

# Laura Cristal Magaña, MPH

2014 HSHPS/NIH Fellow



Laura Cristal Magana, MPH, is a graduate of The George Washington University School of Public Health where she received her MPH in maternal and child health. Her experience as an HSHPS/NIH Fellow helped her see a future in working on a federal scale. Today she is an Oak Ridge Institute for Science Education fellow at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention where she is working on sequencing RNA viruses via next-generation sequencing technology. Her research assists the Division of Virology's in its responsibility for disease surveillance of vaccine preventable and non-vaccine preventable viral diseases.

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

As the oldest child in the family, I became the designated translator when my mother would take my sisters and I for medical appointments. Fast forward several years later - I began taking ethnic studies classes at Oregon State University. I learned about social injustices but what really caught my attention were the healthcare injustices and atrocities committed against women of color.

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

Oregon pre-2000s was predominantly an Anglo-Saxon state with pockets of Latinos working predominantly in the lumber, produce canning, and agricultural industries. The only professional healthcare provider that looked like me was in Mexico. I would accompany my grandparents to their medical appointments for fun - not as an interpreter. One of my dad's first cousins was a nurse. In high school I came across Latino health professionals via the Internet. In college I met Latino health professionals attending conferences such as the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science.

### **What made you decide to participate in the HSHPS training program?**

In college and graduate school I worked in academia and in nonprofits, in various laboratories or on research projects. I saw HSHPS as a form to gain federal government experience while also engaging in a research project related to Latino health.

### **What do you hope to get out of the program?**

I discovered that the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at the Office of the Director at the National Institutes of Health was an excellent fit for me. I learned that when people are passionate about the work they do, that work environment is a place of professional growth and

collaboration amongst colleagues. The work EDI does can have a lasting impression on NIH outreach to improve the health of minority communities and can be the model for other federal agencies.

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

Working as HSHPS/NIH fellow enabled me to see myself in a career in federal government. I am now an ORISE fellow at the CDC in Atlanta, Georgia.

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

I am passionate about public health. For the time being working in the laboratory setting is where I am at in order to move my academic interests forward – a Ph.D. in microbiology, environmental health, or virology is in the horizon. One day I would like to return to EDI or an office similar to EDI at a different agency. I see myself doing the work that EDI does to support both NIH employees and clients. Though there is no instant gratification from an individual that you may help, the difference will be felt by entire communities as access increases to NIH services, such as clinical trials or IC information about specific diseases in other languages apart from English.

**What advice can you give to young people who have an interest in Hispanic health or medicine/PH/health professions?**

- 1) Be persistent and relentless about your passion. I applied three times to HSHPS before I was accepted. I applied to numerous ORISE positions before I was finally given an opportunity. Do not quit!
- 2) Be open and flexible. The hiring process for the federal government is slow, so be patient. I relocated from Washington, D.C. to Atlanta, Georgia, for my ORISE fellowship. I miss D.C. but know that the CDC is the next move in my career.
- 3) Be in the know and involved. Continue reading journal articles or attending seminars, workshops or conferences even after graduation. Give back to young professionals and students because even though you may have succeeded without a role model, others may need that icon, mentor, sponsor and advisor.
- 4) *Hecha la mano*. Do all for your passion and community. When things get tough, remember your purpose and remember all the *raza* that are rooting and counting on you and your success to give back to the community.