

## 2024 CAPAC Summer Trainees' Testimonials



(<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Sharlene-Santiago-Diaz.jpg>)

**Sharlene Santiago Díaz**

**Institution:** Ponce Health Sciences University

**Mentor:** Josefina Romaguera, MD – University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus

**Summer Project:** Longitudinal Study to evaluate the cervicovaginal microbiome as a risk factor for high-risk HPV progression and cervical cancer.

**Testimonial:** “This experience helped me realize that Ob-Gyn is the right specialty for me. Thanks to my mentor, I can now visualize myself in this field, and as a clinical researcher focused on the Puerto Rican community. I am forever grateful to CAPAC for the opportunity and their excellent work towards cancer prevention and control.”

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**Institution:** Ponce Health Sciences University



2024

(<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Leslie-N.-Padilla-Vazquez.jpg>)

**Leslie N. Padilla-Vázquez**

**Mentor:** Carola T. Sánchez, PhD – University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

**Summer Project:** Social Drivers of Health (SDoH) influence on cardiovascular diseases in Hispanic breast cancer (BC) survivors in the US and PR.

**Testimonial:** “My experience in the CAPAC program has been unique and enriching. It’s an invaluable opportunity to learn and expand knowledge, especially for future public health professionals eager to delve into the field of cancer prevention and control.”

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2024

(<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Alejandra-Cardenas-Montanez.jpg>)

**Alejandra Cardenas Montañez**

**Institution:** University of Puerto Rico, School of Medicine

**Mentor:** Michelle Martínez Montemayor, PhD – Universidad Central del Caribe.

**Summer Project:** Pre-clinical evaluation of the proteasome activity of steroidal anti-cancer compounds.

**Testimonial:** “I believe there is power, not only by understanding the importance of cancer control and prevention, but also by conducting valuable research to raise awareness and to have an active role in advancing science. That’s what CAPAC is all about.”

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(<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Michael-A.-Rodriguez-Rivera.jpg>)  
**Michael A. Rodríguez Rivera**

**Institution:** University of Puerto Rico, Medica Sciences Campus

**Mentor:** Kevin M. Alicea, PhD – University of Puerto Rico, Humacao Campus

**Summer Project:** Deciphering the role of interferon 1 ( $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ ) in the glycolytic activity of myeloid-derived suppressor cells (MDSCs)

**Testimonial:** “The CAPAC program is a very well-organized summer research experience that provides seamless integration into the research setting and motivates students to continue their careers in cancer research. The program provides mentoring and career development activities that help you not only grow your knowledge, but your professional career.”

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2024

(<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Amarilis-Bolanos.jpg>)

**Amarilis Bolanos**

**Institution:** University of Southern California

**Mentor:** Nancy R. Cardona-Cordero, DrPH and Ana Patricia Ortiz, PhD

**Summer Project:** “Evaluating the impact of hurricane floods on gynecological cancer patients’ quality of life within the physical and mental domains following the hurricanes in Puerto Rico in 2017.”

**Testimonial:** “CAPAC gave me the confidence to pursue a career in research and share my findings with both scientific and general audiences, in both oral and written forms. Being surrounded by like-minded peers from various fields also encouraged me to pursue research within my area of interest, particularly in cancer. Through CAPAC, I had the opportunity to meet my fantastic mentor, with whom I am excited to continue working and sharing my successes. Thank you, CAPAC, for this opportunity and for opening doors for me in the field of cancer prevention and control.”

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**Institution:** University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

**Mentor:** Nancy R. Cardona-Cordero, DrPH and Ana Patricia Ortiz, PhD – University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

**Summer Project:** Identifying neighborhood characteristics of Puerto Ricans and Superfund sites (heavily contaminated sites designated by the Environmental Protection Agency).



2024

(<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Sailing-Jane-Tak-Tang.png>)

***Sailing Jane Tak Tang***

**Testimonial:** “It was a great summer program, and I wish I had done it sooner. For me, the program clarified a lot of research experience mysticism (i.e., submitting abstracts to conferences, finding funding, conducting research, etc.). I also had the opportunity to focus on a topic that I am passionate about and collaborate with a supportive team of researchers.”

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2024

(<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Wilfred-Fonseca-Ferrer.jpg>)

***Wilfred Fonseca Ferrer***

**Institution:** University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus

**Mentor:** Carlos Díaz Osterman, PhD – University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

**Summer Project:** Enhancing the Efficacy of standard therapies in prostate cancer cells using novel inhibitors of Rho GTPases.

