



# Commencement Ceremony Miami, Campus

December 2, 2021



## *Program*

Salutation

Message from the Student Council Secretary

Message from the President

Message from the BOT Chair

Message from the Chancellor

Diploma Presentation

Conferring of Posthumous Degrees

Closing



*To the Families of the Graduates*

We all recognize the help, support, respect and love that our family has provided us throughout the academic journey that we complete today. Our achievements are the fruit of mutual work and efforts.

Love is appreciated through love. Just to say “Thank You” is not enough. We want to dedicate this great moment, our Graduation, to all of you.



## **CARLOS ALBIZU-MIRANDA, Ph.D.**

*Founder and First President  
Albizu University*

Dr. Carlos Albizu was a pioneering and visionary man who dedicated his life to improving the well-being of Puerto Rico.

Dr. Albizu labored to improve the mental health services offered to his fellow countrymen, while providing opportunities for Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics to complete a program of study in higher education which was not available at the time.

Dr. Albizu was born on September 16, 1920 in the city of Ponce, Puerto Rico. In 1943, he attained a bachelor's degree in education from the University of Puerto Rico with a concentration in psychology and history. As there was no graduate program in the field of psychology on the Island, he decided to attend the University of Minnesota to begin his graduate studies in clinical psychology. After a year, due to financial reasons and to the lack of financial aid programs available to minorities, he returned to Puerto Rico to work and so postponed completing his doctoral studies. In September of 1950, Dr. Albizu secured a teaching assistant position and moved to Purdue University, where he attained a master's degree in experimental psychology in 1951, and a Ph.D. in clinical psychology in 1953. His doctoral dissertation focused on the relationship between social class factors and test performance.

Dr. Albizu joined the faculty in the Psychology Department of the University of Puerto Rico where he attained the rank of full professor, retiring in 1975 after 22 years of service.



Upon returning to Puerto Rico, Dr. Albizu felt great concern about the lack of opportunities for students on the Island to engage in graduate studies in the field of psychology. He fervently believed that the training acquired abroad did not provide psychology students with the skills needed for an effective and culturally-sensitive intervention with Hispanic populations. He therefore founded the Puerto Rico Institute of Psychology in 1966, which became the first psychology graduate program on the Island, and the first school of professional psychology in the United States and its territories.

Dr. Albizu was not only a visionary but also a man with great courage. After ten short years, Dr. Albizu foresaw the same needs in South Florida where the increasing influx of Caribbean and Latin American immigrants created a critical need to provide culturally-sensitive mental health services for this population.

He thus established the Miami Institute of Psychology in 1980. Master's and doctoral level programs in the field of psychology were offered, concentrating on the needs of underrepresented minority groups. The institution offered opportunities for studies in higher education that were otherwise inaccessible to the majority of Hispanics and other minority populations.

Dr. Albizu passed away in 1984, but his legacy of excellence in mental health and education continues to contribute significantly to the social and economic development of the Caribbean, Latin America, and the United States, through the culturally sensitive professional training offered at the campuses in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and Miami, Florida.

In January of 2000, the Board of Trustees changed the name of the institution to Carlos Albizu University in response to its strategic plan to become a multidisciplinary university responsive to the educational and workforce needs of the pluralistic and diverse population of the United States. Albizu University is the only regionally accredited, secular university in the United States named in honor of a Hispanic.



## *History*

Albizu University (AU) is a private, nonprofit, specialized university-level institution offering associate, bachelor's and master's degrees in psychology, education, criminal justice, and speech and language pathology, and doctoral degrees in psychology and human services. Albizu University has campuses in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and Miami, Florida, and an extension center in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico.

The origin of Albizu University dates back to the year 1966, when the Puerto Rico campus, originally known as the Caribbean Center for Advanced Studies, was founded with the specific objective of offering a Master of Science degree in clinical psychology. At that time, there were very few mental health professionals on the Island and most received their professional education outside of Puerto Rico.

Upon completion of those studies, returning mental health professionals were confronted with the necessity of adapting their training to Puerto Rican socio-cultural realities. The Caribbean Center for Advanced Studies was established by Dr. Carlos Albizu, a renowned Puerto Rican psychologist, in response to the need for culturally sensitive professional training. Starting in 1972, the Puerto Rico campus began offering doctoral degrees (Ph.D. and Psy.D. in Clinical Psychology), thus becoming the first university offering culturally sensitive doctoral training in clinical psychology in Puerto Rico.

Dr. Albizu devoted his life to the training and formation of multiculturally competent psychologists on the island of Puerto Rico as well as on the mainland. Albizu University continues in this tradition of cultural sensitivity and is today an educational institution whose programs of study and research are founded, both in theory and practice, on our multicultural heritage.

Through the founding of the Miami campus in 1980, Albizu University responds to the need in the continental United States for graduate psychology programs sensitive to cultural and ethnic issues. Through the academic offerings at both campuses, AU provides professional training that is relevant and responsive to the educational needs of the communities served and to the needs of culturally sensitive research, thereby contributing to the development of the professions of psychology, education, criminal justice, human services, and speech and language pathology.



