URISA Dr. Marilyn O’Hara Ruiz Young Professional Scholarship

This scholarship fund was established in 2018 and honors Dr. Marilyn Ruiz* who passed away unexpectedly. During Dr. Ruiz's career at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, she provided her undergraduate, graduate and post-doctoral students with excellent research experiences in her laboratory which helped them to have successful careers in academia, government and industry. Marilyn was passionate about her role as a mentor of graduate education. The scholarship fully supports young professional participation in the conference, fostering their professional connections and educational development.

- 2023 Scholarship Winners: Jordan Landrum and Christina Sabochick
- 2022 Scholarship Winners: Adailin Lebron Bengochea and Sydney Fuhrig
- 2021 Scholarship Winners: Samantha Strang and Josiah Burkett
- 2019 Scholarship Winners: Rachel Layko and Shenyue Jia
- 2018 Scholarship Winners: Fikriyah Winata and Bryan Ferri

A core strategic goal for URISA is to support GIS professionals at all stages of their careers. URISA has established a number of programs to support young professionals and has active participation through programs such as GISCorps with abundant, diverse and rewarding volunteer opportunities, the URISA GIS Leadership Academy, and the Vanguard Cabinet which collaborates with URISA leaders and committees to create programs and opportunities geared toward other young professionals.

URISA established the Dr. Marilyn O'Hara Ruiz Young Professional Scholarship program which selects up to two young professionals (35 years old or younger) to attend GIS-Pro in-person each year. The participants in this program have the opportunity to attend a one-of-a-kind geospatial super-event and experience cross-discipline sessions covering the most up to date and emerging GIS technologies, processes and applications, strengthen professional connections through networking with key URISA and industry leaders, and connect with and get involved in local, national and international initiatives and activities, all while obtaining valuable professional/continuing education credits.

- Deadline to Apply: June 1

Eligibility and Attendance Requirements

Applicants must:

- Be a URISA member in good standing
- Be a first-time attendee at GIS-Pro
- Work directly in GIS or working with GIS in a closely related geospatial field (surveying, planning, engineering, etc.)
- Be available to assist in the Vanguard Cabinet booth during the Exhibit Hall Social
- Have confirmed ability to secure travel to/from the conference (costs will be reimbursed up to $500)
- Summarize your conference experience and incorporate how you will incorporate this experience and knowledge into your own career path and professional development by November 1 to be included in a URISA newsletter. The summary must be received prior to expense reimbursement.

Selection Criteria

1. Demonstrated work and/or research within the GIS (or related) industry
2. Quality of responses to essay questions
3. Impact of work, contributions to the GIS field
4. Letter of recommendation
Selected Scholarship winners receive ($1850 Value + professional growth and networking experience!)

- Free registration to attend GIS-Pro
- 5-night hotel single/double room accommodations at the conference hotel
- $500 expense reimbursement towards meals and travel
- Obtain professional continuing education credits for GISP, AICP and others
- Opportunities to meet and network with other young professionals, Vanguard Cabinet, URISA leaders, and key national and international industry leaders

*Marilyn Sue O’Hara, also known as Marilyn Ruiz, died September 30, 2018, following a collision between her car and a semi-truck at an intersection near her home in Urbana-Champaign, Illinois. She was 58 years old. She is survived by her parents, four children, and six siblings.

Marilyn received her Ph.D. in Geography at University of Florida in 1995. Her dissertation was titled “A Model of Error Propagation from Digital Elevation Models To Viewsheds.” Her dissertation advisor was Grant Ian Thrall. Her bachelor’s and master’s degrees were from University of Illinois. Her selection of UF for her doctorate degree came about because of communications with Grant about Spatial Diffusion. Grant, at the time, was resident scholar at the Homer Hoyt Institute, doing research on spatial diffusion of urban development, and he had recently co-authored a monograph titled Spatial Diffusion. She then applied for the graduate program at UF and received an offer of a UF Presidential Scholarship awarded to the University’s top entering graduate students. Marilyn never drew funds from that award because her graduate program at UF was generously and fully funded by contract grants on DEM from the US Military. Her advancements on the topic of DEM were expedient; but her passion was Epidemiology, Spatial Diffusion of Disease.

After receiving her Ph.D., she was offered several academic appointments and accepted a position as Assistant Professor at Florida State University. After completion of her third year at FSU, she was offered positions at University of Illinois where she advanced to Clinical Professor of Pathobiology. A selected list of her publications at [https://experts.illinois.edu/en/persons/marilyn-ohara-ruiz/publications/](https://experts.illinois.edu/en/persons/marilyn-ohara-ruiz/publications/)

She was involved in URISA's GIS in Public Health Conference since its inception, serving as Chair at least two times.

At the University of Illinois, she became a cherished teacher, advisor, and mentor.