#IamPhysSci - Emi Cervantes, B.S., Mathematics

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Emi Cervantes made the most of her time at UCI by participating in multiple fellowship programs where she expanded her knowledge of data science research and educational psychology.

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Lucas Joel

When she was in fifth grade, Emi Cervantes embarked on a life-changing journey with her family when they moved from Japan to the United States. She not only had to adjust to a new culture and education system, but she had to do it all while teaching herself how to read and write English.

That same drive and determination define her academic career. Cervantes has an impressive list of advanced placement classes, prestigious fellowships and now, the beginning of doctoral studies in statistics under her belt.

It was in high school that Cervantes discovered her passion for data science. An AP computer science course in her junior year sparked an interest in the intersections of mathematics and coding — a theme that continues to motivate her.

Cervantes comes from a long line of healthcare professionals – but, wanting to pave her own path in life, she decided to major in math at UC Irvine.

Among her proudest accomplishments at UCI, Cervantes cherishes the vibrant network of friends and colleagues she cultivated, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenge of forming connections in the face of online learning propelled her to engage more actively with the campus community upon their return to in-person activities.

Through her involvement in clubs like the Undergraduate Mathematics Committee (formerly known as Faces in Mathematics) and Data @ UCI, she embraced leadership roles and fostered a sense of belonging and collaboration among her peers.

Cervantes even started to host spike ball socials for math undergraduate students in Aldrich Park – something that attracted all types of personalities – even the shyest among them.



A group of math students gather in Aldrich Park to socialize and get to know one another.

She made the most of her time at UCI by participating in multiple fellowship programs where she expanded her knowledge of data science research and educational psychology. Under the guidance of Dr. Angela Fleischmann in the SoCal Data Science Fellowship, Cervantes bonded with students across campus who shared her interest in data science.

As a Career Pathways for Research in Learning and Education, Analytics and Data Science (CP-LEADS) fellow under Dr. Lindsey Richland, Cervantes explored the use of statistical models in predicting math anxiety in students and learning achievements.

“Both of my fellowships gave me important research experience and made me interested in pursuing graduate school,” Cervantes said.

Cervantes has been profoundly impacted by faculty at UCI, including Professors Anna Ma and Alessandra Pantano. As her research advisor, Professor Ma provided Cervantes with both inspiration and mentorship, embodying the important role of a female leader in the field of mathematics.

The mentorship Cervantes received from Ma and Pantano boosted her confidence and played a pivotal role in her decision to apply to graduate school.

In the fall, Cervantes will begin a Ph.D. in Statistics at Penn State University, where she'll aim to delve deeper into the collaborative and applied facets of statistical research. This next chapter in her journey reflects her enduring passion for mathematics and her commitment to contributing meaningful research to the field.

Looking back on her time at UCI, Cervantes expresses immense pride in the community she helped build in the Department of Mathematics — a community that will continue to feel the impact of her efforts long after her graduation. Her story is a testament to the importance of nurturing connections and to the endless possibilities that arise from pursuing interests with an open and curious mind.

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