UC SANTA BARBARA
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‘A Prime Example’

Carolina Arias, an assistant professor of biology at UC Santa Barbara, has received the 2021-22 Harold J. Plous Award. One of the university’s most prestigious faculty honors, the award is given annually to an assistant professor from the humanities, social sciences or natural sciences who has shown exceptional achievement in research, teaching and service to the university.

The award is presented by the College of Letters and Science, and was established to honor the memory of Harold J. Plous, an assistant professor of economics. It is the highest honor the College of Letters and Science can bestow upon a junior faculty member.

“Carolina Arias is a prime example of a scholar who uses the tools of her research to help her community,” said Pierre Wiltzius, dean of mathematical, life and physical sciences at UC Santa Barbara. “Her development of rapid COVID-19 testing for our campus was an essential and invaluable part of our response to the pandemic. Carolina is extremely deserving of this award.”

“It’s an honor to be commended by my colleagues for all the efforts we’ve made,” said Arias, who with her lab has been on the front lines of the university’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. A virologist by training, Arias’s work has been instrumental in the development of the campus’s asymptomatic COVID-19 surveillance program, the establishment of a clinical-grade CLIA laboratory for COVID-19 testing and the development of a program for genomic sequencing of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the identification of its variants. Through collaborations with

fellow researchers, as well as with colleagues at UCSB's Student Health Services, Cottage Hospital and the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department, tracking of the virus's movements through the campus and wider community has been enabled, and community members are kept up to date with the latest developments.

"There is so much information to sort through," Arias said. "I felt that one good use of my time could be in trying to make sense of it myself and then transmitting what I understood to everyone." She is also a member of UCSB Chancellor Henry T. Yang's COVID-19 Response Team.

The COVID-19 activity is on top of ongoing research, teaching and mentoring Arias continues to conduct throughout the pandemic, focusing on genomic techniques to uncover how viruses gain control of their host cells.

Arias is originally from Bogota, Colombia, where she received her B.S. and M.S. in microbiology at Universidad de los Andes. She received her Ph.D. in microbiology at New York University's Sackler Institute for Graduate Biomedical Sciences in 2008, where she studies virus-host interactions in herpesviruses and poxviruses. As a postdoctoral fellow at UC San Francisco and then at the Novartis Institutes for BioMedical Research, she studied the genome-wide transcriptional and translational regulation of Kaposi's sarcoma-associated herpesvirus. In January 2016, she conducted comprehensive drug screens to identify FDA-approved compounds that could be used to curtail Zika virus infection. Arias joined the UC Santa Barbara faculty in 2016.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.