



CAEOP FACTBOOK

2025 - 2026



ASOCIACIÓN CARIBEÑA DE PROGRAMAS
DE OPORTUNIDADES EDUCATIVAS

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

It is a privilege to present the TRIO Factbook 2025–2026, a publication that captures the scope, impact, and importance of TRIO programs throughout Puerto Rico. Through data, stories, and collective effort, this Factbook reflects how TRIO continues to open doors to higher education and empower students from underserved communities to achieve their academic and personal goals.



Across our programs, we see daily evidence of resilience, determination, and potential. TRIO not only supports students in accessing postsecondary education, but also strengthens their ability to persist, graduate, and become leaders within their families and communities. These outcomes are made possible through the dedication of directors, counselors, educators, and staff who remain deeply committed to opportunity and student success.

This Factbook stands as both a testament to what has been accomplished and a reminder of the work that still lies ahead. It is a valuable resource for understanding TRIO's reach, advocating for continued support, and guiding future initiatives that respond to the evolving needs of our students.

On behalf of CAEOP, we thank everyone who contributes to TRIO's mission and those who use this information to strengthen educational access and outcomes across Puerto Rico. May this edition inspire continued collaboration and renewed commitment to expanding opportunities for the students and families we serve.

Dr. Alejandro Morales

PRESIDENT

WHAT IS TRIO?

The TRIO Programs are federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds in their pursuit of a college degree. Although the name “TRIO” initially came into use after the first three programs were authorized under the Higher Education Act, there are currently eight distinct programs that comprise the federal TRIO programs. Each plays a unique role in providing educational opportunity for eligible students. These programs targeted to serve, motivate, and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. They also assist low-income, first-generation college students, individuals with disabilities, homeless youth, those in foster care, English as a second language learners and other disconnected students to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post baccalaureate programs. TRIO programs provide academic tutoring, personal counseling, mentoring, financial guidance, and other supports necessary for educational access and retention. TRIO also includes a training program for directors and staff of TRIO projects. In Puerto Rico, we have 36 TRIO programs, with representation from each of these federal programs.

The Federal TRIO Programs in Puerto Rico are:

- Regular Upward Bound
- Upward Bound Math & Science
- Veterans’ Upward Bound
- Talent Search
- Student Support Services - STEM and ESL
- Educational Opportunity Centers
- Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement

TRIO HOST INSTITUTIONS

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY CENTERS

Interamerican University of Puerto Rico - Arecibo
 Interamerican University of Puerto Rico - Barranquitas
 Interamerican University of Puerto Rico - San Germán

MCNAIR ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM

Interamerican University of Puerto Rico - San Germán

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Interamerican University of Puerto Rico - Aguadilla
 Interamerican University of Puerto Rico - Barranquitas
 University of Puerto Rico - Arecibo
 University of Puerto Rico - Río Piedras
 Universidad Ana G. Méndez - Cupey
 Universidad Ana G. Méndez - Gurabo
 Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico - San Juan (Regular)
 Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico - San Juan (English as a Second Language)
 Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico - San Juan (STEM)
 Antillean Adventist University - Mayagüez (Regular)
 Antillean Adventist University - Mayagüez (English as a Second Language)
 Universidad Del Sagrado Corazón - Santurce (Regular)
 Universidad Del Sagrado Corazón - Santurce (Disabled)
 San Juan University College - San Juan

TALENT SEARCH

ASPIRA Inc. de Puerto Rico - Carolina
 Interamerican University of Puerto Rico - Ponce
 Universidad Ana G. Méndez - Gurabo
 University of Puerto Rico - Río Piedras

UPWARD BOUND/

UPWARD BOUND MATH & SCIENCE

Academy of Medical Directors of Puerto Rico, Inc.
 ASPIRA Inc. de Puerto Rico - Carolina
 Interamerican University of Puerto Rico - Barranquitas
 Interamerican University of Puerto Rico - Ponce
 Interamerican University of Puerto Rico - San Germán
 LULAC National Education Services Centers, Inc. - Bayamón
 Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico - Regular
 Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico - SITE
 Universidad Ana G. Méndez - Cupey
 Universidad Ana G. Méndez - Gurabo
 Universidad del Sagrado Corazón - Santurce
 University of Puerto Rico - Humacao
 University of Puerto Rico - Río Piedras
 Interamerican University of Puerto Rico - Aguadilla (UBMS)

TRIO PROGRAMS, # SERVED, AND FUNDING IN PUERTO RICO

TRIO PROGRAM	# OF PROGRAMS	# OF PARTICIPANTS	25 - 26 FUNDING
ALL TRIO PROGRAMS	36	12,547	\$ 14,418,186.00
EOC PROGRAMS	3	3,950	\$ 1,194,857.00
MCNAIR PROGRAMS	1	33	\$ 311,980.00
SSS PROGRAMS	14	3,332	\$ 5,054,655.00
TS PROGRAMS	4	4,046	\$ 2,262,102.00
UB PROGRAMS	12	986	\$ 4,911,034.00
UBMS PROGRAMS	1	60	\$ 309,505.00
VUB PROGRAMS	1	140	\$ 374,053.00



