



Commencement Ceremony  
Miami Campus

September 22, 2023



## *Program*

Salutation

Message from the Student Council President

Musical Interlude  
by the Doral Academy Elementary School Choir

Message from the President

Introduction of the Commencement Speaker  
by the Chair of the Board of Trustees

Message from the Commencement Speaker

Diploma Presentation

Closing



*To the Families and Loved Ones of the Graduates*

We recognize the love and support that our families and loved ones have provided to us throughout the academic journey that we complete today.

Our achievements are the fruit of mutual work and effort. 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 to extend the benefit graduate psychology programs that were sensitive to cultural ethnic issues in the continental United States. In January 2000, the university in Miami and the university in Puerto Rico (along with one university center) were renamed Carlos Albizu University in honor of its founder and is now known as Albizu University.

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.



## *History*

Albizu University (AU) is a private, nonprofit, specialized university-level institution offering associate, bachelor's and master's degrees in psychology, business, 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, business, 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.*





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***Student Council President***

Lysmary Cadavieco



## *Commencement Speaker*

Antonio E. Puente, Ph.D.



Dr. Antonio E. Puente was born in La Habana, Cuba and emigrated to the US in 1960. Dr. Puente received his PhD from the University of Georgia. He has taught at the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) since 1981 and prior to that at St. George's University School of Medicine. His primary teaching activities include Brain and Behavior, Clinical Neuropsychology, and History of Psychology. He is the founding director of UNCW's Centro Hispano, and his research focuses on the interface between culture and neuropsychology. Puente founded and edited the journals *Neuropsychology Review* and *Journal of Interprofessional Education & Practice* as well as a neuropsychology book series. He has published 10 books, 93 chapters, and 123 scientific articles in several languages.

Dr. Puente is a Professor of Psychology at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, maintains a private practice in clinical neuropsychology, and is the founder (2002) and co-director of mental health services at the Cape Fear Clinic, a bilingual multi-disciplinary health center serving the indigent.

He served as APA's advisor for 15 years to the American Medical Association's (AMA) Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) prior to serving for an additional 8 years as one of 17 members of the AMA CPT Panel.

Dr. Puente served as president of the NC Psychological Association, NC Psychological Foundation, the Hispanic Neuropsychological Association, National Academy of Neuropsychology, Society for Clinical Neuropsychology (Division 40 of APA), and Society for Behavioral Neuroscience and Comparative Psychology (Division 6 of APA), as well as President of the American Psychological Association. He is currently the Chair Elect of the Board of Trustees of Albizu University.



