

# A success story after the impact of hurricane María: University at Albany as a second home

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## Post María Experience

On September 20 of 2017, I was a senior undergraduate student at Universidad del Sagrado Corazón in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Living near the international airport Luis Muñóz Marín and working in a family-own business store in Old San Juan.

Hurricane María was my second natural disaster experience but the first one as a category 4. Consequently, power outage in the entire island was experienced and the future was uncertain. Living in Puerto Rico at that moment was like living in a desert, without communication and resources. Rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has been reported as 65.7% in Florida and 43.6% in Puerto Rico [1]. After two years, my island is still recovering.

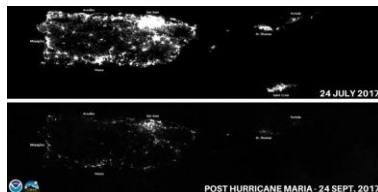


Figure 1: Puerto Rico before and after September 20, 2017 [2]



Figure 2: El Yunque National Forest after hurricane María [3]

## Challenges

Power outage, financial crisis, loss of communication and limited amount of food were experienced. Also, my education and future was in jeopardy. At that moment, I was supposed to take a standardize exam to apply for graduate school, but everything was postponed.

However, while I was trying to finish my last semester under tents, I was also trying to help my parents in the store in the few hours with daylight. It was a challenge task to accomplish due to the cancellation of various flight and cruises.

## Benefits

As a Puerto Rican student, I participated in a tuition relief program. Being part of this program was a huge help financially for my parents and I, but also encourage me to fulfill my dreams. Educationally and professionally, University at Albany gave me an opportunity to explore and continue to work toward my future and my desired career by being part of the Forensic Biology MS program.

## Suggestion

As an effort to rebuild Puerto Rico, I encourage students from different fields of the opportunities it has to offer.



Courtesy of El Nuevo Dia

## References

- [1] Scaramutti, C., Salas-Wright, C., Vos, S., & Schwartz, S. (2019). The Mental Health Impact of Hurricane Maria on Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico and Florida. *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness*, 13(1), 24-27. doi:10.1017/dmp.2018.151
- [2] See What Puerto Rico's Blackout Looks Like From Space. (2016). *TIME*. Retrieved from <https://time.com/4957119/puerto-rico-hurricane-maria-power-outage-photos/>
- [3] Hurricane Maria May Help Scientists Predict How Rainforests Respond to Climate Change | Climate Change Resource Center. (2019). Retrieved 13 October 2019, from <https://www.fs.usda.gov/ccrc/climate-projects/stories/hurricane-maria-may-help-scientists-predict-how-rainforests-respond>

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