

Latinxs and Hispanics in Mathematical Sciences



Roberto Soto

Roberto Soto was born in Los Angeles, CA, to two undocumented immigrants from Guatemala, Carlos and Maricruz. Roberto's parents worked in the textile industry in downtown L.A. and stressed the importance of education to their five children. Roberto learned his work ethic from his parents and applied it to his studies in the Baldwin Park Unified School District, allowing him to attend UCLA after graduating from Sierra Vista High School (1993).

While at UCLA, Roberto discovered that he enjoyed mathematics but was unsure of what career he could pursue that would allow him to continue doing math and at the same time help his family and community. Thus, after graduating summa cum laude from UCLA with a B.S. in General Mathematics (1997), he obtained an emergency credential and taught in LAUSD while pursuing a Master's in Education at UCLA (1999). Afterwards, he returned to Baldwin Park to help his parents support his four younger siblings and to give back to his community by teaching at his alma mater for six years.

While at SVHS, Roberto was inspired by his students to return to school and earn his Ph.D. In 2005, he enrolled at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) to pursue a master's and in 2008 Roberto earned a M.A. in Mathematics at CSUSB. After a two-year stint as a math content specialist for San Bernardino City Unified School District, Roberto finally started work towards earning a Ph.D. at the University of Iowa in 2010. Roberto graduated from the University of Iowa in 2015 and has been an Assistant Professor of Mathematics at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) ever since. He owes his success to the support of his wife and of all of his mentors, including his parents.

Roberto's passion to help his community has also been at the center of his work in providing early research experiences and mentoring for students from underrepresented backgrounds each of the last four summers. His students have conducted research on topics ranging from using differential equations to model the spread of diseases to analyzing single player games such as peg solitaire. In the four years that he has been a faculty member at CSUF, Roberto has mentored 13 Latinx students through these summer research experiences. Of these, 11 have presented their findings at local, regional, and national conferences. All of them are on track to graduate from CSUF and a majority is considering graduate studies in the mathematical sciences. This group of students also gave rise to the newest club in the math department, the PRIME (Pursuing Research in Mathematical Endeavors) Club. Roberto serves as advisor to the PRIME Club, a club whose mission is to support students from historically underrepresented backgrounds in mathematics persist and succeed in STEM careers by introducing them to many research opportunities.

"Hispanic Heritage Month serves as a moment to pause and reflect on all of the contributions that we have made to this country. It's important to highlight these contributions, preferably year-round, as they serve to motivate and inspire the next generation of Latinx leaders."

Lathisms was founded in 2016 in order to showcase the contributions of Latinx and Hispanic mathematicians during Hispanic Heritage Month, which is celebrated in the United States from September 15 and October 15 every year. During this time, we feature/reveal a prominent Latinx/Hispanic mathematician daily. See all the featured mathematical scientists at LATHISMS.ORG.

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