

Summer Internship Opens Doors for Med Student



Marisa credits the Undergraduate Pipeline Network co-sponsored by NM CARES Health Disparities Center for helping her into medical school.

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By [Nora Chavez](#), NM CARES Health Disparities Center

Marisa Rivera, UNM School of Medicine (SOM) Class of 2016, knew in high school that she wanted to come to UNM. Her father is a SOM graduate and a family practitioner. Rivera grew up around medicine and as a child often visited her father at his office and met some of his patients.

During her undergraduate studies at UNM, Rivera discovered a passion for biology which helped solidify her decision to pursue medical school, and in her senior year, Rivera applied to the [Undergraduate Student Pipeline](#) program to help move that decision forward.

The UPN program is a summer internship that strives to cultivate students' interest in research while helping them gain skills needed to apply for and succeed in post-baccalaureate education. Rivera was one of 30 students selected out of 300 applicants.

Rivera entered the internship with an interest in public health and was paired with Dr. Lisa Cacari-Stone as her mentor.

Cacari-Stone is the director of the Community Engagement Core with [NM CARES Health Disparities Center](#) as well as an assistant professor with the Department of Family and Community Medicine and senior research fellow with the Robert Wood Johnson Center for Health Policy. She has done extensive research along the New Mexico-Mexican border and has studied in-state and national policy making processes that focus on the role of health and social policies in moderating health equity in the U.S.

Rivera had the opportunity to work with Cacari-Stone on the Programa de Investigación en Migración y Salud (PIMSA). PIMSA funds bi-national research teams whose research proposals focus on migration and health within current policy contexts. Cacari-Stone received a grant for research on health disparities along the border region.

Rivera was given the opportunity to visit one of the colonias just outside of Las Cruces to see the disparities facing residents in health care, housing, and economics.

"It reminded me of my father's childhood home," said Rivera. "He came from a very rural area in New Mexico. I just knew it as the place where my father grew up. I didn't see or understand the disparities until I was

involved in this project. It was eye-opening - to see another aspect of medicine and how health policies affect the individual - who seeks care, who doesn't, and why."

Rivera said that her experience with UPN cemented her commitment to medical school and to becoming a family practitioner.

"It's an amazing experience for students to study the research aspect of medicine," said Rivera. "It's a great introduction to research and it opens many doors."

She also credits UPN for romance. It was there that she met and her fiancé, Ioan Belovski. They became friends and discovered shared interests. He is an MD-MPH student with an interest in neuroscience, Multiple Sclerosis and her. They plan on marrying next summer. With both of them in the same field, with the same value of education and hard work, she believes their relationship will work.

"We both understand the commitment we are making to school, medicine, and each other," said Rivera.

For more information about the [NM CARES Health Disparities Center](#), our Speaker Series, Research Resources, and/or the [Undergraduate Student Pipeline](#), please contact [Miria Kano](#) at 505-272-3876.

Links:

Undergraduate Pipeline Network:

http://hsc.unm.edu/som/research/brep/pipeline_overview.shtm

NM CARES Health Disparities Center:

<http://hsc.unm.edu/programs/nmcareshd/index.shtml>