AWM Honors Maria Helena Noronha with Humphreys Award for Mentoring

The Association for Women in Mathematics is pleased to announce that the 2022 M. Gweneth Humphreys Award will be presented to **Maria Helena Noronha**, Professor Emerita of Mathematics at California State University Northridge, in recognition of her outstanding mentoring of undergraduate women in mathematics, and her creation of programs and pathways for those under-represented in mathematics to excel and thrive in the profession.

Noronha has had a lasting influence on the individual careers of countless women in mathematics. Her nomination letter notes that out of 78 women contacted who had been mentored by Noronha, close to a half have obtained a master's or doctoral degree in a mathematics-related field. All were undergraduates at community colleges or four-year Hispanic-serving colleges when they first met Noronha.

Citation

Over an almost thirty-year career at California State University Northridge (CSUN), a primarily undergraduate Hispanic-serving public institution, Noronha has set up structures that foster access to, and success in, the mathematics profession at all stages of the academic pipeline. These initiatives include CSUN's "Preparing Undergraduates through Mentoring for PhDs" (PUMP), which prepares under-represented minority students to enter doctoral programs in mathematics, and which has now expanded throughout the Cal State network; "Research Experiences in Community Colleges" (RE-C^2), providing mathematics research opportunities to community college students and faculty; and "Fellows Engaged in Research in Mathematics to Assist Teachers" (FERMAT), supporting master's students in mathematics to serve as resources for K-12 teachers.

The selection committee received numerous letters in support of Noronha's nomination – one of them itself jointly written by a dozen former mentees! -- from former students and senior and junior colleagues. The picture of Noronha that emerges from these letters is of an educator of prodigious energy, incisiveness, empathy, and belief in her students. Noronha believes that all her students -- be they working full time, the first in their families to attend college, dealing with child care concerns, or beset with health challenges – are capable and deserving of the same standards of excellence as those with more privilege. She encouraged her mentees to engage in high-level research, arranged for international collaborations, and insisted that they have high expectations of themselves and of their own possibilities. In the words of a former student: "She strongly believes you can achieve something even when you can't imagine it possible, and she helps you to understand how to make it happen."

Describing her impact as a role model, one former mentee wrote: "Helena was a woman I looked up to. She was a Latina who took pride and ownership of her mathematics abilities." For her capacity to inspire and set the ground for generations of women to take pride in their mathematics and ownership of their abilities, AWM is pleased to honor Maria Helena Noronha.

Response from Noronha
I am deeply honored to receive the 2022 Humphreys Award from the AWM. I am extremely grateful to my former student and now my colleague and friend Cynthia Flores, who nominated me, to those colleagues and students who wrote in support of my nomination, and to the selection committee. I feel fortunate for having worked with wonderful faculty members of the CSU and UC campuses and nearby community colleges that helped me to implement and make my projects successful. I want to share with all of them this recognition.

I grew up and obtained my degree in Brazil, where the Latinx students are not minorities. I was able to attend excellent schools, a fact that taught me that with appropriate training, academic attention and encouragement, under-represented students in mathematical sciences can excel in their careers. I am glad that my students in the U.S. proved me to be right and, among them, several outstanding women of color. I dedicate this award to all of them and to my late mother, who was my role model as a woman and my inspiration.

This award is named for M. Gweneth Humphreys (1911–2006). Professor Humphreys earned her master's degree from Smith College and her PhD at age 23 from the University of Chicago in 1935. She taught mathematics to women for her entire career, at Mount St. Scholastica College, Sophie Newcomb College, and finally for over thirty years at Randolph-Macon Woman's College. This award, funded by contributions from her former students and colleagues at Randolph-Macon Woman's College, recognizes her commitment to and her profound influence on undergraduate students of mathematics. The 2022 award was recommended by a select committee of Bozenna Pasik-Duncan (Chair), Rehana Patel, and Shelby Wilson. It will be presented at the Joint Mathematics Meetings in Seattle, January 5 - 8, 2022.