

New student organization aims to support Latinas, underrepresented groups in geoscience

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Tulane GeoLatinas is an undergraduate student organization that supports Latinas and other underrepresented groups by offering scholarships, research and travel grants, internships, networking opportunities, and mentorships. Members of GeoLatinas pictured left to right: Maricel Beltrán Burgos, president, Lizmar Rodriguez-Lugo, treasurer, Betina Brockamp, vice president, and Nicole Gasparini, PhD, co-founder and Tulane associate professor. (Photo by Sally Asher)

The geosciences field in the U.S. is historically dominated by white men, but in recent years, there have been significant gains in terms of gender balance. For example, the National Science Foundation's 2018 survey reported a 55.8% increase in women earning geoscience doctorate degrees since 2009. Likewise, a 2019 report from the American Geosciences Institute showed an increase in women's participation in geoscience occupations from 22.5% in 2005 to 33.1% in 2018. However, despite these strides, racial disparities continue to persist. The same 2018 survey from the National Science Foundation revealed that white women received significantly more doctorate degrees than women of color.

In 2018, three Latinas connected on Twitter to address this disparity in their community. These women were Clara Rodriguez, PhD, an exploration geoscientist at Schlumberger; Rocio Caballero-Gill, PhD, a Brown University research assistant; and Adriana Crisostomo-Figueroa, a PhD student at the University of Leeds. Together, they developed GeoLatinas, an organization that would support and empower Latinas to pursue geoscience careers by providing resources, job opportunities, community and more. Their organization quickly garnered online support from other Latinas and allies.

Today, GeoLatinas has more than 100 active members in 18 countries and three local teams throughout the Americas. One of those teams is located at Tulane University.

Tulane GeoLatinas was founded in 2019 by Rodriguez and [Nicole Gasparini](#), PhD, a geomorphologist and associate professor in the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences at the Tulane School of Science and Engineering. As an undergraduate student organization, it supports Latinas and other underrepresented groups by providing information on scholarships, research and travel grants, and internships, as well as offering networking opportunities and mentorships. It also provides a safe space for Latina students to relax and connect with other Latinas. For Lizmar Rodriguez-Lugo, the Tulane GeoLatinas treasurer, this sense of community is what makes the organization special.

"The impact of GeoLatinas — it's not only an organization. It's the support we show to each other," said Rodriguez-Lugo. "When I see purple now, I think about GeoLatinas. That color means something to me now. It means support. Power."

In addition to serving the Tulane community, the organization also participates in community outreach. In September 2019, GeoLatinas members hosted a geology table with the New Orleans Geological Society at the Louisiana Girl Scouts science fair. Likewise, Tulane GeoLatinas frequently volunteers with [Boys at Tulane in STEM \(BATS\)](#) and [Girls in STEM at Tulane \(GiST\)](#), two programs that provide fifth through seventh grade students with the opportunity to meet and work with professionals in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

Maricel Beltrán-Burgos, Tulane GeoLatinas president, stresses the importance of this volunteer work.

"For me, I think it was great to not only have girls but also boys," said Beltrán-Burgos. "Seeing women giving these lectures and talks — that's another way of learning that we can all be in the same environment, no matter where we come from or if we are women or men."

In the future, Tulane GeoLatinas plans to have more activities and community outreach, including bringing in more seminar speakers, providing more professional and personal development opportunities for members, establishing weekly GeoLatina meetings, and fundraising for Puerto Rico to help those affected by the recent earthquakes.

To learn more about Tulane GeoLatinas, [click here](#).