### *Historical Overview of the Academic Costume Code*

The origins of academic dress date back to the 12th and 13th centuries, when universities were taking form. The ordinary dress of the scholar, whether student or teacher, was the dress of a cleric. With few exceptions, the medieval scholar had taken at least minor orders, made certain vows, and perhaps been tonsured. Long gowns were worn and may have been necessary for warmth in unheated buildings. Hoods seem to have served to cover the tonsured head until superseded for that purpose by the skull cap.

A statute of the University of Coimbra in 1321 required that all "Doctors, Licentiates, and Bachelors" wear gowns. In England, in the second half of the 14th century, the statutes of certain colleges forbade "excess in apparel" and prescribed the wearing of a long gown. In the days of Henry VIII of England, Oxford and Cambridge first began prescribing a definite academic dress and made it a matter of university control even to the extent of its minor details.

The assignment of colors to signify certain faculties was to be a much later development, and one which was to be standardized only in the United States in the late 19th century. White taken from the white fur trimming of the Oxford and Cambridge B.A. hoods, was assigned to arts and letters. Red, one of the traditional colors of the church, went to theology. Green, the color of medieval herbs, was adopted for medicine, and olive, because it was so close to green, was given to pharmacy. Golden yellow, standing for the wealth which scientific research has produced, was assigned to the sciences.

European institutions have always had great diversity in their specifications of academic dress and this has been a source of confusion. In contrast, American colleges and universities opted for a definite system that all might follow. A significant contribution to the development of this system was made by Gardner Cotrell Leonard of Albany, New York. Mr. Leonard designed gowns for his class at Williams College in 1887 and had them made by Cotrell and Leonard, a firm established by his family in Albany, New York. He was greatly interested in the subject and following the publication of an article by him on academic dress in 1893, he was invited to work with an Intercollegiate Commission made up of representatives of leading institutions to establish a suitable system of academic apparel.

The Commission met at Columbia University in 1895 and adopted a code of academic dress, which besides regulating the cut and style and materials of the gowns, prescribed the colors which were to represent the different fields of learning.

In 1932 the American Council on Education authorized the appointment of a committee "to determine whether revision and completion of the academic code adopted by the conference of the colleges and universities in 1895 is desirable at this time, and, if so, to draft a revised code and



present a plan for submitting the code to the consideration of the institutional members of the Council."

The committee reviewed the situation through correspondence and conference and approved a code for academic costumes that has been in effect since that year. A Committee on Academic Costumes and Ceremonies, appointed by the American Council on Education in 1959, again reviewed the costume code and made several changes.

In 1986, the committee updated the code and added a sentence clarifying the use of the color dark blue for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

*"Historical Overview of the Academic Costume Code," Eugene Sullivan, American Council on Education, reprinted with permission from American Universities and Colleges, 15th Edition © 1997 Walter de Gruyter, Inc.*



*Board of Trustees*

Adalberto Ramírez, MBA, Chair  
Teresita M. Bolívar, Chair Elect  
Antonio E. Puente, Ph.D., Secretary  
Ana I. Agosto Zayas, CPA, Treasurer  
Jaime Plá Cortés, MHSA, Member  
Jaime L. Albors Bigas, MBA, Member  
Jorge González Monclova, Ph.D., Member  
Ruth C. Prevor, Ph.D., ABPP, Member  
Ángel M. Matos Lugo, MD, Member  
Maribel Del Rio-Roberts, Psy.D., Member  
José M. Fernández, PE, Member  
Annette Montoto, MBA, Member  
Ricardo J. del Río Morales, Ph.D., Member  
Lisandra Echevarría Crespo, MS, SLP, Member  
Ileana Fernández Buitrago, Esq., Member  
José A. Medina Talavera, Ed.D., Member  
Gualberto Rodríguez, Emeritus Member

*Miami Campus Administration*

José Pons, Ph.D., President  
Tilokie Depoo, Ph.D., Chancellor  
Irene M. Bravo, Ph.D., Dean of Academic Affairs and  
Director of the Doctor of Philosophy in Human Services Program  
Floralba Arbelo, Ed.D., Dean of Student Affairs  
Evangelina Alonso, Psy.D., Director of Clinical Training and Director of  
the Goodman Psychological Services Center  
Diana Barroso, Ed.D., Director, Psychology Master Programs  
Rafael Martinez, Ed.D., Director, Education Programs, Undergraduate  
Psychology and Criminal Justice Programs  
Lizzette Román, SLP.D., CCC-FLP,  
Institutional Director of Speech and Language Pathology Programs