TALENT SEARCH

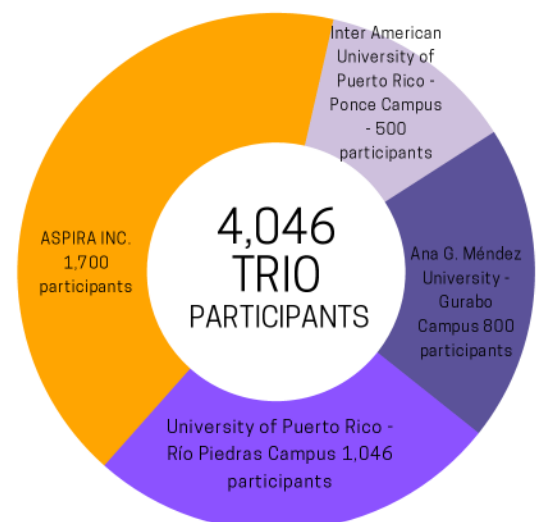
The Talent Search program identifies and assists individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds who have the potential to succeed in higher education. The program provides academic, career, and financial counseling to its participants and encourages them to graduate from high school and continue on to and complete their post-secondary education. The program publicizes the availability of financial aid and assists participants with the postsecondary application process. Talent Search also encourages persons who have not completed education programs at the secondary or postsecondary level to enter or reenter and complete postsecondary education. The goal of Talent Search is to increase the number of youth from disadvantaged backgrounds who complete high school and enroll in and complete their postsecondary education.

Services:

- Academic, financial, career, or personal counseling
- Exposure to college campuses
- Information on student financial assistance
- Tutorial services
- Career exploration and aptitude assessments
- Counseling, mentoring programs, and workshops
- Guidance on and assistance in secondary school reentry, alternative education programs for secondary school dropouts and entry into general educational development programs or postsecondary education
- Information on postsecondary institutions and education or counseling services designed to improve the financial and economic literacy of students
- Assistance in completing college admissions and financial aid applications
- Assistance in preparing for college entrance exams
- Special activities for sixth, seventh, and eighth graders
- Workshops for the families of participants

Serve 4,046 6th to 12th grade students as well as adult high school dropouts through 4 projects which provide services to participants in 17 counties across the Island. We need continued funding to provide educational opportunities to our participants from an early stage.

Funding: \$2,262,102.00



UPWARD BOUND

Upward Bound was the first of the TRIO Programs funded under the Higher Education Act of 1965, and amended in 2008. Upward Bound provides fundamental support to participants in their preparation for college entrance. The program provides opportunities for participants to succeed in their precollege performance and ultimately in their higher education pursuits.

Upward Bound serves high school students from low-income families and high school students from families in which neither parent holds a bachelor's degree. There are two specialties under this program: Upward Bound Math and Science, that prepares students in careers in Science and Mathematics; and Veterans Upward Bound, that prepares returning veterans to enter colleges and obtain a postsecondary degree.

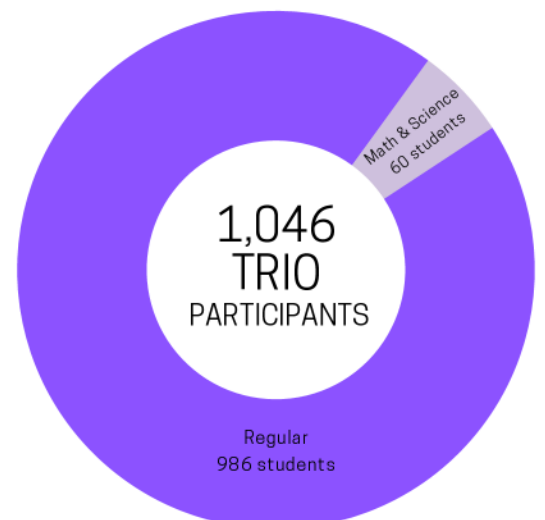
Services:

Academic instruction and tutoring in mathematics thru pre calculus, laboratory sciences, composition, literature, and foreign languages, guidance and counseling, mentoring, cultural enrichment, work-study programs, education designed to improve the financial and economic literacy of students; programs and activities previously mentioned that are specially designed for students who are: limited English proficient, traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary education, students with disabilities, students who are homeless children and youth, students who are in foster care or are aging out of the foster care system and/or other disconnected students.

UB Regular serves 986 high school students through 12 projects and UBMS serves 60 high school students through 1 project across the Island.

With continued funding for our programs, we are eager to serve many more!

Funding: \$5,220,539.00



VETERANS UPWARD BOUND

Veterans Upward Bound is designed to motivate and assist veterans in the development of academic and other requisite skills necessary for acceptance and success in a program of postsecondary education. The program provides assessment and enhancement of basic skills through counseling, mentoring, tutoring, and academic instruction in the core subject areas. The primary goal of the program is to increase the rate at which participants enroll in and complete postsecondary education programs.

Services include:

- Education or counseling services designed to improve the financial and economic literacy of participants
- Instruction in reading, writing, study skills, and other subjects necessary for success in education beyond high school
- Academic, financial, or personal counseling
- Tutorial services and mentoring program
- Information on postsecondary education opportunities
- Assistance in completing college entrance and financial aid applications
- Assistance in preparing for college entrance exams
- Information on the full range of Federal Student financial aid programs and benefits
- Guidance and assistance in alternative education programs for secondary school dropouts that lead to receipt of a regular secondary school diploma, entry into general education development (GED) programs or postsecondary education

Serve 140 Veterans through 1 project which provides services to participants across the Island.

