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The Yale Ciencia Academy welcomes a new class of young science leaders

Over the past two weeks, 16 young science leaders kicked off their year as fellows of the Yale Ciencia Academy (YCA) for Career Development in a series of online workshops (June 7-18, 2021). The competitive program, funded by the National Institutes of Health, prepares promising scientists of color to successfully transition from a PhD into rewarding research careers. University of Ottawa is represented through the participation of Isabel Rojas Ferrer.

Led by Yale University in collaboration with the non-profit organizations Ciencia Puerto Rico (CienciaPR) and iBiology, YCA equips biomedical and health sciences doctoral students from underrepresented backgrounds in the final 1-2 years of their programs with the knowledge, skills, and networks they need to find great postdoctoral positions that will further their academic interests and career goals. Fellows must apply to be selected to participate in the year-long, mostly virtual program. The program leverages the CienciaPR community—one of the largest networks of Hispanic/Latinx scientists in the world—and the organizers' contacts with a diverse cadre of scientists of color and professional development, mentoring, and diversity and inclusion experts.

During the series of kickoff workshops, fellows developed trust and a sense of community through improv games, led by theater expert Boyd Branch, and with the guidance of science communicator and trainer, Liz Neeley, learned how to craft an effective personal narrative to communicate their scientific and personal identities to a variety of audiences. Over the upcoming year, fellows gather once or twice a month for online conversations and workshops with role models and experts who will share advice and insights to help them develop important career planning, mentoring, and scientific and interpersonal communication skills and products. Although all activities are specifically designed to help fellows successfully transition to a postdoc matching their career goals, interests, and values, the skills developed through YCA will continue to serve them at every stage of their scientific career. At the end of the program in June 2022, public health circumstances permitting, the cohort will meet in person on the Yale campus for final workshops and to welcome the next cohort of YCA Fellows.

One of the most innovative aspects of the program is that YCA fellows are guided to design and implement a science outreach project that helps them put into practice transferable skills (e.g., science communication, leadership, etc.) and allows them to connect with a community they care about. This year, YCA will also be launching its first "Advisor Academy," a learning community



comprised of the mentors of the YCA fellows, which will explore ways for research advisors to enhance their mentoring and institutional impact.

“The Yale Ciencia Academy complements traditional graduate training with access to a diverse network of peers, role models and advisors,” said Dr. Giovanna Guerrero-Medina, Principal Investigator and Director of YCA. “The goal is to help students gain clarity in their academic and professional goals and become the scientists they want to be. We are excited about the talent and promise among this new class of YCA fellows.”

Started in 2016 and funded by the National Institutes of Health, YCA was originally geared towards graduate students in any stage of their studies and offered more generalized training to support the trainees through academic and professional milestones and challenges and to expose them to a range of careers. In this format, YCA trained five cohorts for a total of 194 young scientists from nearly 80 institutions across the United States and Puerto Rico. The program was shown to help students define the career they want to pursue, improve their professional development and mentoring practices, and increase their confidence in their ability to navigate graduate school and career transitions successfully. The peer community of support and science outreach project were particularly highly rated elements among past YCA participants with more than 175 outreach projects completed over the past five years, reaching more than 50,000 people.

The YCA program was renewed for funding in 2020, pivoting to focus on preparing later-stage graduate students interested in pursuing postdocs. The 2021 class is composed of 16 students from 14 institutions throughout North America, selected from 48 applications. You can meet the full class of 2021 YCA Fellows [here](#).

About Ciencia Puerto Rico

CienciaPR is a nonprofit organization that connects nearly 15,000 Puerto Rican and Hispanic scientists, students, and educators worldwide through an innovative online platform. By leveraging its community’s collective knowledge, the organization has created thousands of resources to improve science education and help forge the next generation of Hispanic/Latinx STEM leaders.

Additional Resources

- [Learn more about the Yale Ciencia Academy](#)
- [Check out the Yale Ciencia Academy Blog](#)
- [Learn more about Ciencia Puerto Rico](#)

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