

Audilis Sanchez, MPH

2011/2012 HSHPS/HRSA Fellow



How did you become interested in public health and Hispanic health issues?

When I was very young I used to wear a Super Girl costume everywhere and say I was going to save the world. I also was a very curious girl with a passion for natural sciences. When I was doing premed, I took some social sciences courses that change my perspective. I learned how the social and natural sciences combined into public health and the rest is history.

While doing my MPH and MHA, all my research projects involved Puerto Rican health issues since it is my culture. After my first internship with HSHPS, I learned about health disparities and how it affects Hispanics, the fastest growing minority, which made me refocus my projects.

Did you have any models of Hispanic health professionals growing up? If so, who and in what ways did they influence you?

When growing up I always looked up to my mom. I wanted to do everything like her. My mom is a nurse and seeing how she loved caring for others drove me to do premed and get involved on public health. It is so amazing how the Hispanic women give everything for their families and still has so much to offer to others.

What HSHPS program did you participate in and what made you decide to apply?

I was a HSHPS/HRSA trainee for the 2011 and 2012 summers. It is funny, the first time I applied because one of my professors forced me to. She told me that I needed to see job opportunities outside the hospital industry. I thought that HRSA and other federal agencies were too much for me and I would not be accepted but at the last minute I received the call, resigned my job and flew three days later to start my summer adventure. For the second time, I was already prepared, much more mature and very excited to be part of the HSHPS/HRSA program again.

What did a day in the life of your HSHPS internship look like?

OMG! It was like being in a public health sorority. There was no time to sleep or rest but I was never tired. Wake up early. Have a quick breakfast while walking to the office. Work all day in super amazing projects, which included staying late because I lost track of time. And then go home to discuss the achievements and/or new ideas while cooking dinner with the roomies. It was all about brainstorming public health.

Describe a time during your HSHPS internship that stuck out to you - a memorable moment, lesson learned, etc., if any?

I have so many wonderful memories...I always liked participating in outdoor activities, especially when they involved BBQ. There was one time where I forced my two vegetarian housemates to have lunch with

me and guess what? We met Dr. Mary Wakefield! We had lunch with her and took pictures that made the HRSA intranet front page.

Another cool story is when I went to a USPHS concert at the WWII memorial and met Dr. Regina Benjamin, Surgeon General at the time. I told her very excitedly "You are my Public Health Celebrity!" She laughed and hugged me. We took pictures and had a great time.

Continuing with the tradition of forcing people to go out and meet people, I forced my housemate to go to the HHS Night at the Ballpark and we met Dr. Kathleen Sebelius, HHS Secretary at the time. The pictures and the story made the HRSA intranet front page again.

How has the program helped you move forward in your career?

I was blessed to be part of HSHPS. Thanks to the program I gained the professional and field experience I needed to move on with my career after graduate school. Education alone is not enough to obtain your dream job, and HSHPS provided me the skills and tools to get closer to it.

Where are you now and what project(s) you are you currently working on?

Currently, I am in my second year with a public health program working for a state Department of Health and a Quarantine Station in illnesses responses and communicable diseases surveillance.

Where do you see yourself and your career going from here?

I am still in the process of defining my career since I am very energetic and like everything about public health but have not focused on a specific area. I truly believe with my administrative skills and my passion for public health one day I will be the director of a program.

What is something that you have learned now that you would have liked to learn as a student just starting her health professions journey?

Get involved in everything! Be part of student and professional associations. Do volunteer work. Take advantage of your time as an intern to learn as much as possible about the job, and meet people and stay in touch with them. But most importantly develop a mentor-mentee relationship.

What advice can you offer to young people interested in learning more about Hispanic health issues or the health professions field?

Instead of taking the easy A elective courses at school, talk to your advisor/counselor and arrange a special project where you can go to healthcare facility, a non-profit organization, or even a health department to do a research project or simply work for them to obtain the experience. Do it even if it is without pay because, in the long run, that experience will provide you with the skills to help you stand out on your resume.