

Accepted at Brown University: Paraded at RUM master's graduation and wedding on the same weekend ^[1]

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In a world where numbers and equations are usually seen as cold and abstract, in math they found so much more. Mónica Colón Vargas and Geraldo Enrique Soto Rosa, who in the same exciting weekend, graduated with a 4.00 grade point average from the Department of Mathematical Sciences of the University of Mayagüez Campus (RUM) and joined their lives in marriage. In addition, they were admitted to pursue doctoral studies at Brown University, a prestigious Ivy League university.

Although both are Mocanos (denonym for residents of the municipality of Moca), it was in the classrooms of the University of Mayagüez where their paths crossed, while they were pursuing their high school degree in the aforementioned Department. Since then, specifically since 2017, their relationship has been a constant source of mutual support and motivation.

"It's a very big accomplishment. We since undergraduates have been and studying together. He would help me in some classes and I, in others. We were going to go straight for the doctorate when we graduated from undergrad, but we decided to pursue a master's degree to see what area we wanted to focus on. That was the best decision because COVID-19 came along and starting a PhD online must be very difficult. Finishing the master's degree now has been very enriching and favorable for both of us in an academic and professional sense. Now we are getting married and entering the doctorate!" said Monica, who graduated from the Statistics Program, in the master's program of Mathematical Sciences.

"I am very happy to be able to share with her all these achievements together from bachelor's degree, to our internships, and the trips we were able to go on when we attended conferences abroad. Also in the master's program, we were together in almost all the classes, not in all of them, but in the most difficult ones. She went to do her major, which was Statistics, but we were always together supporting each other in the classes and looking for ways to participate in the activities of the Department. Everyone already knew us," said Geraldo, who graduated from the Pure Mathematics Program of the aforementioned Master's program.

He added that for him it represents a very significant step, since he is the pioneer in his community in obtaining a university education.

"It represents a very important achievement because I come from a family in which I am practically the first one to continue my studies beyond the fourth year. I was the first to obtain a bachelor's degree and to have a degree beyond that, such as a master's degree," he said.

The professionals began their academic journey at RUM in 2015, when, without knowing each other, they started their first year of the bachelor's degree in Mathematics. Later, in 2020, already in a dating relationship, they concluded that goal, both with high honors.

Their first choice for a Ph.D. was Brown University. However, recognizing that because it is an Ivy League, it is difficult to be admitted (despite the excellent GPA), they decided to apply to about twenty other universities.

"We applied to 27 colleges thinking, 'Wherever we get accepted that's where we're going,' but Brown was our inspiration and a dream. The truth is, we thought we weren't going to get in. As it turned out, Brown was the first college to admit both of us together. You can imagine the joy we felt when we heard the news: first Geraldo and then me, two days later. We cried with joy," said Monica.

"I didn't believe it, I really didn't believe it. It was always a goal we saw far away. I told her that we should be positive, that we should try and that the worst thing that could happen to us was to be told no. We were not afraid, we gathered all the information, we applied and we were surprised that out of all the universities, it was the first one that responded to us", said Gerardo, who added that they were admitted to 15 other institutions.

He will do his doctorate in Applied Mathematics and she will do her doctorate in Biostatistics. Both share the desire to become professors and transmit their knowledge to future generations, after they had the opportunity to be instructors at RUM and teach basic mathematics courses.

"We agreed to offer the Pre-Calculus I and 2 courses, and I also taught Calculus 1 and 2, and Monica, the Statistics course. We really loved the experience and had good feedback from our students as we were focused on reaching them," added Geraldo.

According to them, their success is attributed, in part, to the solid education they received at the Mayagüez Campus. From their high school experience, both recognize the value of their training in the field of mathematics.

"Since undergraduation I can say that I am "sangre verde" (RUM's oficial color is green, therefore students proudly say they have green blood) to the end of the world. I am delighted, I love and adore RUM and I never regret studying at this Campus. I had the opportunity to participate in internships, research and publications. Geraldo did too, for both of us it was the same thing. The education we recieved as undergrad students opened for us the knowledge of so many doors and possibilities in the field of mathematics. There were so many options that we didn't know what to do and that's why we decided to do a master's degree. I liked Statistics more and Geraldo stayed in Pure Mathematics, but even so, during the master's degree he realized that he was interested in Applied Mathematics and that is why he decided to do a doctorate in that field. I have always been interested in Biology and Statistics and I was able to carry out many studies, projects and research in Biology, applying Statistics. That is why I decided to do my doctorate in Biostatistics," he explained.

"I think it was the basis of everything, really, because when I started studying Mathematics I didn't know its scope. I went in because I was just good at it, I liked it and I wanted to teach at some point. After taking all the courses and seeing the program, I had a broader idea," added Gerardo.

The newlyweds got married on Saturday, June 10 in Moca. Although they lived 10 minutes away from each other, their first encounter was at the University, as they had graduated from different schools.

"Geraldo met me while we were taking Economics class, but I don't remember much about him on that occasion. When we started talking was in the Fundamentals of Mathematics course, MATE

3020. That was in 2016 and that's where we met. We were friends, nothing on my part, nor did I see him as anything else, but he tells me he was trying to get my attention. Then, in 2017 Hurricane Maria hit and he came to my house to bring me gallons of water. That's how, little by little, we got to know each other. It was the hurricane that brought us together," Monica recounted.

"I always texted her, we talked, but everything stayed there. One day after the hurricane, since our houses were not so far apart, I went to his house and we talked for a long time. I had a contact for getting water faster, more accessible, and I began to bring him the bottles, until they began to realize that: 'this boy was coming here a lot'. Then I gave her a kiss on the forehead and that's when she realized," recalled Geraldo.

On July 25, they will travel to Rhode Island, where the University, founded in 1764 and the seventh oldest in the United States, is located.

"Now there are many things going on: graduations, starting a doctorate, marriage, travel, moving, everything at the same time is very difficult, but exciting at the same time," concluded Geraldo.

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