Our participants typically come from low-income households where no one has previously completed a college degree. We are proud to serve each veteran adult. With continued funding for our programs, we are eager to serve many more!

Funding: \$374,053.00



140
TRIO
PARTICIPANTS

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

The federally mandated purpose of the SSS Program, as stated in 646.1 of the federal legislation, is to: a) increase the number of disadvantaged low income college students, first generation college students, and college students with disabilities who successfully complete a program of study at the post secondary level. Student Support Services programs should also improve the financial and economic literacy of students. The SSS Program provides opportunities for academic development, assists students with basic college requirements, and serves to motivate students towards the successful completion of their postsecondary education. The SSS goal is to increase the college retention and graduation rates of its participants.

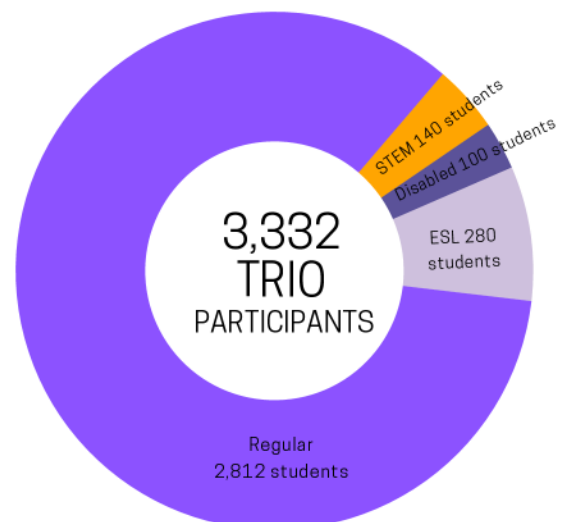
Services:

- Individualized education plan
- Communication skills
- Mathematical skills
- Technological skills
- Motivational and Socio-cultural activities
- Career and study skills course during summer component
- Academic, financial and personal counseling services during academic year
- Program Services Delivery

Serves 3,332 freshmen students through 14 projects which provides services to participants in 8 counties across the Island.

Our participants are disabled, low-income, and first-generation students where no family member has previously completed a college degree. We serve college students and provide services to retain and guide them to complete a Bachelor's Degree. With sustained funding, we can broaden our impact and empower more students to earn their Bachelor's Degrees.

Funding: \$5,054,655.00



EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY CENTERS

The goal of the Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) is to increase the number of adult participants who enroll in postsecondary education institutions. The Educational Opportunity Centers program provides counseling and information on college admissions to qualified adults who want to enter or continue a program of postsecondary education. The program also provides services to improve the financial and economic literacy of participants. The goal of the EOC program is to increase the number of adult participants who enroll in postsecondary education institutions.

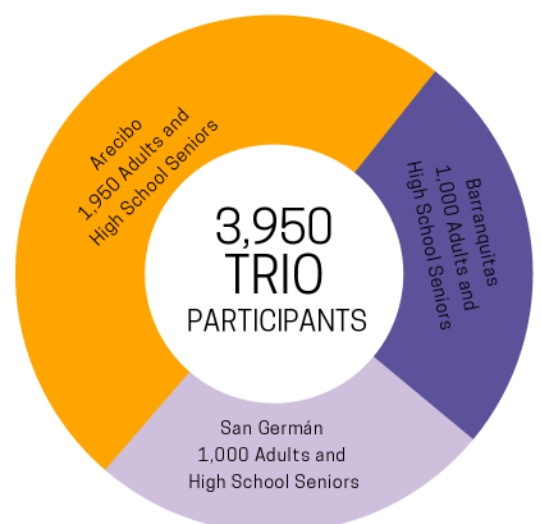
Services:

- Personal counseling
- Academic advising
- Career workshops
- Information on postsecondary educational opportunities
- Information on student financial assistance
- Tutoring
- Assistance in completing applications for college admissions, testing, and financial aid
- Coordination with nearby postsecondary institutions

Serves 3,950 Seniors and Adults through 3 projects which provides services to participants in 34 counties across the Island.

Our participants typically come from low-income households where no one has previously completed a college degree. We are proud to serve each student and adult. With continued funding for our programs, we are eager to serve many more!

Funding: \$1,194,857.00



MC NAIR - POST BACCALAURATE

The federally mandated purpose for the McNair Program is to award grant institutions of higher education for projects designed to provide disadvantaged college students with effective preparation for doctoral studies.

Services:

- Internships
- Seminars and Workshops
- Field Trips
- Cultural Events and Academic Program
- Academic Advising
- Financial Aid Assistance
- Research Opportunities

First generation and low income students

Post- Baccalaureate Program (PBP)- Graduate School Enrollment

Post- Baccalaureate Program (PBP)- Continued Enrollment in Graduate School
Research and Scholarly Activities

Serves 33 college students through 1 project which provides services to participants in 1 county.

Our participants typically come from low-income households where no one has previously completed a college degree. We are proud to serve each college student by providing the skills, knowledge, and investigation experience necessary to complete their Doctoral Degrees. With continued funding for our programs, we are eager to serve many more!