*Student Council Secretary*

Monique Jimenez



2020-2021

***Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education***

Sasha Marie Lopez

Viviana Maria Saldala, *Distinguished Award Recipient*

***Bachelor of Arts in Exceptional Student Education***

Venesa Alonso, *Distinguished Award Recipient*

Crystal Salgueiro

***Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice***

Alena Vargas

***Bachelor of Science in Psychology***

Zarina Abduova

Caridad Natalí Acosta Sánchez

Maria Alonso Montesino

Mariana Alves Furtado, *Distinguished Award Recipient*

Valerie D. Avant

Maria Alejandra Cadavid

Juan José Castillo Pérez

Yoan David Collado

Janet Perez Contreras

Leticia Cuervo Albuerne

Deborah L. Diabate

Erica R. Earl Marin

Lorena Landa

Edgar Leon

Lizmary Lopez

Yunaisy Martínez Gonzalez

Yeney Medina Arencibia

Eiler Mesa

Krystal E. Montes de Oca

Yarmis Nueva

Alberto Alejandro Rodriguez Sanchez

Claudia Santana Correa

Cesar A. Silva Martinez

Camila M. Silva Villarrubia



Romy Valdespino Rodriguez

Jennifer Vale

Linda Yevenez

*Master of Science in Psychology*

*Mental Health Counseling*

Ailed Albuerne

Inna Alvarez Barrero

Brian Michael Andrews

Gabriella Frances Batista

Greta Calvo

Ivette Castellanos

Thierry Descadres

Andrés Grille Espada

Patricia Espinoza

Nicole Esquen

Lianny Fernandez

Diego Manuel Gonzalez

Sergio A. Gonzalez

Gabriela Guardarrama

Johandra Guevara, *Distinguished Award Recipient*

Kriselle Brigitte Hadad Bsereni

Monique Marie Hernandez

Gezabel Hernandez Rodriguez

Karen Marieta Hill

Jenny Hurtado Riera

Carlos Izquierdo

Laura Marcela Jaramillo Alzate

Naivy M. Kamberger

Idalmis Leyva Rosales

Danet Martinez

Daniela Membreño

Laura Lizeth Morales

Alexandra C. Morillo Morales

Yenitza Ivelisse Ortiz Villegas

Erasmus J. Peraza

Angelica Gladys Pita Klugman

Giselle Crystal Plasencia

James Andrew Pontillo



Aymee D. Pozo  
Ariamna Ramirez Cueto  
Roxana Reyes  
Crystal Marie Rivera  
Niubis Robaina  
Neymalis Rodríguez Lacomba  
Alexander Sardinas  
Dionne Mahe Setien  
Elizabeth Soto  
Rubén Suro  
Tahlia Marta Utrera

*Master of Science in Psychology  
Marriage and Family Therapy*

Juan J. Arzola  
Eli Bravo  
Andreina Del Valle Bravo Hurtado  
Jennyffer Castillo Ventura  
Geladys Nicole Del Valle Rivera  
Ana Maria Gomez  
Norma A. Hernández de Medina  
Ismel de los Angeles Melean  
Dannielle Nesbitt  
Monica Frances Prieto  
Solange Rodriguez  
Jacnery Rodriguez Perez  
Maria del Rosario Crespo  
Raquel Sossa Castaneda  
*Master of Science in Psychology  
School Counseling*  
Jacqueline Nieto  
Rosmery De las Merdeces Olivera  
Dadiremse Perez Rocha

*Master of Science in Psychology  
Mental Health Counseling  
Marriage and Family Therapy*

Frances C. Perez  
Yainely Valle



*Master of Science in Psychology*

*Marriage and Family Therapy*

*School Counseling*

Donalin P. Michel

Karolyn J. Quintana

*Master of Science in Psychology*

*Mental Health Counseling & School Counseling*

Kristine Nicole Morell Arbelo

Lizet Morlote Leon

Juana Nunez

Catherine Ríos

Maricruz M. Sardinas

*Master of Science in*

*Industrial and Organizational Psychology*

Diana R. Aguila

Nadiecha Alvarez

Precious Brown

Tanya Dutra

Nicholas Garret Hall

Kenia Machado Gonzalez

Emily K. McCall, *Distinguished Award Recipient*

(*Online program*)

Amy E. Pell

Charles Manuel Ramos

Ana Jeanine Rubilar

Richard Munir Simon

Daiane Souza Bacheler, *Distinguished Award Recipient (Campus-based program)*

Maria de L. Vargas Rodríguez

*Master of Science in*

*Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*

Raquel N. Reyes, *Distinguished Award Recipient*

*Master of Science in Exceptional Student Education*

Yenisleidy Armas Mendez, *Distinguished Award Recipient*



Grisel Cabrera  
Gisselle D. Calderon Galvez  
Dayari Carbonell  
Kendra DeStefano  
Amparo Guillen  
Odaly Gutierrez  
Patricia Piñeiro  
Maria Cecilia Suarez  
Julio Victores

