

UC SANTA BARBARA

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Gail Gallessich

UCSB Graduate Student Wins UNESCO Fellowship

UC Santa Barbara graduate student Alejandra Jaramillo has been awarded a prestigious fellowship with the UNESCO-L'Oréal Fellowships for Young Women in Life Sciences for 2011. She is one of only 15 recipients worldwide.

Jaramillo, who is from Panama, is the first UNESCO-L'Oréal Fellow to be based at UCSB and only the fourth at any UC campus. She is also one of only 16 Fellows in the fields of parasitology/epidemiology to receive this award.

Every country can nominate as many as four top young women scientists for these awards, according to the organizers. The selection process includes over 1,000 women each year.

Each Fellow must be based at a host institution outside her native country. There have been 165 fellowships awarded since 2000. The winners receive \$40,000 over two years. They are required to attend a six-day awards ceremony in Paris, which Jaramillo attended last spring.

"It was a great honor to receive this award," said Jaramillo. "I was very excited and proud to be the first Panamanian scientist to receive it. I was also very excited because it allowed me to fund some of my Ph.D. research."

Armand Kuris, professor of zoology, and ecology, evolution and marine biology at UCSB, said: "Alejandra has developed a deeply intellectual thesis project, melding

immunology and ecology to study the impact of parasites on the behavior and survival of fishes. This has implications for human parasites, some of which also modify our behaviors. She is also an outstanding teacher and is as adept in the field as she is in the lab. Also, she already is among the authors of a high profile paper on the ecology of parasites. In other words, she is a very well-rounded young scientist who is a rapidly rising star."

Jaramillo explained: "This award will help me complete my Ph.D. research. In addition, L'Oréal and UNESCO have done an excellent job of creating a worldwide network of women scientists. This type of community is especially important for young women in science as it promotes collaborations and provides important opportunities for mentorship."

After completing her Ph.D., Jaramillo plans to return to Panama, where she will continue to investigate disease dynamics in mangrove ecosystems. She also hopes to teach in one of Panama's universities to pass on her research experience and act as a mentor to students in biology and medicine.

"My research focuses on understanding how parasites mediate selection on the immune system of fish," said Jaramillo. "I hope my research helps us improve our understanding of parasite-host dynamics, as well as gain some new insights into the ecology of diseases."

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