Funding: \$311,980.00



33
TRIO
PARTICIPANTS

SUMMARY

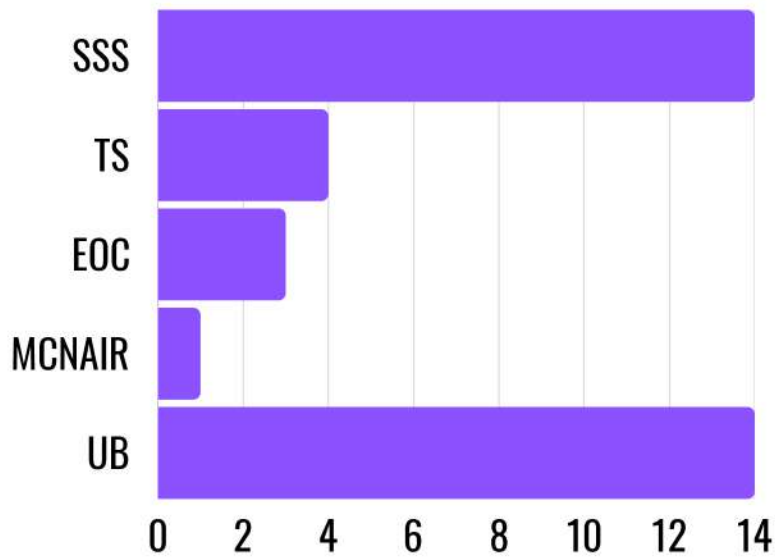
TRIO PROGRAMS IN PUERTO RICO MAP



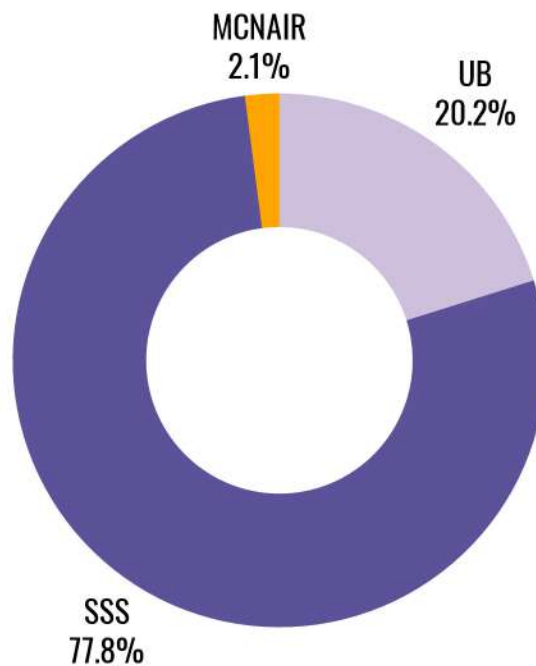
Across Puerto Rico, municipalities without TRIO programs face a significant gap in access to structured academic support, college preparation services, and retention resources that are critical for both pre-college and university students. In these communities—particularly in the central and southeastern regions of the island—students often encounter higher levels of economic hardship, geographic isolation, and limited access to college counseling, mentoring, and financial aid guidance. Without TRIO’s comprehensive services, many talented and motivated students lack the consistent support systems that help them enroll in postsecondary education, persist through academic challenges, and ultimately graduate. Expanding funding to extend TRIO programs into underserved municipalities would directly address these disparities by increasing outreach, strengthening college readiness pipelines, and improving retention and completion rates. Strategic investment would allow us to reach, serve, and meaningfully impact students in the central and southeastern regions, ensuring that educational opportunity is not determined by zip code but by potential.

