



## RDPG Member Spotlight: Judith Rodriguez, PhD, RDN

Judith Rodriguez, PhD, RDN, is the Chairperson and Professor of the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics at the University of Florida in Jacksonville, FL. The department offers a Bachelor of Science (BS) in Nutrition, a combined Master of Science (MS)/Dietetic Internship, an online MS in Nutrition, an Individualized Supervised Practice Pathway, and a Doctorate in Clinical Nutrition. The Department is a designated Flagship and Community-based Transformational Learning Program. Dr. Rodriguez' responsibilities include administration, teaching, research and service. Some of you may recognize Dr. Rodriguez as a former president of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (2010-2011). Please read below to learn about her distinguished career.

### **Dr. Rodriguez, please tell us about your background. How did you get to where you are now?**

I received a BS in nutrition and dietetics and Master of Arts also in nutrition and dietetics or in another major from New York University, completed a dietetic internship at Beth Israel Hospital, and a PhD in cultural anthropology at Rutgers University. After defending my doctorate, I had a series of jobs: clinical dietitian, Cooperative Extension Agent for the Expanded Food, Nutrition and Education Program with emphasis on youth programming, and for the Women Infants and Children program (WIC). In addition I had numerous consulting jobs in the national Hispanic Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (HHANES), early child care, home health, and Job Corps Food Service training, industry, school "bridge programs", continuing education, and university adjunct teaching as well as college advising. All these jobs and experiences eventually led me to a position as full-time faculty.

### **Could you please summarize your current research for us?**

Currently, I am working with several faculty in the Department of Nutrition as well as in the university's College of Education and Human Services teaching mathematics and statistics to analyze food and nutrition intake data from the local middle and high school Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). In the past, my research has been mostly translational or applied, that is, the evaluation of community based programs related to nutrition education especially for at-risk or under-served populations.

### **How did you become involved/interested in your current line of research?**

What got me interested in my current research was that in my experience as Chairperson, I saw a need to unite both tenured and non-tenured faculty on a team project which would expand their networks of collaboration. It has been very rewarding to see us all come together on this work.

### **What advice would you give to a young researcher for developing a successful line of research?**

First, make sure the research you select is aligned with what you like to do; natural questions will "flow" from the work you are doing. Anytime you are working or reading professional literature and you ponder a research concept, get an, "I wonder if...(X) and (Y)..." you are opening the door for a research project. Second, find others who are interested in the same or similar things and establish collaborations or joint work teams. Last, create templates or "boiler plate" narratives for yourself that can help you with all the standard types of questions you are likely to encounter in research or

grant applications. This step will save you from re-inventing the wheel every time you need the information.

### **What are your career goals?**

My career goal at this stage is to be a research facilitator and mentor. I am "winding down" professionally, so to speak, hoping to retire in a couple of years. So I want to help junior faculty develop strong research agendas. Mentoring is very rewarding to perpetuate or extend your own work and watch it develop based on the interests and passions of others.

### **How has your affiliation with the Academy impacted your career progression?**

Affiliation with the Academy has been a major life changer. The lessons have been innumerable ranging from better understanding of the big picture of food and nutrition to the key role that research plays in both the science and profession; second, making numerous contacts and friends has broadened my knowledge of the range of practice areas, their contributions, needs, and the training needed to practice in alternative areas; and third, the opportunity to serve has been a key contributor to the development of my leadership, collaborative, and consensus-building skills. I use these every day in small or large ways.

### **If someone were to ask you to explain why research is important to the field of dietetics, what would you say?**

Eating is something we all do every day, multiple times a day, and it is the first and most important line of defense for health promotion. Thus, it is imperative we conduct both basic nutrition and applied or translational research so we can effectively apply evidence for maximal use of dietetic and nutrition interventions and practice.