2022-2023

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

Angelica Londono

Ana Elena Rodriguez

Daniela Camacho Rodriguez, *Distinguished Award Recipient*

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

Valentina Erchini

***Bachelor of Science in Psychology***

Maria Cristina Abelairas

Alicia Perez Abreu

Enrique Jesus Alvarez

Jonah Valdes Alvarez

Krystal Ann Alvarez

John Ryan Barnhart

Mirelys Becquer

Kiara Beltran

Lisette Blanco

Adinnet Cervantes

Jonathan Crespo

Michelle Nicole De Mota

Jannine Doreste

Amanda Katie Eaton

Eliany Guerra Garcia

Luis F. Gonzalez De Jesus

Frandy Cornelio Hernandez, *Distinguished Award Recipient*

Leidy Laura Hernandez

Jose Luis Ibanez

Claudia Macias

Ada Lilian Martinez Perez

Grethel Landin Prieto

Melisa Roque

Nathali C. Sanchez

Miguel Tucen

Yolaine Mayea Vargas



*Master of Science in Psychology  
with a major in Mental Health Counseling*

Luis Beltran  
Adriana E. Correa Zapata  
Harvey Dedemadiz  
Jessica Nicole Ferrare  
Liliana Caceres Ferreiro  
Yoel Vergara Gamez  
Carlos DeLazaro Garcia  
Maidel Gimenez  
Almendra Andrea Grados  
Diana Isabel Hernandez  
Jessica Hernandez  
Jodi Kathleen  
Mariana Levi  
Chantal Llabona  
Arianne Monal  
Jose Antonio Montes Santana  
Yanela Munoz Mora  
Pedro Joel Navarro David  
Lissette Valdes Oliva  
Daimi Quesada  
Aileen Abello Rivera  
Jonachy Prieto Rodriguez  
Melissa Rodriguez  
Lisandra Barbara Rodriguez Sierra  
Yamisley Alamo Ruiz  
Yael Salas-Beltran  
Ivanna Schuls-Diaz  
Zahyra Ithamar Torres Centeno  
Jessie Zamora Valdes  
Carlos Tapanes Vazquez  
Damarys Machado Vega  
Dawn Witherspoon



***Master of Science in Psychology  
with a major in Marriage and Family Therapy***

Sandra Banegas  
Anna Theresa Bouza  
Beyazly Itzbel Castro Sanchez  
Victor E. Gomez Garcia  
Viviana Hernandez  
Andres Felipe Mejia  
Vanessa Molina  
Juan Jose Fernandez  
Danielle Ashton Kelly  
Anees Patnam, *Distinguished Award Recipient*  
Stephany Preciado Sepulveda  
Lourdes Milagros Tomas  
Melinda Williams

***Master of Science in Psychology  
with a major in School Counseling***

Jessica Acosta  
Walter A. Centeno  
Alis Cueto Garcia  
Chelsey Linda Huamali-Arroyo  
Vanessa Vigil  
Saryleen Concepcion

***Master of Science in Psychology with a Dual Major in  
School Counseling and  
Marriage and Family Therapy***

Jessica C. Gonzalez

***Master of Science in  
Industrial and Organizational Psychology***

Paola Nicole Lam Medina  
Ingrid Y. Salamanca, *Distinguished Award Recipient*  
Adriana A. Barrero  
Mariely Rosa Rios  
Paola M. Davila Ramos  
Kristal Marie Miranda-Gonzalez



Ileana Loren Rosario Ayala  
Sheila Cristina Villagrasa Mendez, *Distinguished Award Recipient*

*Master of Science in Exceptional Student Education*  
Emily C. Rodriguez, *Distinguished Award Recipient*

*Master of Science in Speech and Language Pathology*

Addharossie C. Baez Vazquez

Dominique Sonora

Francy Merline Alfrena

Lisbeth Amador

Ilana Charmin Aquia Shaw

Susana M. Arango Amoros

Carvajal, Jessica Victoria

Casali, Martina

Natalie Castañeda

Lily Rosy Delgado

Kendra Destefano

Allisha Delores Dieujuste

Yanet Felipe

Celina Elyse Ganesh

Cristina I. Garcia Costas

Anamaria Garzon

Helen Hernandez

Angelica Herrera

Jordyn Mariah Holmes

Astrid Correa Jimenez

Annette Jorge

Angieleen Juvert

Natalie Nicole Kocikowski

Maria arque

Jamie Lee Landa

Jennifer Marie Lopez

Lauren Victoria Lopez

Saria A. Malik

Gabriel Marrero

Gabriela Alejandra Martinez

Jamey Morales Gonzalez



Daniela Nazario  
Lilian Mercedes Obando Flores  
Jessenia Ojeda  
Joanne C. Orta, *Distinguished Award Recipient*  
Katelyn Nicole Ortega  
Victoria Maria Padron  
Taylor Nicole Perry  
Melissa Pita  
Jennifer Quintero Fernandez  
Natalie S. Rafeh  
Liliana P. Ramirez  
Janeisy Rodriguez  
Rosali Rodriguez  
Claudia Michelle Rodriguez-Danton  
Jamie Kirsten Sanchez  
Rayna Dai Serafine  
Lianny Sims  
Andrea Moran Sosa  
Shaylene Varela  
Jouss Meredith Vazquez Sanoguet  
Estefania Vega  
Ritzi Yesenia Villatoro  
Mallory Susan Watson  
Aileen Zaldivar