*Master of Science in Speech and Language Pathology*

Rosibel Julia Abrahantes  
Emily Rose Achong  
Zamile Acosta  
Anais Janet Aranega Venereo  
Vanessa Bedoya  
Marsha Buisson  
Ashley Carroll  
Natalie Ann Cruz  
Kayla de Barry  
Wendy Delgado  
Karla Delgado Batista  
Karolina Andrea do Nascimento  
Priscilla Echevarria  
Anna Kathryn Ellison  
Gabrielle Z. Gonzalez  
Tiffany Marie Goodwin  
Alexandra Grada  
Alexis Michelle Guillama  
Robin Ashley Gutierrez  
Michelle Ann Hilzen  
Vanessa Jaramillo  
Dalymar Maldonado Ríos  
Ashley Marquez  
Brenda Martinez  
Chantal Mathurin

Maria de los Angeles Medinilla, *Distinguished Award Recipient*  
Natalia M. Montalvo Ayala  
Carla Morales Martin



Krista D. Nichols  
Doris Padilla-Flamenco  
Katherine Leah Paz  
Flor Perez  
Danielle Perez Fernandez  
Laura Prieto  
Wendy Roche  
Emily Rodriguez  
Mayre Rodriguez  
Michell Romero  
Yessenia Sanchez  
Merlyn Santin  
Amanda Ray Smith  
Gretter Tejera  
Rosangela Tiza Calderon

*Master of Science in Psychology*

Stephany Aguiar  
Jorge Felix Alcina  
Rose Genesis Alicea Oliveras  
Yasmin Arias  
Brielle E. Barbagello  
Leelan Nicholas Michael Bhagwandeen  
Fabiana Victoria Bracho  
Brian Kristopher Dashner  
Amaris Denise Dennison  
Andres Duarte  
Julissa Fonseca  
Brianna Gonzalez  
Anabel Jabilles  
Stacy C. Jimenez  
Stephanie Marie Remedios-Herrera  
Linda Veronica Rios  
Katiarina Selena Rodriguez  
Neyda Victorero



*Doctor of Psychology in Clinical Psychology*

Gustavo A. Benejam  
Christina Elena Borgan  
Nathalie V. Buitrago  
David D. Coronado  
Agustina Ferrell  
Arlene Gerardo  
Judith Guevara  
Crisilda Irizarry-Anson  
Ronnie V. Lee  
Tiffany A. Lyon  
Karina Marrero  
Wilman Morales  
Alexandra Ortega

Hector Alfonso Patiño-Carvajal *Distinguished Award Recipient*

Sophia Adelina Peaco  
Livia Perez  
Venise Jade Predestin Carrier  
Adriana Emma Ramirez Fernandez  
Derek Roy Daniel Ream  
Mayra A. Rodríguez Figueroa  
Meilyn Rodriguez Ramos  
Gabriela Rojas  
Osuni Roque  
Natalia Ruiz-Nardone  
Lyudmila Saltman  
Natalie Marie Sanchez  
Lize Tibiriçá  
Noelvys Y. Valle  
Edward John Victor Zacca

*Doctor of Philosophy in Human Services*

Yadi Fernanda Flores  
Natasha Lavon Peaco  
Nilda I. Rivera Arroyo, *Distinguished Award Recipient*  
Marcia Tai-Vazquez



## **Venesa Alonso**

*2021 Distinguished Bachelor of Arts in Exceptional Student Education Award Recipient*

Ms. Venesa Alonso enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts in Exceptional Student Education program in the Fall 2019 academic session at Albizu University from which she is graduating Summa Cum Laude with a minor in Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Venesa immigrated with her parents to the United States from Cuba at the age of 10. She is the proud mother of two boys, Eliel and Dariel, ages 14 and 10. She has been married to her husband Israel for 18 years.

Since a very early age, Venesa developed a passion for teaching and helping others, greatly influenced by her children who are both in the exceptional student program. She considers her family as one of her most powerful influences and support in pursuing her educational goals.

Her undergraduate studies in the field of Exceptional Student Education allowed her to combine her two passions in life: learning and helping others, especially as it relates to helping children with disabilities. She is always going the "extra mile" in her pursuit of professional growth, thus completing professional certifications that will enrich the quality of her work with the students and families she serves. For example, she became a certified Youth Mental Health First Aider to be able to better identify and understand the signs and symptoms of mental health challenges in youth.

Venesa has expressed that she will continue her graduate studies in the School Psychology field at our institution. She is currently getting prepared to obtain her teacher certification while working at a local high school in an administrative position.

Venesa is the perfect representation of the hard-working Hispanic students who form part of Albizu University and a genuine example that with perseverance and dedication you can achieve your goals.



## **Mariana Alves Furtado**

*2021 Distinguished Bachelor of Science in Psychology Award Recipient*

Ms. Mariana Alves Furtado enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Psychology program at Albizu University in the Fall 2019 academic session, from which she graduated Summa Cum Laude.