**Testimonial:** “Faculty, mentor, and peer to peer mentor were very proactive and always available to help. It was an excellent experience.”

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(<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Yaraliz-Corchado-Vargas.jpg>)

*Yaraliz Corchado Vargas*

**Institution:** University of Puerto Rico, Aguadilla Campus

**Mentor:** Yisel Cantres, PhD – University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

**Summer Project:** 3D oral mucosal organoids as models to study oropharyngeal cancer and HPV.

**Testimonial:** “The CAPAC internship was an excellent experience, it helped me grow professionally and have more confidence as a scientist. It also allowed me to meet great mentors and make connections with students from different parts of Puerto Rico and the United States.”

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**Institution:** University of Southern California

**Mentor:** Stephanie M. Dorta-Estremera, PhD – University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

**Summer Project:** Identifying immune cells for cervical cancer progression due to HPV, and exploring health disparities among Hispanic women in Puerto Rico and the continental U.S.





2024

([https://www.cccupr.org/wp-](https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Diana-Viridiana-Flores.jpg)

[content/uploads/2024/10/Diana-Viridiana-Flores.jpg](https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Diana-Viridiana-Flores.jpg))

***Diana Viridiana Flores***

**Testimonial:** “I appreciate all I have experienced and learned about Puerto Rico and its culture. It is a beautiful place with wonderful people. My research skills have advanced far beyond my expectations, and I am amazed by what I can achieve. Although I was placed in a lab unrelated to my background, I am now confident that I will pursue a PhD and continue applying the skills I have acquired here.”

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2024

([https://www.cccupr.org/wp-](https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Maria-Sofia-Segarra-Juelle.jpg)

[content/uploads/2024/10/Maria-Sofia-Segarra-Juelle.jpg](https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Maria-Sofia-Segarra-Juelle.jpg))

***María Sofía Segarra Juelle***

**Institution:** University of Puerto Rico, School of Medicine

**Mentor:** Ana P. Ortiz, PhD – University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

**Summer Project:** Prevalence and risk factors of oral human papilloma virus and the correlation to cervical and anal HPV infections in a population-based sample of women in Puerto Rico

**Testimonial:** “The CAPAC program helped me develop new research skills and connect with mentors who will aid in my future professional development.”

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   (<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Riseilly-Ramos-Nieves.jpg>)  
*Riseilly Ramos Nieves*

**Institution:** University of Puerto Rico-Medical Science Campus

**Mentor:** Josué Pérez-Santiago, PhD – University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

**Summer Project:** Role of Microbial Compounds in Oncogenic Mechanisms Associated with Oral Squamous Cell Carcinoma.

**Testimonial:** “By participating in the CAPAC Program, I learned about the significant cancer research being conducted in Puerto Rico and had the opportunity to work alongside a highly experienced mentor. CAPAC allowed me to strengthen my research skills and understand how, as a scientist, I can make a significant impact in cancer research.”

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**Institution:** Caribbean Central University

**Institution:** Caribbean Central University

**Mentor:** Rocío Rivera, MD, PhD – University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center





2024

(<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Isabel-Agostini-Catala.jpg>)

**Isabel Agostini Catala**

**Summer Project:** Understanding disparities in pediatric cancer: an epidemiologic study in a Hispanic patient cohort.

**Testimonial:** “I highly recommend the CAPAC summer research program for its unparalleled opportunities for professional development. During my time in the program, I gained in-depth knowledge about pediatric cancer disparities and had the chance to collaborate with a diverse group of professionals on a significant research project. This experience not only enhanced my research skills but also expanded my professional network and provided me with valuable insights into the field.”

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2024

(<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Luis-F.-Diaz-Pagan.jpg>)

**Luis F. Díaz Pagán**

**Institution:** University of Puerto Rico, School of Pharmacy

**Mentor:** Pablo Vivas, PhD – University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus

**Summer Project:** Evaluating the biological effects of targeting the hemopexin domain of MMP3 with small molecule inhibitors as a potential approach to overcome the platinum-based chemoresistance in ovarian cancer patients.

**Testimonial:** “In addition to the opportunity to be part of a research project that can have a real impact on the population, CAPAC is a program that includes a specific approach to addressing cancer disparities within Hispanic communities and that promotes culturally relevant interventions.”

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 (<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Greicha-L.-Martinez-Rosario.jpg>)  
***Greicha L. Martínez-Rosario***

**Institution:** Interamerican University of Puerto Rico, Metropolitan Campus

**Mentor:** Dr. Yamixa Delgado, PhD – San Juan Bautista School of Medicine

**Summer Project:** Lung cancer therapy, using plant-based formulations adding knowledge on their genetic effects to determine their potential as immunotherapies.