STATISTICS

TRIO PROGRAMS IN PUERTO RICO

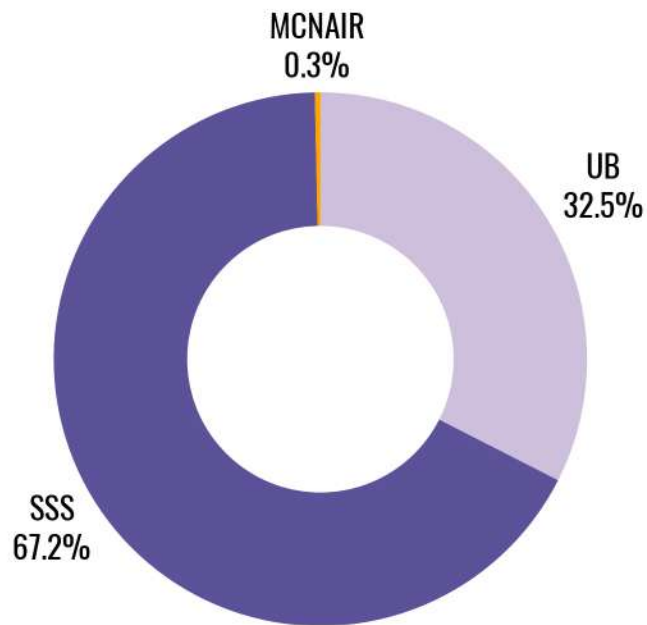


LOW INCOME & FIRST GENERATION PARTICIPANTS IN PUERTO RICO

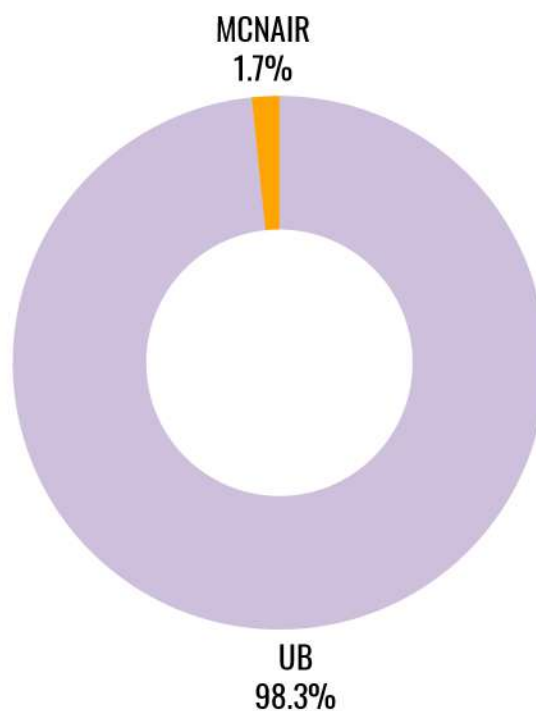


STATISTICS

RETENTION RATE

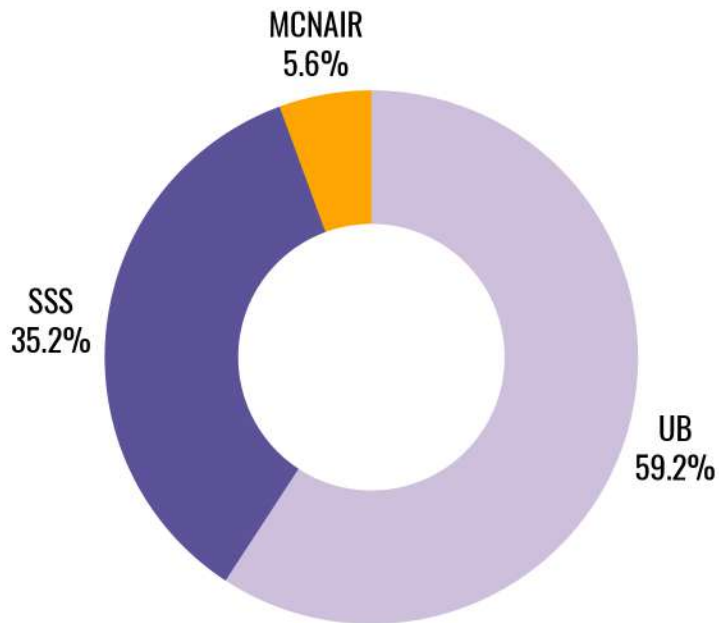


ENROLLMENT POST SECONDARY EDUCATION

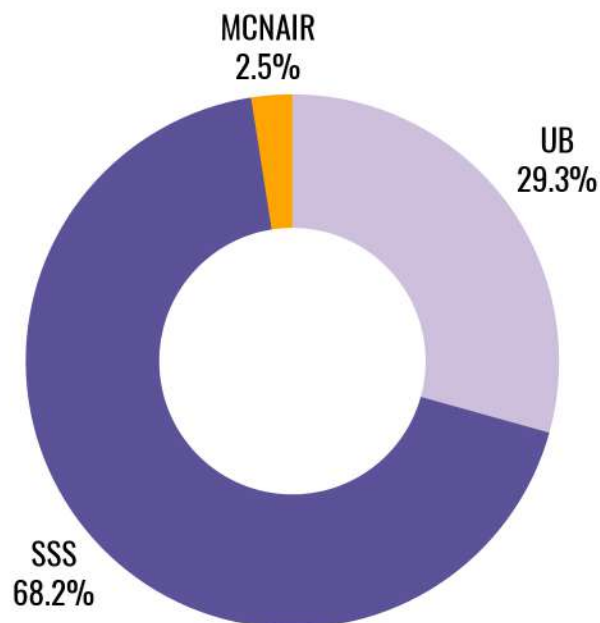


STATISTICS

GRADUATION RATE



ACADEMIC STANDING



ACTIVITIES

ANNUAL CONFERENCE



2025-2026 Executive Board of Directors





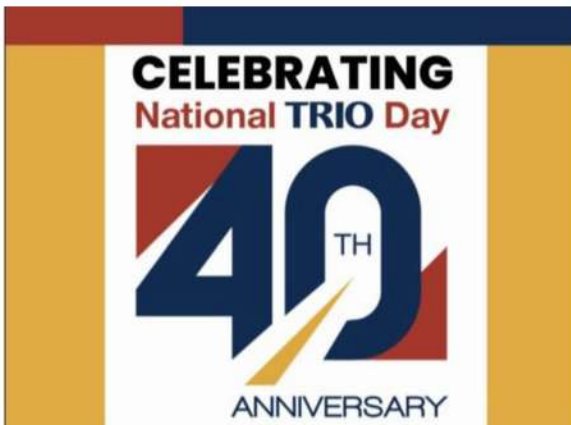
ACTIVITIES

NATIONAL FIRST GENERATION STUDENT DAY



ACTIVITIES

NATIONAL TRIO DAY CELEBRATING 40TH ANNIVERSARY





ACTIVITIES

MEETINGS



With Resident Commissioner, Hon. Pablo José Hernández



2025 National TRIO Achiever, Dr. Natalia Giraldo



2025 COE Policy Seminar





ACTIVITIES

STAFF WORKSHOPS



ACTIVITIES

STUDENT ACTIVITIES



SUCCESS STORIES



Axel Bonilla Rodríguez - TRIO Upward Bound

Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico, Ponce Campus

Axel Bonilla Rodríguez is a distinguished participant of the TRIO Upward Bound Program whose academic excellence, leadership, and service reflect the transformative opportunities provided by TRIO. Throughout his involvement in the program, he consistently demonstrated outstanding academic performance and was recognized as Student of the Month, TRIO Student, and recipient of the Director's Cup of Excellence. Through TRIO, he gained valuable professional experience as a mathematics and science tutor, research and robotics instructor, tutoring coordinator, and, currently, as the program's STEM instructor. He also served as team captain in FIRST Lego League and FIRST Tech Challenge competitions and represented the program in academic and community initiatives such as Relay for Life. These experiences fostered his development in critical thinking, leadership, and service, allowing him to grow from a program participant into a professional role model. Axel's strong ethical values and commitment to education make him a clear example of the TRIO Upward Bound Program's impact and success.

SUCCESS STORIES



**Carlos Vázquez, J.D. - TRIO Student Support Services
University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus**

Carlos Vázquez has a BA in Political Science from the University of Puerto Rico, class 2017. He finished his Juris Doctor in 2024. In addition, he passed the Bar in 2024 after his second attempt. Carlos grew up in a home marked by instability and emotional hardship and did not give up. He is a firm believer in the TRIO programs due to the fact that they provide outstanding academic and personal support throughout the entirety of the student's undergraduate experience.

SUCCESS STORIES



Katarina Santiago Justiniano - TRIO Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Interamerican University of Puerto Rico, San Germán Campus

Katarina Santiago Justiniano is one of the most compelling success stories in our McNair community. Her academic excellence, resilience, and unwavering determination reflect the program's mission. Katarina graduated magna cum laude in May 2025 with a bachelor's degree in biology and a minor in chemistry from the Interamerican University of Puerto Rico, San Germán Campus. Her department recognized her as an Outstanding Student, a distinction that highlighted her exceptional academic performance and strong commitment to learning. Her cumulative GPA demonstrated remarkable discipline, consistency, and organizational skills.

However, her journey is defined by much more than academic achievement. Katarina became a mother at 14, a life-changing experience that shaped her character and fueled her determination to succeed. Despite the challenges of balancing motherhood with demanding academic and professional responsibilities, she excelled in every area. Her perseverance and sense of purpose have inspired peers, faculty, and staff alike.

