



Dr. Lourdes Rojas is First to Graduate from Ph.D. in Prevention Science and Community Health Program

The University of Miami Miller School of Medicine's Department of Public Health Sciences admitted its first cohort to the Ph.D. in Prevention Science and Community Health program in the fall of 2015. This year, Lourdes M. Rojas, Ph.D., M.P.H., who is now a two-time graduate of the Miller School, was the first to graduate from the program.



Lourdes M. Rojas, Ph.D., M.P.H.

“Being at the Miller School for the master’s and doctoral programs, I definitely learned a lot,” Dr. Rojas said. “I would say that the faculty in the program really had my best interest in mind, not just professionally, but also personally, and I think that’s really important for student growth.”

After finishing a Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Connecticut, Dr. Rojas, who is a Miami native, began her journey at the Miller School when she enrolled in the Master



of Public Health program in August of 2013. During the M.P.H. program, she worked for Familias Unidas, a family-centered, evidence-based substance prevention intervention program for Hispanic youth and their families, alongside Guillermo “Willy” Prado, Ph.D., dean of the University of Miami Graduate School and professor of public health, and Hilda Pantin, Ph.D., professor emeritus, who developed the program together.

“Working for Familias Unidas merged both my interests in the health care system and public health research, and that is when I really fell in love with the idea that I could help people at a level of hundreds at a time,” Dr. Rojas said.

Dr. Prado, who is also the director of the Division of Prevention Science and Community Health, said, “Lourdes was an incredible asset to the Familias Unidas research team. She helped to coordinate our studies, ran complex analyses, and very impressively published 13 peer-reviewed publications, including three first-authored publications in prestigious journals in the field.”

When she graduated from the M.P.H. program in May 2015, Dr. Rojas wanted to hone in on her research skills, as well as to delve deeper into her work with Familias Unidas.

“When I decided to go for the Ph.D., I really wanted something that was public health focused and I really liked the idea of prevention science. It takes us all the way to epidemiology, to understanding what communities are affected most, and to understanding what strategies we could be implementing,” Dr. Rojas said.

During the Ph.D. program, she was a teaching assistant for Dr. Pantin and for voluntary professor Cinthia Rowe, Ph.D., a research assistant for Familias Unidas, and a member of the



Society for Prevention Research and the American Public Health Association organizations.

Dr. Rojas also won various awards, including the Early Career Prevention Network Travel Award in 2015 and 2016 and the International Collaborative Prevention Research Award, both from the Society for Prevention Research.

“Lourdes was outstanding and very, very driven,” said Seth Schwartz, Ph.D., professor of public health and program director of the Ph.D. in Prevention Science and Community Health. “She was always passionate about trying to integrate prevention programs into primary care. That was always her major interest from when she was an M.P.H. student. She has a bright future as a prevention scientist.”

Dr. Rojas is currently a research associate for the Center for Advanced Analytics at Baptist Health System. She and her team are using predictive analytics, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, to answer questions on how to lower hospital and patient costs, how to improve patient outcomes, and how to use medical records data to support clinical decision making. The algorithms, she said, can help predict which patients are most at risk, so that physicians can make better informed decisions.

“I’m learning a lot and I’m so excited,” Dr. Rojas said. “I’ve already been able to apply the skills that I’ve learned during my education at the Miller School.”