Latinxs and Hispanics in the Mathematical Sciences

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Dr. Fernández earned a dual high school diploma and AAS in Industrial Electronic Engineering Technology from the Industrial Polytechnic Institute of Santiago, and an AS in Pure Math from Bronx Community College (BCC). He enrolled in Stony Brook University’s dual BS/MAT program with the intention to become a high school Mathematics teacher. While at Stony Brook, having benefited from an S-STEM-NSF scholarship, and having taught Calculus for Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program students, Dr. Fernández realized that something about Black and Latino students born and raised in the United States was fundamentally different. They seemed to lack the mathematical and engineering aptitude and strengths him and his immigrant African and Latino classmates at BCC possessed. Dr. Fernández did not complete the MAT, choosing instead to complete all the Mathematics Masters courses, while parallely completing a second BA in Hispanic languages and literature. He studied social formations at the graduate level, earning an MA with a research thesis on Dominican Cultural Identity. These experiences culminated in the completion of a PhD in Engineering Education, Management, and Policy with doctoral thesis in Mathematics Education.

Dr. Fernández is a multi-disciplinary researcher anchored in mathematics and engineering in the search of solutions to problems that arise from, or have solutions in, social interaction and policymaking. He is also deeply committed to building community, particularly grounded on mentoring Black, Indigenous, People of Color students and faculty. At Pace University, he co-founded People of Color Collective, is founding adviser to the Dominican, and Christian, Student Organizations, and co-founder of the Anti-Racism-Education Core-Curricula. Dr. Fernández has had over six dozen mentees, most of whom are Black, Latinx, and female, have successful careers in a variety of STEM fields.

Dr. Fernández tells students he wishes he had the opportunity to be a full-time student only. “If you must work, of course do it. But if you can afford to just study for four years, especially living on campus outside your comfort zone, which includes your safe space, please do it.” Dr. Fernández also offers the advice, “Learn to not say yes, without saying no. Seize every opportunity.”

“En la unidad está la fuerza’, ‘you may find strength in unity’. To me, Hispanic heritage month is bitter-sweet. In academia, where I mostly celebrated it, most Hispanic students I met came from wealthy Latin-American families and we did not have much in common. As a general practice, the fact that we still have to celebrate means we have much more work ahead of us. I know we will get to the place where we no longer need to celebrate but be part of the larger space. I look forward to building a strong community with social and cultural capital for my herman@s latin@s.”