In recognition of her commitment to transportation research and her academic accomplishments, the University of Rhode Island Transportation Center (URITC) selected Gema Viñuales as its 2012 Outstanding Student of the Year.

Viñuales has collaborated on several transportation research studies and is currently working on a study titled, “The Economic and Social Role of Bike Paths in Rhode Island.” This research will serve as a baseline for using the bike path infrastructure in Rhode Island and will identify the economic and social benefits bike paths bring to local communities.

For the past five years, Viñuales has served as the URITC’s research manager, collecting research reports from professors and posting the reports on the URITC’s website.

“Gema has been a real utility player for the URITC,” said URITC Executive Director Dr. Deborah Rosen. “She manages our research program, making sure that we satisfy all our research funding requirements. Along the way she has gotten involved in several of our research projects when an extra educated hand was needed. She also took charge of recruiting students to our Garrett Morgan Exchange program with the University of Puerto-Mayagüez. She is someone we all have learned to count on when an extra effort is needed.”

Rosen added, “It was extremely gratifying, therefore, that Gema was nominated for the Student of the Year award by a member our research community.”

Viñuales will be presented with the Outstanding Student of the Year award at the Transportation Research Board’s (TRB) Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. in January.

“It was truly an honor to be selected as the Transportation Center’s Outstanding Student of the Year at URI,” said Viñuales. “I’ve attended TRB before, so I know how special the award ceremony is, with so many highly-regarded transportation professionals from private and public institutions in attendance. The award serves as a great motivation to keep contributing to the transportation field through service and scholarship.”

As the research manager for the URITC, Viñuales has played a vital role in all aspects of the research process.

“I’ve worked as a liaison between principle investigators (PIs) and state and federal funding sources,” said Viñuales. “I’ve maintained the Center’s research database and the submissions of research projects to federal databases. I’ve also participated in proposals, papers reviews and the project reporting processes.”

Viñuales’ relationship with the URITC began in 2008 when she was awarded a Dwight D. Eisenhower Transportation Fellowship. Her research project was to conduct a case study on the regional and global economic impact of the Port of Mayagüez, Puerto Rico.

In 2011, Viñuales was instrumental in developing a Rhode Island Transportation Fact Book, which highlighted the status of the state’s transportation infrastructure and financial constraints. She has presented scholarly research at the U.S. National Decision Sciences Institute, at the International Conference of the International Association of Intercultural Communication Studies in Mexico and at the Discovery@URI Bid Ideas Take Shape Conference.

Originally from Huesca, Spain, Viñuales is pursuing a PhD in marketing and supply chain management at URI. She holds a master’s of business administration from URI and bachelor’s and master’s degrees in electrical engineering from the University of Zaragoza (Spain).

“My experience at the URTC has been professionally and personally invaluable,” stated Viñuales. “It has been a pleasure to join the dedicated URITC team and getting to share with them personal and professional accomplishments over the last five years.”