

Latinxs and Hispanics in Mathematical Sciences



"I love my culture and heritage, but where I grew up I didn't quite fit in because not many people were like me. It was not until I went to my first Hispanic math conference where I was able to meet and connect with others who had similar experiences to mine. After listening to others' math journey stories, I felt at home and understood. Hispanic Heritage Month is a time to get to know others where we share something in common. It is a way to get back to your roots and be proud of where you came from, and it is a time to celebrate our differences and explore new connections."

Darleen S. Perez-Lavin

Research Associate, Naval Information Warfare Center

Dr. Darleen S. Perez-Lavin received her bachelor's degree in Engineering Management from Purdue University. She worked in construction management for just under 5 years before going back to graduate school. The original goal was to get a master's in applied mathematics as a gateway to a Ph.D. in engineering. During her Applied Mathematics master's degree at Florida Gulf Coast University, she fell in love with the difficulty and complexity of pure mathematics. So, she continued her math journey at the University of Kentucky where she finished her Ph.D. in number theory. During her years at the University of Kentucky, she was awarded the SMART Fellowship, funded by the Department of Defense. This fellowship is tied with years of service where she took the position as a research associate at a National naval lab.

In her current position, understanding a wide variety of mathematics comes in handy. She has worked in areas that range from topological data analysis and integer programming to understanding how to apply current graph theory methods to the scope of the problem. So, having a good foundation in algebra and analysis is beneficial. Mathematics teaches you how to think outside of the box. In this position, Dr. Perez-Lavin comes to the table with the understanding that the goal is to use her current math foundation and apply it in a way that those from other disciplines might not be aware are possible.

Every year she selects an under-represented organization and volunteers her time. In the past, she has volunteered for organizations such as The Association for Women in Mathematics (AWM) and is currently volunteering for the Black graduate professional student association. Outside of academics, she volunteers her time as a math tutor and also as a soccer coach. After settling in her new position, she is looking forward to finding a new community to volunteer for.

Dr. Perez-Lavin's advice to students is: "study what you love but try and venture out past your comfort zone. The more you learn how to handle working in an area with which you are unfamiliar, the easier it becomes." For example, Dr. Perez-Lavin studied number theory but took classes in numerical analysis and biostatistics. While she is not an expert in bio stats or numerical analysis when she sees a paper or someone presenting in this area, she has a sense of keywords and knows where to start asking questions. She is not intimidated by not knowing the area because she has practiced working outside of her comfort zone. This practice has given her the confidence and courage that she will be able to contribute once she starts diving in.

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](https://lathisms.org).

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