

# Dayana Paula, MPH

2009 HSHPS/CDC Fellow

Project Coordinator

Florida International University (FIU)



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A public health career didn’t cross Dayana Paula’s mind until a friend introduced her to a public health professor at the beginning of 2007. He put into words what Dayana liked for so long. “I knew what I wanted to do but I didn’t know what it was called,” she recalls.

Just a year earlier, Dayana graduated from the University of Massachusetts Amherst with a B.A. in communications. She was working as a receptionist in Amherst’s alumni office when her “big turning point” happened.

In the fall of 2007, Dayana started her Master’s program in community health education at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. And now?

“I’m obsessed with public health,” Dayana says excitedly. “You can go into so many different projects and programs because it is so broad.” She cites the World Health Organization’s definition of health: “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

She adds: “Public health doesn’t limit you. You can go into so many different fields, and that’s what I love about it - you can make it what you want it to be. You can narrow it down into your own specialized science.”

Dayana participated in the 2009 HSHPS/CDC Program in Atlanta, Ga., to learn what it was like to work on the federal level. She was impressed by the amount of resources poured into the program’s professional development events. She was required to go to three to four training sessions and set up her opportunities to network on her own time. Dayana made seven to eight contacts at the CDC in two months.

“There was so much learning going on,” she says. “I’m a lifelong learner.”

As of December 2013, Dayana has been working as a Project Coordinator for Florida International University. Her current research project looks at how marijuana use affects thinking and memory in adolescents, a relevant topic considering recent efforts to reform marijuana laws.

For Dayana, the appeal of the project lies in its research subjects.

“Adolescence is a time when you can make the most mistakes and be the weirdest and no one can say you’re crazy!” she says laughing. “But I also know what a lonely place it can be. Teens need as many people in their lives. You can still impact, mold, and shape at a young age. That’s why I like working with them.”

Dayana sees herself continuing her line of community-based work. “I really want to help my community out. I grew up in Boston where we encounter barriers and obstacles, and I definitely want to be part of that solution.”

Eventually she wants to work on the federal level but her ultimate goal is moving to Geneva, Switzerland, to work at the World Health Organization.