***Master of Science in General Psychology***

Clara Valentina Agudo Matthies  
Jasmine Jimena Appolon  
Jessica Balter  
David Benitez  
Hannah Michelle Browning  
Daniela Brito  
Lysmary Cadavieco  
Jessica B. Castillo  
Claudia Nadal Cedenó  
Martesha Daesha Collins  
Karla Teresa Correa  
Gabriela Corticchia  
Davis Richard Dodge





Abigail Farfan  
Ednei Estevez Gonzalez  
Dania Johnson Roth  
Jennifer Martin  
Jessica Martin  
Ivana Martinez  
Yly Morales  
Sarah Joon Lesser  
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Cristina Sanz  
Skylar Slawiak  
Nicole Stroude  
Rossana Tamames  
James Vincent Ugent  
Rebecca Villalba  
Maria Cristina Villena Odriozola  
Valery Zullo

***Doctor of Psychology in Clinical Psychology***

Breona Alvarado  
Aliette Pico Valdes  
Stephanie Afua Afranewaah Sarkodie  
Vanessa Yolanda Alarcon  
Giselle J. Alvarez de la Campa  
Cassandra Denise Bruton  
Denise Carballea  
Carmen Lis Casas  
Kalpana Daswani  
Amaris Denise Dennison  
Manuela L. Despian, *Distinguished Award Recipient*  
Jessica Marie Frias  
Malyorie Garcia-Diaz  
Elizabeth Karen Grittens  
Adriana Martinez  
Alexandria Kathryn Marullo  
Katty Mastrodomenico  
Lizandra Muniz



Dilianna Marie Padron  
Rita M. Rivera  
Maudy A. Sanchez  
Monica Santini Santiago  
Nicole M. Serrano Colon  
Arlenis Silva  
Sean Michael Suarez  
Emily Jane Thompson  
Mariemilia Larrea Tinajero  
Hanny Valentina Vera  
Ayana Autumise Walls

*Doctor of Philosophy in Human Services*

Tim Sahliu Braimah  
Andres Correa  
Samantha G. Hernandez, *Distinguished Award Recipient*  
Chantal A. Ramirez Tapia



### ***2023 Distinguished Award Recipients***

*The Distinguished Award Recipients exemplify our values of excellence in academics and commitment to social responsibility.*

*They are selected by the program faculty.*



## **Frandy C. Hernandez**

*2023 Distinguished Bachelor of Science in Psychology Award Recipient*

Frandy Cornelio Hernandez was born and raised in Cuba. He was a medical doctor working Intensive Care Unit (ICU) before arriving in Miami in 2010 as a political refugee, which interrupted him from obtaining his academic record. He started his educational journey pursuing a nursing degree which he confidently relinquished to pursue a bachelor's degree in psychology at Albizu University. In Spring 2023, Mr. Hernandez finished his Bachelor of Science in Psychology with a minor in Behavior Analysis exceeding academic performance and achieving a 4.0 GPA. He currently works full-time as a Registered Behavioral Technician.

Mr. Hernandez decided to further his studies and will soon finish a Master's in Psychology Specialist (Psy.S.) while also preparing to take the Board-Certified Assistant Behavior Analyst (BCaBA) exam. Mr. Hernandez represents outstanding students, hard-working immigrants achieving the American Dream.

Albizu University congratulates Frandy on his accomplishments and wishes his success in his future endeavors.



## **Daniela Camacho**

*2023 Distinguished Bachelor of Arts in Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Award Recipient*

Ms. Daniela Camacho enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts in Exceptional Student Education (BA ESE) program in May 2020, at Albizu University. Coming to Albizu ready to complete this goal, she transferred in credits from another institution, and was determined to excel in her higher education program at Albizu. Daniela has also completed the BA ESE Program's Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Minor, all while working as a preschool teacher. She loves her field.

