

Latinxs and Hispanics in Mathematical Sciences



Photo courtesy of Amira Maxwell for SLMath

Jillian Cervantes

Graduate Student

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Born in Redlands, California, Jillian Cervantes moved to Appleton, Wisconsin with her family when she was six. Her paternal grandparents were second generation Mexican immigrants; the family came to California in the midst of the Mexican Revolution.

Jillian enrolled at Milwaukee Area Technical College, intending to transfer to UW-Milwaukee. A required calculus course led Jillian to discover a deep love and curiosity for mathematics. She declared a computer science major and began a software development internship. Though on paper this was an ideal position, Jillian felt that she couldn't bring her entire identity to this workplace as a queer Latina. Jillian had no awareness of any other Latinx mathematicians until she met her mentor, Dr. Pamela E. Harris. Having a role model convinced Jillian that she had a future in math research. A pivotal experience was attending the Field of Dreams conference, where she met a community of accomplished Latinx mathematicians who took deep pride in their heritage. Their example showed Jillian that she could be a serious mathematician without having to assimilate. In 2024, Jillian earned her BS in mathematics and began graduate studies at UW-Milwaukee.

"Hispanic Heritage Month reminds me that my achievements are built on the accomplishments and sacrifices of my ancestors. I am deeply grateful for the privilege of pursuing a career I love, and I know that maintaining a strong Latinx community within this field is essential to my success. My journey is one that highlights the importance of representation, and I hope to serve as a role model for the Hispanic and Latinx mathematicians who follow."

Jillian's research with Dr. Pamela E. Harris in graph theory dominating sets has spanned her undergraduate and graduate career. Jillian and Dr. Harris have published two expository articles on domination theory in Girls' Angle bulletin, a magazine which provides accessible articles to introduce research topics to girls in middle and high school. Their research manuscript on domination numbers and densities of the truncated square tiling graph has been submitted for publication. Jillian's graduate work has been supported by a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, an Advanced Opportunity Program Fellowship, and a Graduate Fellowship for STEM Diversity. She has delivered twenty talks and presentations throughout the country on her research and experiences as a Latina mathematician.

As an undergraduate, Jillian served as UW-Milwaukee Math Club president, writing the club's first grant to secure funding to host diverse speakers, giving students the opportunity to hear from mathematicians who look like them and share their experiences. She created a Math Club Discord server, growing the community to over 50 active members. Her efforts earned her a nomination for student organization leader of the year. Jillian also served as undergraduate research ambassador through the UW-Milwaukee Senior Excellence in Research Award. She worked as a peer calculus tutor for three semesters, earning an Outstanding Tutor award for her dedication to her students.

Jillian has advocated for inclusivity in math by sharing her passion for mathematics with audiences including undergraduates, high school students, math teachers, and non-mathematicians. One of her proudest moments was being invited to serve as a recurring speaker at a Latinx majority high school on her experiences as a woman in STEM.

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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