Mariana immigrated with her mother to the United States from Brazil at the age of 10. Since a very early age, Mariana developed a passion for helping others, greatly influenced by her experiences working in a beauty parlor with her mother, where clients confided in her about their life struggles.

Her undergraduate studies in the field of Psychology have allowed her to combine her two passions in life: learning and helping others, particularly as it relates to helping families in need. She has also volunteered as guardian ad litem and this has given her the opportunity to work closely with at-risk youth and their families.

This Fall session, Mariana enrolled in our Doctor of Psychology in Clinical Psychology Program to further advance professionally and continue to serve the community. She is an exceptional student and a proud member of the Albizu Alumni Association.



## Viviana Maria Saldala

*2021 Distinguished Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education Award Recipient*

Ms. Viviana Maria Saldala enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education program at Albizu University in January 2018 as a transfer student, determined to complete her higher education program at Albizu. Viviana is currently working as a 5th grade Language Arts and Social Studies teacher.

Viviana performed extremely well in her undergraduate studies in the field of Elementary Education. She has expressed on numerous occasions how her passion in life includes educating children, staying abreast of her field, and making a difference in the lives of those she comes in contact with. During her program at Albizu, she was always ahead of time with assignment submissions, research, readings, presentations, and all other program requirements. When she entered and completed the Albizu University and Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) Internship--which was no simple feat, as she completed it during the COVID-19 Pandemic, both virtually and face-to-face, simultaneously--Viviana was heralded as an outstanding intern by her M-DCPS Directing Teacher. She demonstrated excellence in completing her Internship.

Additional positive attributes Viviana possesses are being caring, giving and family-oriented. She has often spoken of her family and her dedication to them. These positive attributes carry over into her world of work, making her stand out whether she is speaking, teaching, educating, and being a role model for others.

Ms. Saldala is a true representative of what we look for in our alumni. Furthermore, and in keeping with the Albizu University Mission Statement, she has helped improve the quality of life of those she now educates, while serving our diverse communities. We are proud of her!



## **Maria de los Angeles Medinilla, M.S.**

*2021 Master of Science in Speech and Language Pathology Award Recipient*

Mrs. Maria de los Angeles Medinilla was accepted and enrolled in the Master of Science in Speech Language Pathology Program at Albizu University in Spring 2019. Mrs. Medinilla has achieved academic and clinical excellence exemplified through her GPA and Clinical Practicum Score. She excelled in maintaining a perfect GPA for 5 semesters and successfully passed her advanced practicum and her comprehensive examination.

In addition to these achievements, Mrs. Medinilla has also demonstrated professional and ethical behavior towards her peers, professors, and others. She consistently displayed appropriate interactions with her patients during clinical practicum and accepted and implemented recommendations given to her by her supervisors. Mrs. Medinilla was also noted by professors and supervisors as having excellent oral and written communication skills, and being punctual, organized, and prepared for classes and clinical experiences.

Mrs. Medinilla is the type of student that was fully committed to the program by always attending her courses and clinical practicum and actively participating in the learning process. She would often ask thoughtful questions in class, share experiences, or visit her professors to discuss a variety of issues. Her commitment to improving herself in the profession and developing the necessary skills to be an effective Speech-Language Pathologist was always a priority to her.

While dedicating herself to the pursuit of her chosen profession, Mrs. Medinilla is currently involved in meeting the requirements for her clinical fellowship year which she is completing in a private clinic that serves a pediatric population with diverse speech and language needs. In addition, Mrs. Medinilla is a dedicated mother of two daughters and actively engaged in helping them complete their schoolwork and participate in extracurricular activities.

In a testimonial she shared the following: "At the beginning of the program I did not know many terms and topics; they were very different from what I was used to in the world of education, and I did not understand what the terms meant. However, towards the end of the program, things were clearer to me, and I understood things better. I feel that through the program I was able to learn the language of the therapy world, and I am prepared."

Albizu University congratulates Mrs. Medinilla in her achievements and wishes her success in her professional endeavors.



**Daiane Souza Bacheler, M.S.**

*2021 Distinguished Master of Science in Industrial and Organizational Psychology Award Recipient (Campus-based program)*

Ms. Daiane Souza Bacheler graduated with honors earning a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology degree

from Rutgers University in 2018. She was admitted to the Master of Science in Industrial and Organizational Psychology, campus-based program, at Albizu University in Spring 2019. Today, she graduates with an outstanding GPA of 3.7 and Distinction.

While pursuing her graduate degree, Daiane continued to work full-time for Estee Lauder Companies. At the Pennsylvania branch, she started as a customer service representative back in 2015 and later assumed a supervisory role in training and development. In 2020, the company accommodated a practicum experience for Daiane in its New York-based Global Education and Quality, Consumer Care division, and she completed it in an outstanding manner. Additionally, during this time frame, she completed a part-time internship for a human resource consulting firm in Baltimore, Maryland. During her time at Albizu University, Daiane also presented the findings of her research “A Comparison of Work Locus of Control Between the United States and Brazil” at the Association for Psychological Science (APA) 2020 (Virtual) Convention. Her commitment to produce excellent work earned her commendations from her professors throughout the program.

