Latinxs and Hispanics in the Mathematical Sciences

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Dr. Oliver was born and raised in Venezuela. Although he had a positive upbringing, it came crashing down when his father died of a heart attack; in search of better opportunities his family moved to Mexico. But, with his mother’s monthly income of $300, they struggled. What came after was straight out of a telenovela: Dr. Oliver’s mother fell in love with an American. With another family move, Dr. Oliver dared to dream of school again. However, being a high school dropout, learning a new language, and still with very little income, he had few options. Riverside Community College accepted and supported him where he was at, and Dr. Oliver was able to continue his dream of getting a degree. By the time Dr. Oliver was applying to universities, he and his family were sharing a room at his neighbor’s house. Although acceptance letters rolled in, there was no feasible way to pay. Thankfully, the University of California, Los Angeles offered a full ride scholarship and Dr. Oliver was able to graduate with highest honors. From there he became a Math doctoral student at the University of California, San Diego. Being only one of two Latino students, he was acutely aware of how different he was. But, feeling the support from his family, friends and the Latinx community, he excelled yet again and earned his Doctorate of Mathematics. He went from GED to Ph.D. He finally realized his dream.

Dr. Oliver’s current research focuses on wave equations arising in general relativity and math education investigating opportunity gaps for Black, Indigenous, People of Color students in STEM. His active projects in both of these areas involve students directly. His approach to student research mentorship aims to increase student access to cutting-edge mathematical knowledge in his areas of expertise. Dr. Oliver’s mentorship style is holistic and seeks to leverage identity and cultural background as core assets.

Dr. Oliver reminds students, “Find your support system.” He tells them, “If you talked to me when I was a freshman, you wouldn’t see a young man in the trajectory of a math Ph.D. and a future academic position. Instead, you would see a shy, quiet kid, willing to work very hard, yet desperately in need of guidance and support. I stand here today in front of you because I had the unconditional support of my family, mentors, and the Latinx community at large.”

“[Hispanic Heritage Month] means a chance to be inspired by the achievements of the Hispanic community. It’s also an opportunity to participate in the rich cultural traditions of our community.”