

Dario Dieguez graduated from Emory University's Neuroscience and Behavioral Biology Program in 1999. The following is an interview with Dieguez about his beginnings as a neuroscience student and his current job as a neuroscientist for the National Institute of Health. The article appeared in Sacas News: Traditional Knowledge magazine, Summer/Fall issue 2009.



DARIO DIEGUEZ, JR., PHD

Discipline: Neurobiology

Ethnic Background: Latino

Highest Degree Earned: PhD

Employer: National Institutes of Health

How did you know you wanted to get a PhD?

During my sophomore year at Emory University, I decided to pursue a PhD in neuroscience. This decision directly resulted from the confluence of some rather extraordinary circumstances. First, my grandfather, who suffered from Alzheimer's disease, passed away at that time. Second, around the same time, Emory created a new major in neuroscience and behavioral biology (NBB), and I was invited to work in the research laboratory of one of my neuroscience professors. My decision to pursue a PhD in neuroscience, therefore, was rather serendipitous. In 1999, I graduated from Emory University's first graduating class in NBB. Today, Emory's NBB program is one of America's largest and most successful undergraduate programs in neuroscience education and training.

How did you get involved with science writing?

I have always enjoyed writing. When I discovered science writing as a discipline, I felt that it could provide me with an opportunity to combine two things I have always loved. While a PhD student, I acquired grants from the American Psychological Association, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the National Institute on Aging, and the National Institute of Mental Health. During my neuroscience training, I also published three manuscripts in peer-reviewed scientific journals.

These experiences facilitated the realization that I enjoyed writing about science much more than conducting experiments. After I completed my postdoctoral fellowship at Boston University, I moved to Bethesda, Maryland, to become a science writer in the Office of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Director, where I wrote lay summaries of NIH-funded research, including two health-related stories that were published by NIH's Office of Communications and Public Liaison's NIH Research Matters web page.

How and why did you decide to pursue a career with the federal government?

During my postdoctoral fellowship, I searched for science writer positions across America. During my neuroscience training, I had become acquainted with a number of NIH investigators and administrators, all of whom told me that NIH is a great place to work. Working at NIH has afforded me the opportunity to interact and become friends with a wide variety of scientific experts across a number of disciplines. Thus, working at NIH has allowed me to both network and sharpen my skills.

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