Latinos and their understanding of sexual and reproductive health, increase the understanding of contraception and the positive impact of comprehensive sexual education among disadvantaged populations, decrease stigma surrounding sexual and reproductive health, and normalize all sexual behaviors among people of color.





**Cristina Valdovinos**  
***Éxito!* Alumni 2012**

**C**ristina Valdovinos is a research associate. In the last few years, Cristina has had several publications, including a first-author publication that resulted from the work she did while in the *Éxito!* program.



**Aixa Perez-Caraballo**  
***Éxito!* Alumni 2013**

**A**ixa Perez-Caraballo is a PhD student at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Aixa is also a research assistant for a project, “Global DNA methylation in white blood cells and risk of breast cancer,” and an instructor for the Introduction to Public Health undergraduate course. Her goals are to: develop and disseminate knowledge to prevent disease and promote women’s health through interdisciplinary efforts; promote and conduct innovative research design using early clinical data to assess the risk of disruption of epigenetic control as a driver of breast cancer; identify the role of epigenetic changes and their influence in gene expression and breast cancer risk as potential biomarkers for targeted research; and further understand cancer health disparities and reduce the Latino cancer burden by increasing Latino participation in solving cancer health disparities. Aixa states that *Éxito* encouraged her to pursue a doctoral degree and a career in Latino cancer research and reminded her that she already possessed the necessary tools to successfully complete a PhD.



**Loida Tamayo**  
***Éxito!* Alumni 2011**

**L**oida is currently doing her PhD in health policy and management at Texas A&M University. Loida works as a researcher/research associate doing evaluation of the 1115 Waiver for the State of Texas. Loida does primary data collection, develops instruments and reports, and is qualitative and quantitative lead analyst and coder. Loida’s career goals are to conduct health services research at the Health Resources and Services Administration along with becoming a Large Think Tank Researcher.

Loida states that *Éxito!* empowered her to look at other areas in health where she could attain a PhD.



## Sanae El Ibrahimy

### Éxito! Alumni 2013

**S**anae El Ibrahimy is a PhD student at the University of Nevada Las Vegas. Sanae currently works as a healthcare analyst and is working on her dissertation project on diabetes and risk of colorectal cancer. Her top career goals are to become faculty, become an independent researcher, and obtain grant funding. Sanae states that *Éxito!* showed her that she can achieve her career goals regardless of barriers or challenges.



## Beatriz Sosa-Prado

### Éxito! Alumni 2014

**B**eatriz Sosa-Prado is a PhD student at University of California, where she is also a teaching assistant. Beatriz's research focuses on examining how socioeconomic status and acculturation influence weight status among Latino children in Los Angeles and Houston. Beatriz is also a graduate student investigator for the Healthy Passages(TM) data set under her advisor Dr. Jan Wallander at UCM. Beatriz's top career goals are to graduate with a PhD in public health, engage in research, and teach at the California State University system. Beatriz would also like to open a Latino health research and community center for undergraduate and graduate students, *promotoras/es de salud*, and community members, and replicate *Éxito!*



## Alexandra Banks

### Éxito! Alumni 2015

**A**lexandra Banks works as a clinical research intern. Alexandra's future career plans are to become a breast cancer surgeon and researcher. She also wishes to one day have her own non-profit organization. Alexandra presented research at the CDC. She was also the recipient of the CDU Mission Maker Scholar and NCI Introduction to Cancer Careers Program.



**Jasmin Martinez**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2015**

**J**asmin Martinez is currently a graduate research fellow. Her future education goals are to obtain a DrPh or PhD in public health. Jasmin would also like to become a professor at a university and develop and lead chronic disease prevention programs for Latinos. Jasmin presented posters at the Annual Latino Health Equity Conference and National Conference on Health Disparities. She was also named the Sally Casanova Pre-Doctoral Fellow.



**Lani Alcazar**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2013**

**L**ani Alcazar is a program coordinator at Brighter Bites. Lani would like to continue working in research, help with the implementation of research projects, and work directly with human subjects. She enjoys working with the Hispanic community and having the opportunity to promote healthier eating habits in the community. Currently, Lani is writing a paper about a Photovoice project she did last year and has submitted the abstract for two conferences.



**Diana Flores**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2012**

**D**iana Flores works in higher education as a program advisor/pre-medical advisor for an academic achievement program at UC Berkeley. Diana's current education and career goal is to obtain more research experience in social epidemiology. She would also like to be able to use her supervisory experience to move up in her current position, and use her knowledge, experience and Spanish-speaking abilities to continue to impact communities of color, especially as it pertains to preventative health measures. Diana was chosen to attend two very important conferences that relate to individuals of color in higher education. She has also had the opportunity to catch up and see a few of the people from her *Éxito!* cohort. Diana also took a trip to Latin America.



