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

"No! I'm sorry, but your child cannot be admitted here! You do not have insurance," said the nurse behind the counter. My mother would sadly recount this story in the same fashion. She would further explain how my father and her stood there, scared and powerless. The underlying theme within their anecdote of social inequality and its effects on health care access gave impetus to my public health career.

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My interest in public health research expounds on the intersection between race/ethnicity and health. More importantly, my goal as a public health leader is to think creatively to better address and effectively reduce racial/ethnic health disparities, specifically targeting Hispanic health issues.

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

I completed my Masters in Public Health from the University of Texas Health Science Center in May 2004. I then applied to HSPHS because the organization's mission was a perfect fit for me. I participated in the HSPHS program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta. The program furthered my experience in HIV prevention by gaining research mentorship within the Division of HIV and Prevention. The program also allowed me to network with other young Latino health professionals from all over the United States. Today, I keep in touch with many of my colleagues that participated in the HSHPS Summer program, many of whom I consider my best friends.

What are doing now?

Currently, I am teaching for the City University of New York in the Department of Health Education. I teach for a school that targets the South Bronx Hispanic and minority communities. Being a professor has been a rewarding experience. I always try to make my class fun yet educational. I also know my students appreciate having a Latino role model who supports their long-term goals in nursing, public health and medicine.

In addition, I am working on publishing my dissertation and evaluating a Bronx-based mentorship program that encourages minority youth to gain entry into college and obtain scholarships. This program is amazing and already produced three Gates Scholars from the Bronx who will receive full funding for their academic careers. I am proud to state that one of those students was a former student of mine as I have also taught gifted high school students college courses.

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

I really love teaching - I want to continue being affiliated with an academic institution. But I also really need to continue working in communities. I want my career to progress to a point where I am still an active professor, conducting community based participatory research and building capacity for community based organizations. Our Latino communities are at a pinnacle point in our lifetime. There are so many changes occurring with immigration reform, voting power and increases in our population that it is crucial that we sustain the health and education of our community. I feel that I can play an integral role in helping with that sustainment, so that our current and future generations of Latinos will benefit more.