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Beth Potier
UNH Media Relations

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UNH News Release: UNH Graduate Student Receives Ford Foundation Dissertation Fellowship

May 22, 2013
UNH Graduate Student Receives Ford Foundation Dissertation Fellowship

DURHAM, N.H. – University of New Hampshire doctoral candidate Sylvia Rodriguez-Abudo has been selected as an awardee in the Ford Foundation Fellowship 2013 dissertation competition. The fellowship provides a one-year stipend of $21,000 and pays Rodriguez-Abudo’s expenses to attend the annual Conference of Ford Fellows.

The UNH ocean engineering student was one of 35 awardees out of 640 applicants. “Your selection for this prestigious award reflects our review panelists’ judgment of your scholarly competence as well as the promise that you show for future achievement as a scholar, researcher, and teacher in an institution of higher education,” her award letter said.

“I’m happy, honored, and very proud,” Rodriguez-Abudo says. “This will allow me to concentrate 24 hours a day on my dissertation.”

That dissertation, called “Seabed Roughness in the Coastal Ocean,” aims to better inform forecasting models of beach erosion in response to forces such as hurricanes, tsunamis or sea level rise through detailed measurements of the physics of the seabed. “I basically study the very small scale of what’s happening on the bottom of the beach – what the sand is doing,” says Rodriguez-Abudo, noting that coastal events like Hurricane Sandy bring increasing relevance to her work.

Rodriguez-Abudo studies with Diane Foster, associate professor of mechanical engineering, with whom she did her master’s degree. “She always encourages us to apply for fellowships,” she says. This is Rodriguez-Abudo’s second such success; she also received a three-year fellowship from the Department of Defense.

“This award is another example of the recognition Sylvia has received for her ability to couple high level fluid dynamics analysis with complex ocean data sets to provide insight on the relative contributions from currents, waves, turbulence, sediment, and seafloor morphology,” Foster says.

A native of Arecibo, Puerto Rico, Rodriguez-Abudo received her bachelor’s degree from the University of Puerto Rico. She studied with Foster at Ohio State University and has been at UNH since 2008; she anticipates completing her dissertation by 2014.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.