Performing extremely well with her undergraduate studies, she further has expressed numerous times how her passion in life has included 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 completed her assignments, presentations, and all requirements included with her program. Her work demonstrated her excellence with going beyond, with specificity and detail. These positive attributes carry over into her world of work, making her stand out whether she is speaking, teaching, educating, and or being a role model for others.

Additional positive attributes Daniela possesses are being caring, giving and family oriented. She has often spoken of her family and her dedication to them. She arrived to Miami with her mother from Cuba, six years ago. Her family here, and family in Cuba are ardent, hard working professionals. Daniela has joined their ranks, and they are very proud of her.

Ms. Camacho is absolutely representative of what we look for our alumni to be. Further, as the Albizu University Mission excerpts includes, she has helped to improve the quality of life for those she now educates, all while serving our diverse communities. Congratulations Daniela!



## **Emily Rodriguez**

*2023 Distinguished Master of Science in Exceptional Student Education Award Recipient*

Ms. Emily Rodriguez enrolled in the Master of Science in Exceptional Student Education (ESE) in the Summer of 2022, at Albizu University. While being advised at the onset of this academic journey 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 just that!

Excelling with her graduate studies at Albizu was her desire. She said that Albizu's professors were on point with her education. All of her classes and coursework were complete with sterling caliber. She was always ahead of time with assignment submissions, research, readings, presentations, and all requirements included with her program.

Born and raised in Miami, Florida, she is from a Hispanic lineage and very proudly, first generation college student of her family. She has spoken of her family and the joy she has with them. She recognized early on in life that her passion was for learning, being educated and educating. As such, she has always had a "passion for working with children with goals including making a difference in children's lives". This is also why she is working now as a registered behavior therapist; planning to gain graduate certificate and becoming a board-certified behavior analyst.

Ms. Rodriguez is one of Albizu University's shining assets...hard-working and sincere. Aligned with excerpts of the Albizu Mission Statement: She is working to improve quality of life and serving our diverse communities. We are very proud of her!



## **Joanne C. Orta**

*2023 Master of Science in Speech and Language Pathology Award Recipient*

Joanne C. Orta is a shining example of unwavering commitment and achievement in the field of Speech-Language Pathology. Recognized as the recipient of the Excellence Student Award, she embodies the essence of an exceptional student through her dedication to personal growth, positive influence on peers, and the potential for future contributions.

Starting her academic journey in Spring 2021 within the master's program in Speech-Language Pathology, Joanne quickly emerged as a standout figure. Her academic excellence was evident as she navigated the program with determination and grace, consistently showcasing her abilities and commitment to excellence.

Joanne's academic brilliance is complemented by her strong sense of professionalism and ethical integrity. She conducts herself with unwavering moral values, radiating integrity and respect in her interactions with various stakeholders. Her adeptness in managing diverse relationships reflects both her maturity and her understanding of the importance of upholding values.

A remarkable quality of Joanne is her continuous pursuit of growth and innovation. Always at the forefront of new ideas, she seamlessly incorporates novel concepts into her work. Her proactive approach in exploring uncharted territories demonstrates a blend of intellectual curiosity and practical implementation that sets her apart and promises future contributions.

Beyond her individual accomplishments, Joanne's positive impact on peers and surroundings attests to her exceptional character. She fosters an environment of encouragement and inspiration, motivating those around her to strive for their best. Her ability to mentor and uplift underscores her genuine concern for community growth.

As Joanne charts her path toward a promising future, her commitment to personal advancement, positive influence, and unwavering dedication to excellence mark her as a true example of an exceptional student. Her journey embodies determination, aspiration, and the promise of meaningful contributions to her field and community, painting a bright future ahead.

Albizu University congratulates Ms. Murphy on her accomplishments and wishes her success in her future endeavors.



