‘Exito!’ Welcomes First Class of Latino Doctoral Hopefuls

SAN ANTONIO (Aug. 17, 2011) – As she wraps up her master’s degree at the University of South Florida, Mariana Arevalo already has worked on projects to improve health care access for the underserved.

But that early experience is driving Arevalo to do more.

So Arevalo and 16 other master’s-level students or health professionals joined the Institute for Health Promotion Research’s first-ever Summer Institute of Exito! Latino Cancer Research Leadership Training on June 2-6, 2011, in San Antonio.

Exito! encourages participants to pursue a doctoral degree and careers studying how disease—especially cancer—affects Latinos differently.

“Exito! gave me the resources that I needed to pursue my goal—motivation and pathways,” Arevalo said. “I came in with doubts about my ability to have both. Now I’m confident that with hard work, passion and persistence I can achieve both things.”

Exito! (English: Success!), led by the IHPR at The UT Health Science Center at San Antonio and funded by the National Cancer Institute, annually recruits master’s students or master’s-trained health professionals from Texas, Oklahoma, Arizona, New Mexico and other states.

Participants take part in a five-day summer institute to provide motivation, skills and resources needed to apply for doctoral programs.

They can eventually apply for internships and doctoral retreats, too.
The hope is that participants go on to earn doctoral degrees and conduct novel research on why Latinos suffer worse outcomes from cancer and chronic disease.

“We believe training new Latino researchers will increase the number of Latinos in cancer control research, which will increase work being done to reduce Latino cancer,” said Dr. Amelie Ramirez, director of Exito! and the IHPR.

At the recent first Exito! Summer Institute, 17 recruits heard from Latino role models and researchers, such as Dr. Cristina Barroso of the UT School of Public Health and Jose Pagan of the University of North Texas Health Science Center.

Participants also learned about cancer, research, culture and career options.

Several said the program provided strong motivation to apply for a doctoral degree.

“I have no one to talk with about the application process. Being a first-generation college graduate and master’s level graduate, I can’t get insight/guidance from family,” said Laura Rubalcava of Alexandria, Va. “It’s been inspiring to see people just like me overcome barriers and become successful in their fields.”

Learn more about Exito! and get details on the next Summer Institute at http://ihpr.uthscsa.edu/exito.html.

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For current news from the IHPR at the UT Health Science Center San Antonio, please visit our blog or follow us on Twitter @SaludToday.

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The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, one of the country’s leading health sciences universities, ranks in the top 3 percent of all institutions worldwide receiving federal funding. Research and other sponsored program activity totaled $228 million in fiscal year 2010. The university’s schools of medicine, nursing, dentistry, health professions and graduate biomedical sciences have produced approximately 26,000 graduates. The $744 million operating budget supports eight campuses in San Antonio, Laredo, Harlingen and Edinburg. For more information on the many ways “We make lives better®,” visit www.uthscsa.edu.

The Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio investigates the causes and solutions to the unequal impact of cancer and chronic disease among certain populations, including Latinos, in San Antonio, South Texas and the nation. The IHPR, founded in 2006, uses evidence-guided research, training and community outreach to improve the health of those at a disadvantage due to race/ethnicity or social determinants, such as education or income. Visit the IHPR online at http://ihpr.uthscsa.edu or follow its blog at http://www.saludtoday.com/blog.