**Testimonial:** “I am grateful for the opportunity CAPAC gave me to research cancer. Likewise, I thank my mentor for her patience and dedication to teaching me.”



2024

(<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Alyssa-Arreola.jpg>)

**Alyssa Arreola**

**Institution:** University of Pittsburgh

**Mentor:** Julie Dutil, PhD, University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

**Summer Project:** Ancestry Aware Analysis Reveals Importance of Genetic Diversity in Breast Cancer Research in Puerto Rico.

**Testimonial:** “CAPAC has allowed me to put a dream of mine into action-conducting research focus on Hispanic health and genetic diversity. This program allowed me to grow my candidacy as a genetic health disparities researcher, and I believe these skills I gained from this experience will prepare me for future research experiences and career goals.”

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**Institution:** University of South Florida

**Mentor:** Marievelisse Soto, DrPH -University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

**Co-Mentor:** Lorena González, MS

**Summer Project:** HPV vaccine uptake among people living with HIV aged 18-47 years-Medical Monitoring Project (MMP), 2015-2017.



2024

(<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Nachalie-Ramos-Montalvo.jpg>)

***Nachalie Ramos Montalvo***

**Testimonial:** “My experience overall was great! I had the opportunity to work on my writing skills, and the CAPAC program helped me to work on that matter. I would say that the communication and collaboration between my mentors and peer to peer mentor was excellent.”

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2024

(<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Janlouis-Rodriguez-Figueroa.jpg>)

***Janlouis Rodríguez Figueroa***

**Institution:** University of Puerto Rico-Medical Sciences Campus, Graduate School of Public Health

**Mentor:** Marievelisse Soto-Salgado, DrPH – University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

**Co-Mentor:** Lorena González, MS

**Summer Project:** Social Determinants of Health and Cigarette Smoking Among People Living with HIV in Puerto Rico: Evidence from the Medical Monitoring Project, 2015-2021.

**Testimonial:** “The CAPAC program was an incredible and enriching experience. During my time in the program, I undoubtedly grew as both a researcher and a healthcare professional. Under the guidance of my mentor, my growth was exponential, and I feel that these experiences have shaped me into the professional I aspire to be. Not only did the program allow me to research topics of personal interest, but I also learned immensely from others. As a result of this work, I am currently working on a manuscript. CAPAC was a turning point-it significantly boosted my confidence in the kind of researcher and professional I can become. Lastly, I had the privilege of meeting extraordinary people and forming friendships that I hope to keep for a lifetime.”

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(<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Valeria-M.-Schleier-Albino.jpg>)

*Valeria M. Schleier Albino*

**Institution:** University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus

**Mentor:** Magaly Martinez Ferrer, PhD- University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus




**Summer Project:** Effects of Methyl Jasmonate (MJ) on cancer cells, focusing specifically on the A-253 cell line



**Testimonial:** “My experience in the CAPAC program has been crucial for my growth, both personally and professionally. I have gained valuable skills and knowledge that I am confident will carry over into all my future endeavors. The program has provided me with tools and perspectives that will positively impact my career as a researcher. I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of this program, and to have learned from such a dedicated and enriching community.”

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   (<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Jazmar-Villarini-Torres.jpg>)

**Jazmar Villarini Torres**

**Institution:** Interamerican University Metropolitan Campus

**Mentor:** María González-Pons, PhD – University of Puerto Rico  
Comprehensive Cancer Center

**Summer Project:** Host Genetics/Gut Microbiota Interactions  
Contribute to Colorectal Carcinogenesis

**Testimonial:** “CAPAC provided me with a tremendous experience to learn about the day-to-day work of professionals in the cancer control and prevention field. It also gave me the opportunity to understand the importance of health disparities and their impact on the Puerto Rican Hispanic population. This experience motivated me to continue developing in this field and contribute to reducing cancer incidence and mortality within our community. I also value the chance to meet and collaborate with other trainees and build meaningful connections with them.”

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2024

(<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Juliana-Guevara-Montanez.jpg>)

**Juliana Guevara-Montañez**

**Institution:** Puerto Rico-Medical Sciences Campus, School of Pharmacy

**Mentor:** Elsa Pedro Gutiérrez, PharmD, University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus

**Summer Project:** Analyzing Antiemetic Medication Prescribing Patterns in an Outpatient Oncology Clinic in Accordance with Established Guidelines.

