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Jose Hernandez, The Latino Astronaut visits LMU

During his senior in high school, Jose Hernandez discovered that Franklin Chang-Diaz, his inspiration, had been selected for the Astronaut Corps. In that moment, Hernandez realized that he wanted to "fly in space." Born into a migrant farming family of four children, Hernandez spent much of his youth traveling between Mexico and Southern California to ensure the livelihood his family. Hernandez never veered from hard work, as traveling so frequently often took a toll on him. Despite spending three months at a time in Mexico, Hernandez's parents valued education. Having the education equivalent to a third grader, Hernandez's parents placed an emphasis on their children's studies whether they were acquiring that education in the classroom or on the road.



"My parents always motivated and set the expectation that school was not an option, but a requirement." Hernandez did not master the English language until he was twelve years old, but the language barrier did not deter him from his studies. He commented that the inconsistent lifestyle affected his studies, until he was in the second grade. His teacher Ms. Young made it a point to not only provide Hernandez with the schoolwork he would miss, but also came to his home to ensure both she and his parents sought his best interests both inside and outside of the classroom.



Hernandez defied all obstacles in his way, when he received a B.S. in electrical engineering from the University of Pacific in Stockton, CA. Following, he was awarded a full scholarship to U.C. Santa Barbara, where he further pursued his engineering studies. In 1987, Hernandez aided in the creation of the first full-field digital mammography imaging system which spotted breast cancer in its earliest stage. In 2001, he became a materials research engineer for NASA, followed by a stint as the Material and Processes Branch chief in 2002. By 2009, Hernandez journeyed to space on the STS-128 to assist NASA with robotic operations.