Most recently, Daiane was appointed as the mentorship lead of the Women’s Leadership Network, an employee resource group within the Estee Lauder Companies. Through this position, Daiane assists in the career development of over 1000 women working for the company.

When not working or studying, Daiane is an avid reader and enjoys discussing various works in her book club “Homonarrativus”. She has also spent much of her free time this past year raising her furry child “Sunny” (a mini Goldendoodle puppy). She looks forward to continuing to support professional development opportunities for employees from diverse backgrounds.

The faculty is proud of her accomplishments and wishes her continued success in all her endeavors.



## **Emily K. McCall, M.S.**

*2021 Distinguished Master of Science in Industrial and Organizational Psychology Award Recipient (Online program)*

Ms. Emily K. McCall graduated Magna Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology degree from the University of North Florida in 2015. Upon discovering her passion for showcasing the importance of harmony, equality, and respect within the workplace, she applied and was admitted to the Master of Science in Industrial and Organizational Psychology online program at Albizu University in 2018. Today, she graduates with a perfect GPA of 4.0 and Utmost Distinction.

Emily's passion for I/O psychology was further reinforced when her research poster was chosen to be showcased at the International Conference on Organizational Psychology and Research Methods in New York in October 2020. Unfortunately, her poster, titled "Gender and Perceived Leadership Effectiveness – What is the Relationship" could not be showcased due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, Emily was honored to be chosen in the first place. In addition to excelling in her academic courses, Emily also completed Six Sigma Certification, achieving both Green Belt and Black Belt-level certifications as part of her capstone projects.

While attending Albizu, Emily simultaneously worked at a prestigious consulting firm, starting as an executive assistant with her eye on a career within their People Operations department. Recognized for her work ethic, dedication, and attention to detail, she was promoted to a Professional Development Administrator position six weeks before graduation. In this role, Emily has been able to put her studies into practice and help foster others' passions for their work and the firm as a whole.

In her free time, Emily enjoys cheering on the New Orleans Saints, spending time with her partner, Chase, and their rescue dog, Tupelo, and exploring local restaurants and breweries near their home in Tampa. She also loves traveling and is an avid trivia player.

The faculty is proud of her accomplishments and wishes her continued success in all her endeavors.



## Raquel N. Reyes, M.S.

*2021 Distinguished Master of Science in TESOL Award Recipient*

Ms. Raquel N. Reyes enrolled in the Master of Science in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Program at Albizu University in January 2020. During her advisement session at Albizu, she expressed her desire to move forward in life and make a difference for those young people and students she would come in contact with, and she has done so.

Excelling in her graduate studies at Albizu was her goal, and she achieved it. She said that Albizu's professors were on point with her education and that they kept her "ahead of her game". All of her classes and coursework were completed with sterling caliber. She was always ahead of time with assignment submissions, research, readings, presentations, and all her program requirements.

Born in the United States, Raquel is of Haitian (her mother) and Dominican (her father) heritage. Reflecting her culture is important to her. She has often spoken of her family and the joy of being with them. She realized early on in life that her passion was learning, being educated and educating, thus setting more of these positive examples for her children. Raquel declares her family as staunch role models for her, and she knew she had to succeed with her higher education goals.

Currently, Raquel is the owner of Level Up Tutoring Services, LLC and she has shared that her higher education studies at AU prepared her for this work that she loves. She has realized her passion by working in her tutoring company. She tirelessly ensures that her staff bring the best to the students; and includes music and arts in their learning experience.

Ms. Reyes is one of Albizu University's shining assets, hard-working and sincere. In keeping with the Albizu University Mission Statement, her work is aimed at improving quality of life and serving our diverse communities. We are very proud of her!



## **Yenisleidy Armas Mendez, M.S.**

*2021 Distinguished Master of Science in Exceptional Student Education Award Recipient*

Ms. Yenisleidy Armas Mendez enrolled in the Master of Science in Exceptional Student Education (MS in ESE) program at Albizu University in August 2019. She currently works as a Behavior Analyst with children within the autism spectrum disorder. She started the MS ESE program determined to complete her higher education at Albizu and, subsequently, reach her goal of becoming a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA).

While enrolled at Albizu, for her being on time meant being ahead of time. She completed all her academic requirements well within the established deadlines. These included research, presentations, postings, citations, and others, all of which she completed in a sterling manner. Presently, Yenisleidy is scheduled to take the BCBA examination in January of next year. This further solidifies her plan to continue her work in the behavioral field.

Believing in healthy living and a healthy lifestyle, Yenisleidy finds the time to not only work and study, but practice yoga and Pilates, and is an advocate for motivating and encouraging others to do the same.