**Testimonial:** “CAPAC was an incredible experience for me. It provided valuable professional and personal development opportunities, allowing me to gain new knowledge and insights into the field of cancer research. Personally, the program truly opened my eyes to the diverse contributions that pharmacists can make in this area.”

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**Institution:** Interamerican University San Germán Campus

**Mentor:** Harold Saavedra, PhD – Ponce Health Sciences University

**Summer Project:** The Therapeutic Role of AURKA and AURKB in Triple Negative Breast Cancer Metastasis and in Survival Disparities.

**Testimonial:** “Participating in CAPAC program has been an invaluable experience, where I improved both my research and communication skills. It also provided a unique platform for networking and exploring diverse academic opportunities, broadening my professional horizons.”



2024

(<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Selimar-Alvarez-Vazquez.jpg>)

***Selimar Álvarez Vázquez***

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2024

(<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Mirelys-Valentin-Lopez.jpg>)

***Mirelys Valentín López***

**Institution:** Ponce Health Sciences University

**Mentor:** Karen Ortiz, DrPH and Axel Gierbolini, DrPH – University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

**Summer Project:** Disparities in Survival and Mortality Risks Among Patients with Oral Cavity and Pharynx Cancers in Puerto Rico, 2012-2016.

**Testimonial:** “When applying, I was very scared because I had no research experience. However, I believed in myself and went for it. Overcoming that fear was the best decision I could have made. This

experience will mark a turning point in all aspects of your life.”

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(<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Jesennia-Bonilla-Liriano.jpg>)

**Jesennia Bonilla-Liriano, MS** *(Peer-to-peer mentor)*

**Institution:** Interamerican University of PR-Fajardo Campus

**Mentor:** Pablo Vivas, PhD, University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus

**Summer Project:** Elucidation of the mechanism of action of Simalikalactone D (SKD) in breast cancer cells.

**Testimonial:** “As a CAPAC 2023 alumni, returning to CAPAC 2024 as a peer-to-peer mentor has been an incredibly fulfilling experience. This year, I had the exceptional opportunity to serve as a leader, and guide 2024 CAPAC trainees. The program not only enabled me to enhance my knowledge and skills in cancer research, but also allowed me to be a role model for others. My previous experiences in the program, including conducting research, networking, and engaging in collaborations, seamlessly aligned with my role as a peer mentor. This alignment empowered me to provide meaningful support and guidance to the trainees, fostering their development while further solidifying my expertise and commitment to cancer prevention and control research.”

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**Institution:** University of California, Berkeley



(<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Hemakshat-Sharma.jpg>)

***Hemakshat Sharma***

**Mentor:** Hector Franco, PhD – University of Puerto Rico  
Comprehensive Cancer Center

**Summer Project:** FOXA1 as a Pioneer Factor in ER $\alpha$ -DNA Interactions in ER+ Breast Cancer: Insights from ChIP-seq and Inherited Mutations in Hispanic Patients.

**Testimonial:** “This program gave me a great insight into the workings of Cancer control with respect to cultural associations. It put me in contact with talented individuals who helped me grow and learn more about what I would like as a future career.”

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(<https://www.cccupr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Isabel-T.-Rivera-Plata.jpg>)

***Isabel T. Rivera Plata***

**Institution:** University of Puerto Rico-Rio Piedras Campus

**Mentor:** Abiel Roche Lima, PhD – University of Puerto Rico-Medical Sciences Campus

**Summer Project:** Machine learning algorithms to identify factors associated with cervical dysplasia progression.

**Testimonial:** “Participating in the CAPAC program has been a milestone in my scientific career. This experience provided me with pivotal tools that enabled me to develop my skills as both a professional and a researcher.”

**Emergencias**

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**Sala de Emergencias Oncológicas**  
(24 horas, 7 días de la semana)

**Para citas e información sobre los servicios del Hospital**  
(787) 936-1477  
o escriba a [citas@cccupr.org](mailto:citas@cccupr.org) (<mailto:citas@cccupr.org>)

**Para citas del Centro de Radioterapia**  
(787) 772-8300 Ext. 8301, 8302  
o escriba a [refereridosradioterapia@cccupr.org](mailto:refereridosradioterapia@cccupr.org)  
(<mailto:refereridosradioterapia@cccupr.org>)

**Mapa**

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**Enlaces**

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[Calendario de Actividades/calendario-de-actividades/](#)

[Sobre el Cáncer\(https://www.cancer.gov/espanol/cancer\)](https://www.cancer.gov/espanol/cancer)

[Empleos\(https://www.cccupr.org/category/empleos/\)](https://www.cccupr.org/category/empleos/)

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