**Puerto Rico: Embracing Community and Sharing Passion**

Victoria Flores Parra

Animal Sciences, Oregon State University

---

**Introduction**

On the Island of Enchantment, where the coquis’ songs fill the air and the sun glints on sandy beaches, I had the opportunity to immerse myself in a week-long journey alongside peers, faculty, and community volunteers. Together, we embarked on various projects aimed at enhancing our environment and community. Activities included creating a medicinal garden, exploring coral reef health through snorkeling at La Parguera Reef, planting trees and plaiants, participating in trash clean-up efforts at Bosque Toro Negro and Cabo Rojo, hydroponics research projects, and I also had the chance to tour Dr. Alok Arun’s plant biotechnology lab and the university’s interactive science museum. One of the most favorite moments was engaging in educational initiatives. I had the privilege of mentoring high school students as they designed and pitched their ice-cream.

---

**Lesson Plan**

**Title:** Puerto Rican Horses: A Comprehensive Exploration of Their Island Legacy

**Lesson time:** 50-90 minutes

**Learning objective:**
- Discover the horse industry in Puerto Rico
- Identify ways horses are integral to Puerto Rican culture
- Demonstrate proficiency of research through a poster presentation

**Lesson Overview:** This lesson will provide students with an in-depth understanding of the role of horses in Puerto Rican culture and industry. Students will engage in group research activities to explore various aspects of Puerto Rican horses, leading up to a poster presentation to showcase their findings.

**Background:** The Paso Fino horse breed is deeply rooted in Puerto Rican history, known for its smooth gait and elegant presence. Horses have played a significant role in Puerto Rican culture, from agricultural work to recreational activities and traditional celebrations. As the island's landscape and lifestyle evolved, so did the role of horses, shaping the unique equestrian heritage of Puerto Rico.

**Procedure:**
1. Provide background information to students on the Paso Fino breed and the historical significance of horses in Puerto Rico.
2. Introduce topics related to Puerto Rican horses, such as diet, maintenance, exercise/sport, sustainability, and quality of life.
3. Divide students into small groups (4-5 students per group) based on class size.
4. Assign each group a specific topic related to Puerto Rican horses.
5. Give students time to research their assigned topic and create a research poster.
6. After the allotted time, set up the posters next to each other in a gallery walk format.
7. Allow students to walk around and read each poster, taking notes on what they find interesting or informative.
8. Allocate time for students to reflect on their observations and fill out sticky notes with their thoughts.
9. Have volunteers from each group read out three sticky notes to the classroom, sharing key insights from their research.

**Topics & Guiding Questions:**

- **Diet:**
  - What do Puerto Rican horses typically eat, and how does their diet contribute to their overall health and performance?
  - Where do Puerto Rican horse owners source the feed and grain for their animals, and is it primarily locally grown or imported from external sources?

- **Maintenance:**
  - How do environmental factors unique to Puerto Rico, such as climate and terrain, influence the maintenance needs of horses on the island?
  - What preventative healthcare measures are implemented to safeguard the health and longevity of Puerto Rican horses, including vaccination, deworming, and dental care?

- **Exercise/Sport:**
  - What are the prominent equestrian sports in Puerto Rico, and how do horses participate in competitive events?
  - What considerations are taken into account when designing exercise programs for different types of horses, such as working horses versus competition horses?

- **Sustainability:**
  - How does the horse industry in Puerto Rico address environmental concerns and promote sustainable practices?
  - How do local residents perceive and interact with horses compared to tourists visiting Puerto Rico?

- **Quality of Life:**
  - What measures are taken to ensure the welfare and quality of life of Puerto Rican horses, both domestically and in working environments?
  - Is there ongoing contention or debate surrounding the presence of freely roaming horses in Puerto Rico, and if so, what are the key arguments on both sides?

**Reflection:**

Reflecting on my experiences in Puerto Rico, from my first visit in 2022 for the SACNAS NDSTEM Conference to my more recent immersion in the community of Barranquitas in 2024, I encountered two profoundly different yet equally valuable experiences. Puerto Rico has left an impression on me, characterized by a sense of community, passion, and resilience among its people. One can’t help but admire their deep appreciation for their island and its inhabitants, as well as their unwavering drive to progress forward. The innovative spirit and commitment to sustainability I witnessed are truly inspiring. Puerto Rico's enchantment touches everyone who visits, and I am enthusiastic about sharing my passion for horses through my lesson plan to contribute to the education of the community.

**Acknowledgements**

- Oregon State University Faculty Leaders
- Staff and students at Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico - Recinto de Barranquitas

---

**Figure 1. Puerto Rico school bus**

**Figure 2. Looking to help students during ice cream activity**