SUCCESS STORIES

Since 2014, Katarina has worked as a surgical technician, an experience that exposed her to high-pressure clinical environments and strengthened her precision, teamwork, and decision-making skills. This background sparked her interest in scientific inquiry and deepened her desire to understand the mechanisms behind disease and medical innovation. As a McNair Scholar, she conducted undergraduate research titled “Antibiotic Properties of Oregano and its Ability to Inhibit E. coli” under the mentorship of Prof. Tania Rodríguez. She approached this project with seriousness, intellectual curiosity, and strong research ethics. Her work demonstrated her potential as a future researcher and affirmed her commitment to pursuing advanced studies.

Beyond academics and research, Katarina has been actively involved in community service. She volunteered with the Scouts of America, Troop 1032G in San Germán, where she helped guide young participants and promote values such as responsibility, perseverance, and service. Her leadership and mentorship reflect the same spirit of support and community that the McNair Program seeks to cultivate.

What truly distinguishes Katarina is her ability to transform adversity into motivation. She not only maintained outstanding academic performance while managing significant personal responsibilities but also became a motivating presence within the university community. Her story has encouraged many students—especially those facing similar challenges—to believe in their own potential and pursue their goals with determination.

Katarina embodies the purpose of the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program. Her achievements reflect the transformative power of opportunity, mentorship, and resilience. She continues to represent the program with pride and serves as a powerful example of what is possible through dedication, perseverance, and a passion for knowledge.

SUCCESS STORIES



Karolina Rodríguez Acevedo - TRIO Upward Bound Math and Science Interamerican University of Puerto Rico, Aguadilla Campus

Karolina Rodríguez Acevedo is a distinguished alumni of the Upward Bound Math and Science Program at the Interamerican University of Puerto Rico, Aguadilla Campus, where she participated from 2016 to 2019. Coming from a low-income, first-generation background, she embraced every opportunity to grow academically and personally. She graduated Magna Cum Laude with a Bachelor's degree in Biology (Biomedical emphasis) from the University of Puerto Rico at Aguadilla and, in 2025, was honored as CAEOP's TRIO Achiever winner in the Bachelor's category in recognition of her outstanding accomplishments. Today, she is a third-year Doctor of Dental Medicine (DMD) student at the University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus. She continues to excel academically while serving her community through oral health education and volunteer clinics. Her journey reflects perseverance, leadership, and a deep commitment to giving back. Karolina's success is a testament to the transformative impact of TRIO programs and her determination to achieve her dream of becoming a dental professional.

SUCCESS STORIES

“In June of 2023, I graduated with a bachelor’s degree in biomedical biology from the University of Puerto Rico, Aguadilla Campus, and I am currently beginning my second year of a Doctorate in Dental Medicine at the UPR-RCM. This academic path has been a dream come true, and my story would not be the same without the support I received from the Upward Bound Math and Science (UBMS) program, one that was fundamental in building my academic and professional goals from day one.

