HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH AT PHYSICAL SCIENCES

Whether Earth-bound or star-bound, our Hispanic and Latinx scientists and staff make our School hum.

Wednesday, October 07, 2020

UCI Physical Sciences Communications



It’s Hispanic Heritage Month, which means from now until October 15th, we’ll be shining lights on the Hispanic and Latinx members of the School of Physical Sciences community, who themselves cast new light onto the many-varied fields they study. They’re casting light on the Amazon rainforest, where they’re trying to characterize the different types of wildfire that spread through the rainforest, and where they’re trying to understand how, if enough trees die in the rainforest due to climate change-driven droughts, the rainforest’s ecosystems will collapse. And beyond this planet, they’re studying why some galaxies stop creating new stars, and they’re working to measure the distribution of metals in those

galaxies. Whether Earth-bound or star-bound, or whether they work behind the scenes making sure the rest of the Physical Sciences community hears their stories, our Hispanic and Latinx scientists and staff make our School hum.

George Vazquez, UCI Alumnus, Department of Mathematics

PS: Tell us about yourself and your research.

GV: My name is George Vazquez, and I'm an alumnus of the UCI Math Department. I graduated in 2014 with a degree in Applied and Computational Mathematics. I'm a first-generation Chicano graduate who was raised in low-income communities, so I never imagined my life would end up the way it has. As an undergrad, I was fortunate to have Dr. Alessandra Pantano as a mentor and conducted research with her for two summers. Now, I'm a program specialist with the California Alliance for Minority Participation (CAMP) program at UCI, which provides students from underrepresented populations in STEM with resources, information, and opportunities that help them to thrive in their degree programs. In addition, I volunteer with Math CEO on their community relations team.

PS: What advice do you have for Hispanic students who are considering a career in STEM?

GV: It's crucial that they find a support system as early as possible. Hispanic students, and other students of color, are underrepresented in STEM; therefore, this can lead some to feel like imposters. Having a support system can help alleviate the effects of the imposter syndrome so that they can achieve their goal of graduating with their math degree. I'd also highly recommend they think about the benefits of going to graduate school. There are programs on campus such as CAMP and SSI that can help students prepare for the GRE exam, but many of these resources are not available to students once they graduate. Earning a graduate degree can also provide Hispanic students with a wider range of career options, the credentials to move up the "corporate ladder," and the opportunity to become leaders in whatever field they choose. I'm just now applying to Ph.D. programs, but it's definitely something I wish I would have thought about earlier.

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