Yenisleidy has shared many times how since a very early age, her mother was her role model and would impress upon her the importance of education and of becoming a professional person. This remained with Yenisleidy throughout her life, and into her adult years. Being able to make a difference in the lives of young children, thus making a firm footprint of service in our community, is very meaningful to her. It is her passion.

Yenisleidy is a true representative of what we look for in our alumni, thus exemplifying the University's mission to improve quality of life and serve diverse communities. We believe in her and we are proud of her!



**Johandra Guevara, M.S.**

*2021 Distinguished Master of Science in Psychology Award Recipient*

Ms. Johandra Guevara earned a BS degree in Education with specialty in Teaching English as a Second Language from the Jose Marti Higher Pedagogic Institute in the province of Camaguey, Cuba in 2002. Her goal was to become a teacher. However, she was unable to secure a teaching position without having to travel to other municipalities and did not have the means to do so. She was offered employment instead as a Social Worker at a geriatric nursing home for individuals suffering from chronic mental illness in her hometown. This position reinforced her passion for helping others and paved the way for her future professional goals.

The social system in Cuba is stifling and Johandra knew that despite her education she would always be faced with limitations. In 2007, she and her husband migrated to the United States vowing to secure a better life for their family. Shortly after migrating, Johandra relied on her TESOL training and began working as a translator. In 2011, Johandra began working as a Targeted Case Manager at a community mental health agency. Four years later, she and her husband opened their own targeted case management agency titled G & G Zone Corporation.

In Summer 2018, Johandra was admitted to the MS in Psychology program, with major in Mental Health Counseling, at Albizu University. During her academic tenure, she successfully balanced her personal, professional, and academic responsibilities with grace, yielding a GPA of 4.0. Johandra conducted her clinical practicum duties in an exemplary manner at MUJER, Inc., an agency tending to the needs of women and migrants. She graduates today with Utmost Distinction.

Currently, Johandra resides with her husband of 24 years, Rudyard Gonzalez, and their 4-year-old son, Rudyard Jr. She remains grateful to have secured a better life for her family and to have been able to assist her parents, sibling, and mother-in-law to migrate to the United States successfully. Johandra believes in hard work to achieve goals.

The faculty is proud of her accomplishments and wishes her continued success in all her endeavors.



## Nilda I. Rivera Arroyo, Ph.D.

2021 Distinguished Doctor of Philosophy in Human Services Award Recipient

Dr. Nilda I. Rivera-Arroyo graduated from the Caribbean Center for Advanced Studies in Carolina, Puerto Rico in the year 1974, with a Master's degree in Clinical Psychology. In that capacity, she served as an educational psychologist in the Massachusetts Public School System, a faculty member at the Inter American University of Puerto Rico, and a Marriage and Family Therapist at Psicólogos de Puerto Rico Asociados, demonstrating a wide-range of interests. After a few years, she entered the business world as Management Director or Consultant of Florida Prime Properties International, Ritz Carlton Residences, Millennium Companies, Four Seasons Resorts, and Hilton Grand Vacations, demonstrating her zest and entrepreneurial spirit.

In 2017, Dr. Rivera-Arroyo was admitted to the Ph.D. in Human Services program while living in Orlando, Florida. She did excellently in her coursework, which she could have completed virtually, but preferred to travel often to campus, as she thoroughly enjoyed the overall academic experience. She completed a qualitative dissertation of ethnographic design entitled *Life Satisfaction and Successful Aging: An Ethnographic Study in a Congregation of Retired Hispano-American Daughters of Charity Sisters*.

To complete the study, Dr. Rivera-Arroyo worked independently, mobilizing multiple resources. She traveled to Puerto Rico, where she immersed herself in the Charity Sisters culture for several weeks. The results of her study showed seven themes of life satisfaction: (1) faith and trust in God, (2) religious community, (3) happiness as life satisfaction, (4) charity as life meaning, (5) spirituality as manifestation of their faith, (6) religiosity as an important part of the Sisters' culture, and (7) lifestyle connectedness.

Dr. Nilda Rivera-Arroyo deserves recognition for her multiple achievements, unique study and highly meritorious work.



## Hector Alfonso Patiño-Carvajal, Psy.D.

*2021 Distinguished Doctor of Psychology Award Recipient*

Dr. Hector Alfonso Patiño-Carvajal began his academic career at Albizu University in the Bachelor of Psychology program. Since the very beginning, he was motivated by an audacious passion to understand the inner workings and dynamics of the human psyche. After graduating in 2015, he immediately commenced the Doctor of Psychology program at Albizu University where he gained recognition as a stand out first-year doctoral student.