## **Anees Patnam, M.S.**

*2023 Distinguished Master of Science in Psychology Award Recipient*

Anees Patnam earned a BS in Cognitive Psychology at University of California, San Diego. After graduating, Anees sought to continue to build his knowledge in the field of psychology amidst his pursuit to become a psychiatrist. In Spring 2022, he was admitted to the Master of Science in Psychology program with major in Marriage and Family Therapy at Albizu University, Miami Campus.

Anees's academic performance during his graduate studies was exemplary. He received commendations from his professors on numerous occasions and maintained a perfect GPA of 4.00. He performed his practicum duties at Borinquen Health Centers in an outstanding manner. Today, Anees graduates with Utmost Distinction.

Throughout his life, Anees has experienced change. Growing up in India and coming to America before adolescence has helped Anees understand the importance of diversity and culture in impacting life. Through his own tumultuous change, he can engage with others and truly help instill hope in his clients and future patients. He expects that his diversity, his tenacity, and his motivation will go a long way in delivering caring and effective counseling services, and eventually becoming an excellent doctor.

Anees volunteered his time for six months in California helping combat COVID-19's impact on senior communities by working with various companies to provide food and services to those affected by the coronavirus. While Anees enjoys helping others and excelling in courses, Anees understands that there is more to life than this. In his leisure time, Anees likes to explore different cuisines, go to the gym, play video games, and watch YouTube. Everyone has their story, and everyone deserves a chance to be heard. His motto is "Remember that everyone you meet is afraid of something, loves something, and has lost something". Therefore, everyone deserves a chance to be greater than who they were yesterday. He believes that his story is a testament to this.

Currently, Anees is in a pre-medical program, gearing up to apply for medical school afterwards.

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





## **Ingrid Salamanca**

*2023 Distinguished Master of Science in Industrial and Organizational Psychology Award  
Recipient  
Campus-based program*

Ingrid Salamanca earned a Bachelor's in Hotel and Tourism Management from Universidad Externado de Colombia in 1991, a Specialization in Marketing from Universidad Escuela de Administracion de Negocios in 1999, and a Master Certificate in Internet Marketing from University of San Francisco. In 2020, she was admitted to the Master of Science in Industrial and Organizational Psychology program at Albizu University.

In addition to her excellent academic performance in her courses, Ingrid successfully completed both Practicum I at Nicklaus Children's Hospital in their Department of Human Resources and Practicum II at Miami Dade College – Homestead Campus in support of their Culture of Care Initiative. Today, she graduates with Utmost Distinction.

Ingrid considers herself a detailed-oriented professional who is comfortable using reliable research methods to optimize workplaces for both employees and employers. She specializes in employee retention, training and development, and leadership. Ingrid has also demonstrated ability to apply psychological assessments and interventions to enhance workplace effectiveness and productivity.

Ingrid's professional career experiences include working as a project coordinator for Carnival Corporation, property coordinator for Crocker Partners Property Management, and most recently serving with Albizu University as IT Administrative Assistant and Integration Officer. While serving in these roles, she has honed her capacity to organize the logistics of projects and communicate effectively within team systems. In her free time, she has served as a volunteer at community churches. She is also an active member of both the national Society for IO Psychologists (SIOP) and the Florida chapter (FIOP), which not only expands her professional network and knowledge, but also allows her an opportunity for service while meeting her social responsibility to others.

Ingrid's long-term professional goals include establishing her own consulting practice in the field of industrial and organizational psychology to help both private and not-for-profit organizations to meet their desired outcomes. She is passionate about training and development of employees and aims to set up an organization that will focus on glass ceiling issues and workplace bullying.

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



## **Sheila C. Villagrasa, M.S.**

*2023 Distinguished Master of Science in Industrial and Organizational Psychology Award Recipient*

*Online program*

Sheila Villagrasa received an academic and volleyball scholarship at Florida Institute of Technology where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Applied Behavior Analysis in 2020. During her studies there, she completed an internship at The Scott Center for Autism Treatment that focuses on helping children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, and became a Certified Registered Intern Technician. She also participated in two research projects that motivated her to pursue her master's degree in I/O Psychology. The first research program involved using a tactile prompting device that delivered vibrations to athletes to teach them correct responses and to improve body positioning. The second undergraduate research focused on supply chain, and assisted graduate students with their thesis projects under faculty supervision.