Coming from a low income family, finding programs like UBMS was a gift, as it gave me the tools and security necessary to succeed, not only academically, but also as a person. This program gave me much more than I ever imagined and became a key influence in my life. I clearly remember the entrance interview in September 2016 while I was in my tenth grade at the Benito Cerezo Vázquez Public School. I had specific goals and dreams that I wanted to achieve, and the program not only met those expectations but exceeded them. From day one, I realized that UBMS went far beyond just academics. This program not only put me on the right track in the field of science and mathematics, but it comprehensively prepared me to face the challenges of college life. During my time at UBMS, I discovered that I wanted to pursue a career in oral health, an area in which I was able to develop with confidence thanks to the practical and personal skills I acquired in the program. UBMS offered visits to different institutions that helped me clarify my goals and open me up to the possibility of studying dental medicine, a decision that was largely motivated by a visit organized by UBMS to the School of Dental Medicine of the Medical Sciences Campus. There, among the halls of the clinic, I knew that this was my purpose. Seeing the work environment at the dental clinic up close awakened in me a sense of belonging and encouraged me to strive to become a professional in the field of dentistry. Thus, UBMS not only impacted my goals, but also helped me find my calling in life and become the person I am today. Today, as I am working in the same clinic that was once just a dream, I can say with gratitude that UBMS made a difference in my development as a professional”.

SUCCESS STORIES



Carlos Javier Santos - TRIO Upward Bound
Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico, Ponce Campus

“From the very first moment, Upward Bound became an indescribable experience. The warmth and dedication of its staff made me feel “at home,” a feeling that extended to the Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico as well. From its director, Professor Luisa Pillot, to our counselors and teachers, each of them was a key part of our family. I fondly remember our counselor, Professor María Fourquet, whom we affectionately called “titi” because of her closeness to us—like a favorite aunt who helps you, but when she needs to correct you, does so with all her love.

The program fostered values such as respect, empathy, and understanding, teaching us to become better human beings day by day. In addition to supporting us academically, on Saturdays we explored classes in art, French, or sports. We were also offered an orientation course where we could openly express everything that worried or affected us in our “difficult teenage lives.” At first, it was a bit challenging for me to integrate into the group since it was a new experience, but as time passed and my classmates accepted me, I was able to enjoy every moment in the program”.

SUCCESS STORIES

“During my last residential summer, when I was transitioning to become a bridge student in the program, I remember not wanting to go because I preferred to stay home enjoying my vacation. But as time “always finds a perfect ending,” something pushed me to get up, pack my suitcase, and tell my mother, “I’m going to La Católica and I’ll be back on Friday,” since we stayed there from Sunday to Friday. When she heard me, she was concerned, but because she trusted the program, Mrs. Pillot, and me, there was no opposition.

Needless to say, that summer was one of the best of my life. Spending the entire day and night with my peers strengthened our sense of family. I learned from outstanding teachers and developed both personally and professionally, but above all, I was able to be myself and enjoy art at every moment. Every program activity—whether organized by students or staff—included a brief musical performance, dance, or theatrical scene. Moreover, at the final event we held a talent show that concluded with a theatrical presentation about “Our Summer in Upward Bound.” There I was, helping with direction and staging, demonstrating my passion for theater.

Upward Bound not only shaped my life and taught me to be a better human being, but it was also a place to dream and achieve goals—a great family, a home away from home. It opened the doors to the Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico, my home for the past 24 years, where I have the honor of working as Publications Coordinator and professor in the Theater and Performing Arts Program. This is the place where everything began thanks to Upward Bound, and where I know that as long as I continue teaching, creating, and dreaming, I will carry with me the mark the program left on me—that with humanity, empathy, and understanding, we can overcome any obstacle”.

SUCCESS STORIES



**Natalia Giraldo Santiago, Ph.D. - TRIO Upward Bound
University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus**

“My story is just one example of how commitment to education, personal effort, and the opportunities provided by programs like Upward Bound can open doors and make dreams come true. In 2003, my siblings Alexis, Paola, and I (Natalia) entered the Upward Bound program at the University of Puerto Rico in Río Piedras—an experience that profoundly transformed our lives. Before joining the program, my sister and I faced academic difficulties, including repeating a grade in elementary school. This academic delay not only affected our self-esteem but also created a constant sense of insecurity. However, Upward Bound gave us the opportunity to overcome those obstacles by providing access to academic resources, recreational activities, and personal development at the perfect time in our growth. These opportunities prepared us for college and motivated us to graduate successfully.

In Upward Bound, I learned to accept my weaknesses and focus on my strengths and achievements, no matter how small they seemed. Perseverance became my preferred state of mind, as I understood that consistent effort is key to overcoming both individual and systemic barriers. Upward Bound taught me the importance of valuing every small step and helped me understand that difficulties, while unpleasant, allow us to develop resilience”.

SUCCESS STORIES

“In 2018, I was accepted into a doctoral program in social work. However, my fear of failure led to additional challenges, including having to retake my comprehensive statistics exams, which nearly cost me my place in the program. Nevertheless, my determination and perseverance were stronger than my fears. I passed my exams and focused on advancing my research project in Puerto Rico. My efforts were reflected in a total of eight awards and scholarships valued at \$15,000, which allowed me to carry out my dissertation in Puerto Rico. I also received a highly competitive national fellowship through the American Psychological Association valued at \$40,000. In three years and seven months, I completed my doctoral program, becoming the first and only student in the program to do so in that timeframe. I graduated after receiving several job offers and completing all my coursework and dissertation requirements.

