

## Deborah and Franklin Tepper Haimo Award

### Pamela Harris

*Williams College*

Dr. Pamela Harris is the definition of a well-rounded and astonishingly successful mathematics educator. Her teaching has been widely recognized as extraordinarily successful by many different organizations. She describes her professional goals as “[seeking] to teach and mentor in a way that instills mathematical confidence in all students and creates learning communities that develop a culture of continuous improvement and collective responsibility.” To achieve this in her classroom, Pamela uses small group discussions, peer presentations of problems, collaborative problem solving, research projects, metacognitive reflections and other evidence-based practices shown to develop confident and lifelong learners of mathematics.

Pamela constantly involves students in her own research, co-authoring the majority of her over 100 publications with undergraduates. While doing research with students, Pamela always takes the time and makes the effort to get to know students as whole human beings. She regularly engages with them outside formal academic settings. She mentors for academic success while ensuring that students have all they need to flourish completely.

Beyond her institution, Pamela’s contributions in teaching and mentoring on behalf of undergraduate and graduate students and to educate mathematics educators are astonishing. Through her efforts working with and building teams of collaborators she is responsible for the vision, creation, and direction of a wide variety of programs. Examples include Math SWAGGER (Summer Workshop for Achieving Greater Graduate Educational Readiness), a series of 15 virtual meetings for graduate students from underrepresented populations designed to build community and a tiered mentoring network, and AIM UP, a 4-week virtual REU-like experience; serving multiple times as the research director for the acclaimed MSRI-UP; and working as the Chief Editor of the AMS Mentoring Network Blog. Pamela is a co-founder and now president of Lathisms, a nonprofit corporation with an online platform highlighting contributions of Hispanic/Latinx mathematicians. Pamela has also served as a co-organizer of the Latinx Mathematicians Network. Through these and other efforts, Pamela builds community and provides role models to the next, more diverse generation of mathematical scientists. Her efforts have been supported by multiple MAA Tensor-SUMMA grants and National Science Foundation grants, demonstrating the value the mathematics community places on her work.

Pamela works closely with the Center for Minorities in Mathematical Sciences to disrupt the perception of who can do mathematics successfully by providing context, resources, and programming for people of color pursuing degrees or careers in mathematics. Under this umbrella, she and Dr. Aris Winger host “Mathematically Uncensored,” a bi-weekly podcast to discuss issues of equity within the mathematics community. Pamela and Aris also co-authored the books *Asked and Answered: Dialogues on Advocating for Students of Color in Mathematics*, *Practices and Policies: Advocating for Students of Color in Mathematics*, and *Read and Rectify: Advocacy Stories from Students of Color in Mathematics*.

A brief quote from a colleague: “I cannot stress how much her leadership makes a difference in the work we do at every level. I have been a longtime MAA member and have been attending NES sectional meetings since 2000. I know that Dr. Harris embodies what MAA strives for in its leaders. In fact, I believe she can expand the definition of an MAA leader.”

### Response

I am filled with a deep sense of humility in receiving this MAA honor. My life as an educator is rooted in the love I have for people, especially those who, like me, have been marginalized and historically excluded

from higher education. Luckily, I found my people: a community of individuals who care first and foremost about people; who are committed to making the math community more inclusive and equitable; and who are courageous in the fight against systemic oppression and white supremacy. Their work inspires me and keeps me going even when things may feel hopeless—this award is a tribute to them. I would like to thank all of the young people who I have worked with because they have been my greatest teachers. Often, unbeknownst to them, they have been the glue holding my professional career together. Their joy, drive, and mathematical curiosity have kept me engaged and helped me grow and develop. I also extend a heartfelt thanks to my many colleagues who have believed in me throughout my career. In particular, I thank Carrie Diaz-Eaton, Stephan Garcia, Alicia Prieto Langarica, Chad Topaz, and the Northeastern MAA Section for nominating me for this award. This recognition is just a shimmer of the brightness that your friendship and mentoring have provided me. I would also like to acknowledge my family for their unending support and their love, which I carry with me everywhere I go. Even after 20+ years together, Jamual you are still my rock and my foundation. Every day is a good day when I know I have you to come home to. Akira, your fire, your voice, and your fight allow me to reimagine a better world, one in which our humanity unites us. You are the best thing I have ever done. I love you! Lastly, I want to remark that a fight remains in our community. Some will tell us that what is important is mathematics and its rigor. They argue that activities to address racism are a distraction and that those with talent rise to the “top” always dismissing ways in which privilege and power structures have kept others out of the academy because of their gender and/or skin color. Remember that neutrality makes us complicit in a system of oppression. Now is the time to join to fight against these damaging sentiments. We have much work to do and we can do it together!

### **Biographical Sketch**

Pamela E. Harris was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco Mexico and at age 12 immigrated to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Being an undocumented immigrant she began her postsecondary school at Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC), earning two associate degrees. Developing a strong math background at MATC and with an immigration status change, she transferred to Marquette University and completed a BS in mathematics. After learning that a graduate school education in math could come with a monthly stipend along with free tuition, she readily signed up to begin a graduate program at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee, where she completed a master of science and doctorate in mathematics. Her desire to become a better educator led her to a postdoctoral position at the United States Military Academy at West Point. There, she trained soldiers for the US Army and focused on active learning and student centered teaching. After her postdoc, she joined the faculty at Williams College, where she serves as associate professor in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics and faculty fellow of the Davis Center and the Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.