In Fall of 2020, she was admitted to the M.S. in Industrial and Organizational Psychology degree at Albizu University, Miami Campus. Sheila's academic performance during her graduate studies was exemplary. She received various commendations from her professors and maintained a perfect GPA of 4.00. For her Capstone Projects, Sheila completed specialized extracurricular training and earned the prestigious Lean Six Sigma Black, Green and White Belts. Today, Sheila graduates with Utmost Distinction. In addition to her academic pursuits, Sheila has engaged in numerous volunteering projects at various sites, which such as Habitat for Humanity, Hogar Jesús de Santa María, and Verdi Eco School in Downtown Eau Gallie, and the Susan G. Komen Foundation for Breast Cancer. In her leisure time, she enjoys playing volleyball, traveling, cooking, exploring new places, and exercising in the gym.

Currently, Sheila is the Operational Manager at Caferama, which was founded in 1965 by her great-grandfather. She credits her master's in IO for her ability to see things from a different perspective, one that allows merging of her parents' experience and knowledge with new operational systems. It has also helped her gain more insight into human behavior and business management while contributing greatly to her career growth.

Shelia's biggest inspiration have been her parents, and she would like to be a source of inspiration for girl athletes in Puerto Rico to play the sports they love while pursuing a career.

Albizu University congratulates Sheila on her accomplishments and wishes her success in her future endeavors.



## **Manuela L. Despian, Psy.D.**

*2023 Distinguished Doctor of Psychology in Clinical Psychology Award Recipient*

Manuela, known as Ms. D or Manni was born and raised in Miami, Florida. Her goal in the field of psychology is to empower others to break through their inner restraints and expectations others have placed on them. She completed a dual master's degree at Albizu University in Marriage and Family Therapy as well as School Counseling. Her experiences as a school guidance counselor helped mold her into a clinician that can balance the intertwining aspects of psychological, emotional, social, developmental, and educational goals of clients. She trained at the Goodman Psychological Services Center, Nicklaus Children's Hospital, Dr. Coral Arvon & Associates, and Design Neuroscience Center.

It is through a continuous collaborative process and the lens of the family systems theory that she conducts therapy. She learned how to use clinical psychology not only to understand the actions of others, but also to improve individual functioning and mental health. Manuela believes that when working with children, the influence of the family is customarily evident.

Albizu University congratulates Manuela on her accomplishments and wishes her success in her future endeavors.



**Samantha G. Hernandez, Ph.D.**

*2023 Distinguished Doctor of Philosophy in Human Services Award Recipient*

Samantha G. Hernandez is a bilingual speech language pathologist with 16 years of clinical experience with pediatric, adult and geriatric populations. She obtained her BA in Psychology with a minor in foreign languages from the University of Miami and her MS in Speech Language Pathology from Florida International University. She was president and owner of a private clinic with a pediatric focus offering speech, language, feeding and swallowing clinical services from 2009-2015. She has worked in many different settings with pediatric, adult and geriatric populations in the outpatient, rehabilitation and acute care settings at Jackson Memorial Hospital, Mount Sinai Medical Center, Mercy Hospital and Aventura Hospital. She was an assistant professor in the Speech Language Pathology graduate program at Albizu University.

Samantha graduated from Albizu University with her doctoral degree in Human Services, specializing in Gerontology in April of 2023. Her research interests include rehabilitation of neurogenic communication disorders and swallowing disorders. Her dissertation focused on dysphagia, malnutrition, sarcopenia and interdisciplinary intervention and rehabilitation. In addition to teaching, treating, and providing clinical supervision, she enjoys spending time with her family, traveling, completing marathons, triathlons and challenging outdoor activities.



***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



*Special appreciation to the Graduation Committee  
chaired by Carmen Garcia.*