

Adapted from an article about Juan Robles from a 2004 PHRI newsletter

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When PHRI Research Associate Juan Robles arrived in the South Bronx from Honduras, at age of 13, he did not know how to write or speak a word in English. At home, his mother could not help him with his schoolwork because she never had a formal school education.

Juan's transition from rural Honduras to the South Bronx was difficult, not least because he lived among gangs and drug dealers. Juan's mother, a single mother of five, left their country for economical reasons. But, in the United States, her babysitter's salary could only pay for rent and food, and thus very little or none could be allocated for educational expenses, but despite the difficulties of learning a new language and the pressures of being poor, Juan excelled.

Juan was encouraged to pursue his goals, by his Science teacher Mr. Yaakov Saturen, who is also the Director of the PHRI Summer Student Program. With Mr. Saturen's guidance, Juan applied to the PHRI summer program and was a participant in 1996 and 1997.

Just recently, Juan obtained his undergraduate degree from Cornell University, a very important accomplishment for Juan and his family. College was even more socially and academically demanding to him than was high school in the South Bronx. Again, Juan was in an unfamiliar place, another culture shock both academically and socially.

As a physician, Juan would like to be a role model for many youth in his community who, like him, grew up socially and economically disadvantaged. Many young people in his community have the potential to pursue professional careers but are deterred from doing so because of the lack of motivation and guidance from satisfactory role models. Juan's unique life experiences, current circumstances, in addition to his personal characteristics make him a suitable individual to represent his community and to provide an inspiration for these young people.

Juan is currently a Research Associate for Dr. Perlin. His work at PHRI focuses in the study of the molecular basis for resistance for the newly approved antifungal agent Caspofungin in the treatment of systemic infections of *Candida albicans*. This involves the isolation of resistant mutants, profiling of clinical isolates by DNA sequencing, and evaluation of drug susceptibility by Minimum Inhibitory Concentration (MIC) assays. This analysis is greatly needed to understand the emergence of resistant strains.