In 2022, I moved to Boston to work at Massachusetts General Hospital, ranked #1 in the nation, and at Harvard University. Despite significant financial challenges, I completed a two-year fellowship in the Department of Medicine. In 2024, I applied for and received two grants from the National Institutes of Health, with one additional grant pending—together valued at more than \$300,000—to conduct research with Latino populations. My commitment and hard work were rewarded in August 2024 when I was promoted to Instructor in the Department of Psychiatry, becoming the first social worker at Harvard Medical School to hold this title. In this role, I continue to develop my research while ensuring that I hire and bring Latino and low-income students to work at this prestigious university. I am currently working on a \$1.5 million proposal to develop a mind-body program addressing chronic pain and early cognitive decline among older Latino adults.

Although many doors have opened for me, I recognize that changes in political agendas put my Latino-focused work at risk, and I find myself in a position where I must fight to continue this research. This challenge reaffirms for me the importance of education and securing funding to promote the well-being of socially and economically marginalized populations”.

SUCCESS STORIES

“In addition to my social work, I have been committed to research aimed at advancing racial equity in academic settings. In 2023, I conducted a comprehensive review of strategies that promote equity in academic spaces, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The study, which I published in collaboration with other scholars in JAMA Health Forum (a high-impact global journal), highlighted that programs like Upward Bound are crucial for improving educational equity, especially when implemented early in students’ academic trajectories. My research underscores the importance of continuing to support initiatives that promote diversity, inclusion, and equity in education, particularly at a time when such initiatives are under threat.

In summary, the impact of Upward Bound on my educational and professional goals has been profound and transformative. Thanks to this program, I have been able to overcome significant obstacles and build a successful career in the United States while remaining committed to my community. My story of personal perseverance is a testament to the transformative power of education and demonstrates the importance of support programs like Upward Bound that provide opportunities for students from vulnerable communities. Without the program’s early intervention, the path to success would have been far more difficult.

I would like to highlight and thank all the mentors who were part of my journey, especially teachers like Yiria, mentors like Alejandro, and program directors such as Alfredo and Luz Elena, whose dedication and example left a lasting mark on my academic and professional life”.

TRIO ALUMNI



CHRISTOPHER A. SAMBOLÍN
MC NAIR - UIPR SAN GERMÁN
PH.D. BIOTECHNOLOGY



ANGÉLICA TORO CORA
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PH.D. BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES - IMMUNOLOGY



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M.A. MUSICOLOGY



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SUMMARY OF THE HISTORY OF THE CARIBBEAN ASSOCIATION OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS

The first TRIO programs were approved under the U.S. Congress Educational Opportunities Law in 1964. Prior to that law, the Upward Bound program was already established in the United States and, when the law was enacted two additional programs were created under that legislation: Student Support Services and Talent Search.

In Puerto Rico, the first program started services at the Inter American University of Puerto Rico, in the Barranquitas and San Germán Campuses, in 1965. After that, several programs were developed in different institutions: Aspira of Puerto Rico Talent Search Program, Student Support Services at the University of Puerto Rico in Río Piedras, the Upward Bound Program at Sacred Heart University, and in 1973, the Aspira of P.R. Veterans Upward Bound. Later on, more programs were approved to provide services to Puerto Rican communities. Programs established belonged to Region II of the former Department of Health and Well-Being that included New York, New Jersey, U.S. Virgin Islands, Panamá, and Puerto Rico.

Region II authorized the selection of two representatives from Puerto Rico as a mechanism to facilitate the direct communication with the programs. The Association for Excellence and Equality in Education, known as AEEE, was established in the United States. It gathered TRIO professionals in New York and New Jersey. Due to the ties to the Puerto Rican community, some directors of TRIO programs in Puerto Rico became members of AEEE. Taking advantage of the AEEE, a proposal for creating an organization that dealt with the needs of the Caribbean area was presented in the directors' meeting of TRIO programs in Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands.

SUMMARY OF THE HISTORY OF THE CARIBBEAN ASSOCIATION OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS

The directors of TRIO programs in Puerto Rico met and voted in favor of its incorporation through an organization that would serve as a link to exchange impressions and ideas about the effective administration of TRIO Programs in Puerto Rico. To that effect, The Caribbean Association of TRIO Programs of Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands was incorporated through the Department of State of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico as the organization that groups the directors of TRIO programs in Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands; created in 1979.

The Caribbean Association of TRIO Programs began the process to join the National Council of Educational Opportunity Associations (NCEOA) of which it has been part ever since. The NCEOA changed its name to Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) to broaden the scope of its work.

In 2011, the Caribbean Association of TRIO Programs changed its name to Caribbean Association of Educational Opportunity Programs to include other Programs such as, Gear UP, and other state and institutional funded programs with similar educational objectives as the TRIO Programs.

Currently, CAEOP represents 36 TRIO Programs that serve 12,547 students, with a total funding of \$14,418,186.00. Our region continues working toward one shared purpose: to close the education gap, provide meaningful educational opportunities, and serve, motivate, and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds to become successful professionals in the future.



ASOCIACIÓN CARIBEÑA DE PROGRAMAS
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presidencia.acpoe@gmail.com
PO BOX 367379, SAN JUAN, PR 00936-7379