

Latinxs and Hispanics in Mathematical Sciences



"A time to celebrate my heritage. I love attending events and bringing my son so he can learn about his heritage. I also learn in the events I attend. We have such a rich history that I think I will keep learning about our heritage for the rest of my life."

Imelda Flores Vazquez

Sr. Economist, Econometrica Inc.

Dr. Flores Vazquez grew up poor in a small Mexican town. She was fortunate enough to find the best math teacher in high school. With her teacher's support, she won a bronze medal at the Mexican Mathematics Olympiad. That led her to a full scholarship at the University of Guanajuato in Mexico to get her BA in mathematics. At the University of Guanajuato, she met more professors that encouraged and supported her and she ended up doing a Ph.D. in economics at New York University (a top 10 department for economics in the U.S.). After that, she was an assistant professor at the Rochester Institute of Technology, but she was interested in doing research for policy decisions, so she got a job in the Texas government. Later, she was in the hospital industry for a few years, and now she is back doing research that impacts policy decisions. Her current job with a federal government contracting company allows her to work on research projects that are used by many federal and state government agencies for policy decisions.

Dr. Flores thinks her biggest accomplishment is coming this far having grown up in a small town in the middle of nowhere in Mexico. It is an accomplishment that makes her proud and sad. It makes her sad because she saw many equally or more talented girls and women who grew up with her back home who were unlucky and did not have the opportunities she had. Her second biggest accomplishment was the paper she published in The New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM), "Effect of Removal of Planned Parenthood from the Texas Women's Health Program." It is her most read paper by far (142K page views and counting) because it was about an issue that matters to many people including millions of women who did not read it but felt the effects of the policies studied in the article.

Some advice Dr. Flores gives for students: "you have to get comfortable with answering ambiguous questions. It is okay to acknowledge that you don't even know where to start when you are given an ambiguous question; don't panic. Get as much practice as you can during your studies trying to solve open-ended applied questions. At most jobs in industry and government, they don't expect a perfect answer; they just want something useful. It is okay to acknowledge that your answer is imperfect and it doesn't account for everything or that you can only answer the question partially."

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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