From an academic perspective, since the beginning of his higher education, Dr. Patiño-Carvajal's performance was of excellent caliber in all areas of practice. His performance in all courses was outstanding in terms of how rapidly he acquired knowledge in the areas of pathophysiology, assessment, theory, and intervention, thus leading him to excel quickly and win recognition from the doctoral program faculty. He completed his academic training with an excellent GPA. From a clinical perspective, Dr. Patiño-Carvajal sought out and attained very demanding practicum experiences at Design Neuroscience Center, Clínica de Familia-La Romana, Dominican Republic, and Jackson Memorial Hospital. Given that these training experiences were in hospitals and/or medical centers, which often present unforeseeable challenges to students in training, Dr. Patiño-Carvajal continued to impress his clinical supervisors and was lauded for his professionalism and skill set. He subsequently completed a year-long APA-accredited clinical internship at Nassau University Medical Center, in New York.

Dr. Patiño-Carvajal is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Central Florida Center

for Counseling and Psychological Services, where his training is focused on the assessment and treatment of psychopathology in emerging adults.

Albizu University would like to congratulate and celebrate Dr. Patiño-Carvajal on his academic and clinical accomplishments, and wish him success in his future endeavors as a clinical psychologist.



## **Milagros Valdez, Ph.D.**

*Posthumous Doctor of Philosophy in Human Services Degree*

Milagros Valdez was born in Cuba and immigrated to the United States, where she attended Miami Dade College. She later transferred to the Universidad Central del Este in the Dominican Republic where she pursued a medical doctor degree, graduating in 2004. Upon returning to the U.S., Milagros decided she wanted to become a school counselor. It was then that her career at Albizu University began in the Fall 2008 academic session when she enrolled in the Master of Science in Psychology with a Major in School Counseling. She completed her practicum hours at Flamingo Elementary School and graduated in the Spring 2013 academic session. Throughout her life, Milagros held several positions in the health sector. Her incredible ability to instill hope in others led her to pursue a doctoral degree in human services, and she thus enrolled in the Doctor of Philosophy in Human Services program in the Fall of 2015.

Milagros also became part of the National Organization of Human Services Honor Society. In her application to this Honor Society she wrote the following: "My goal and objective is to work with nonprofit organizations in meeting human needs through knowledge, prevention, remediation of problems and maintaining a commitment to improve the overall quality of life of my clients and those in our communities."

To say that Milagros was a part of the Doctoral Program family is an understatement. Her family, professors, and peers grieved together Milagros' untimely death. Her peers showed their admiration and solidarity to her and her family. Milagros truly enjoyed being part of the Albizu community through her classroom experiences and was highly invested in the learning process. Her commitment to academic excellence was evident in her outstanding and advanced doctoral work as she completed most of her program with honors.

Milagros' nurturing spirit and passion for academic excellence live on in the hearts of all the staff, students, and faculty she encountered at Albizu University.



## **Tabitha Young, Ph.D.**

*Posthumous Doctor of Philosophy in Human Services Degree*

Tabitha Young enrolled at Albizu University in the Fall of 2014 to pursue a Doctor of Philosophy in Human Services degree. She had received her Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education degree in 1989 from Barry University and a Master of Science in Urban Education degree from Florida International University in 1998. One of Tabitha's lifelong goals was to earn a doctoral degree, not only for herself, but as an image and model of aspirations for her children. After a few years of conversation and urging from her colleague and friend, Dr. Sharrie R. Dean, Tabitha applied to the Ph.D. in Human Services at Albizu University.

Tabitha began her career in the field of education as early as 1990, shortly after attaining her bachelor's degree and taught in several schools until she was later promoted to Assistant Principal at Young Women Academy of Academic and Civic Development at J.R.E. Lee Opportunity School. In 2011, she served in her final position as Assistant Principal of the Educational Alternative Outreach Program. Throughout her career she served in many leadership capacities and received recognition for her work and dedication. She was nominated for Teacher of the Year in 2002 and Assistant Principal of the Year in 2020. Tabitha also taught

Sunday School at Antioch Missionary Baptist Church and served on the people acting for Community Together (PACT) Committee and Social Justice Ministry, among many other positions.

At the time of her passing, Tabitha was ready to defend her dissertation. She had already received IRB approval from Albizu and the School System. Her dissertation title speaks by itself: *The numbers and the voiceless speak: An empirical phenomenological qualitative study of middle school drop-outs in the Educational Alternative Outreach Program*. Tabitha was honored by family, professors, and peers who loved her dearly. In her application to the Human Services Honor Society, Tabitha wrote the following: "I believe that all people regardless of their walk-in life need a hand up at some point in their lives. I also believe that all people can be successful in life, and that path to success varies from individual to individual. Being able to assist others in reaching their goals as simple or as complex as some of them may be is what I view as my ministry."



***Graduation Honors Criteria:***

Undergraduate cumulative grade point average:

Cum Laude - 3.33-3.49

Magna Cum Laude - 3.50-3.95

Summa Cum Laude - 3.96-4.00

Graduate cumulative grade point average:

Distinction - 3.60-3.94

Utmost Distinction - 3.95-4.00

Graduate students receiving honors cannot:

~ Receive a grade of C or lower in any course.

~ Receive a NP in or repeated courses, practicum,  
Internship, Dissertation/Doctoral Project, and/or  
Comprehensive Examination