## **Sandra Acevedo** ***Éxito!* Alumni 2013**

**S**andra Acevedo is a health educator and registered dietitian. Sandra would like to apply to a doctoral program in public health behavioral health at UC San Diego. She would also like to improve health behaviors among immigrant communities, reduce their burden of chronic disease, and find ways to improve their quality of life. She also wants to become a role model for other Latina immigrants and young girls, as well as research, create and implement evidence-based programs that improve the lives of the Latino population. Sandra brought and implemented into her clinic the CDC's diabetes prevention program and created an internship program for Cal State Fullerton students studying health sciences to get exposure to a federally qualified health center.



## **Lizbeth Del Toro-Mejias** ***Éxito!* Alumni 2012**

**L**izbeth Del Toro-Mejias is working on her PhD at Massachusetts-Amherst's School of Public Health and Health Sciences. She's also a graduate research assistant. Her current research—an NIH/NIDA Research Supplement to Support Diversity in Health-Related Research—will help complete her dissertation research. The aim of this supplement is to identify and address gender dynamics in IV drug use among female drug injectors living in rural Puerto Rico. She's also a health interviewer on two other related projects. One is a randomized trial of a postpartum diabetes prevention program for Hispanic women and the other is a randomized lifestyle intervention in overweight and obese pregnant Hispanic women. Lizbeth's career goals are to get an R01, become a faculty professor, and mentor other students who are willing to contribute to public health and sciences. Lastly she would like to write a book. Lizbeth states that *Éxito!* gave her the confidence and key steps she needed to follow in order to get into a doctoral program.



**Lizette Alvarez**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2012**

**L**izette Alvarez is an academic advisor at a university honors program. Her future education goals are to get a PhD and become a professor/director. She would also like to provide research opportunities for students and engage with the community.



**Melissa Nanette Martinez**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2013**

**M**elissa Martinez is currently working as a data analyst at an advertising agency. She would like to continue taking continuous education relevant to her work and become a manager or director of an analytics department.



**Starla Garcia**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2013**

**S**tarla Garcia is a registered dietitian who would like to consult and work with individuals through diabetes education, eating-disorder nutrition therapy, and other weight management programs. She recently started a blog, [sweatxshine.com](http://sweatxshine.com), devoted to food, fitness, and overall well-being. Starla would also like to continue with her blog to motivate, educate, and inspire others to take advantage of their health issues through fitness, food, and well-being. Her top goals are to become a certified diabetes educator, own a nutrition counseling practice and educate Latinos about eating disorders and body image. Starla worked on an abstract for the 2016 American Society for Parenteral Enteral Nutrition Conference in Austin with her preceptors at Texas Children's Hospital.



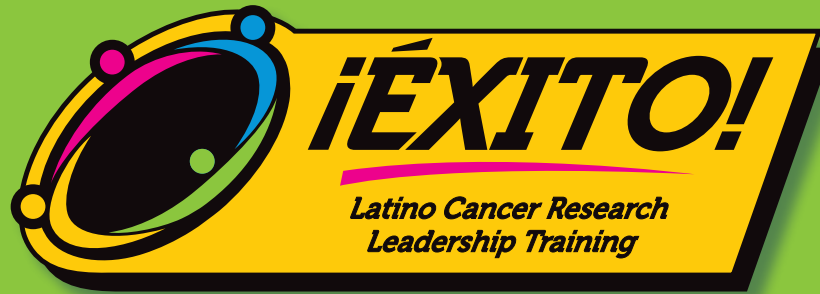
**Kaylee Rivera**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2014**

**K**aylee Rivera is a research and administrative analyst at California State University, Monterey Bay, under Dean Britt Rios-Ellis. Kaylee would like to transition more into health education and less research. Kaylee would also love to start her own business or non-profit one day. Her education and career goals are to possibly pursue PhD in public health nutrition. Kaylee lives in Monterey at the moment. She presented at the EB symposium in April 2016 on the graduate perspective of the USDA-funded fellowship she had from 2014-2015



**Sigolene Ortega**  
**Éxito! Alumni 2015**

**S**igolene Ortega would like to focus on becoming a project analyst or research coordinator in cancer inequities and disparities so that she may gain further cancer research experience. Her top career goals are to bolster her research skills in cancer disparities, implement interventions and programs to reduce cancer inequities, and apply to doctoral program in the next four years. Sigolene also received the Outstanding Masters Award in Health Services 2015.



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

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### 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](mailto:exito@uthscsa.edu).

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