

ELLEN OCHOA: THE FIRST HISPANIC WOMAN IN SPACE

We asked her your questions... She answered.



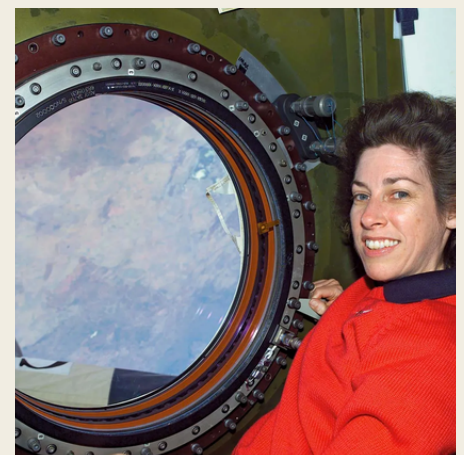
Exploring the Final Frontier

How did you know /when did you decide to become an astronaut?

“The catalysts were the first flight of the shuttle in 1981 and Sally Ride’s flight in 1983. Sally’s class was the first to include women and astronauts of color so that was a huge deal — it simply wasn’t possible to be an astronaut before that. She was also a physics major like me and had gone to Stanford, which is where I was in the middle of getting my Ph.D. when she flew. The shuttle was designed to allow many kinds of scientific research and technology demonstrations, and since I was on a path to be a research engineer, that really attracted me. So I sent in my application to NASA when I got my Ph.D., and got selected 5 years later.”

How do you know if being an astronaut is right for you?

“Well, I didn’t know very much about the job when I initially sent it my application, but a couple of years later I got to go to Johnson Space Center to interview. During the interview week, I had a chance to talk with a few of the current astronauts to find out more about what the day-to-day job was like. I also realized I didn’t have any operational experience, so I got a pilot’s license. All of that helped me believe that I would love the astronaut job, which I did!”



How would one necessarily get into the field of space architecture and help astronauts and humans have better living capabilities and conditions for the future in space?

“There are some universities that have specialties in Space architecture — I’m most familiar with the one at University of Houston. You can also search online for quite a bit of information about space architecture.”

What was your favorite thing about going to space?



“It’s too hard to pick just one thing, but overall I loved being part of a team that was working to accomplish a challenging, meaningful goal to bring benefits to people on Earth. Of course, the amazing experiences of living/working in microgravity and seeing the Earth from space are hard to beat!”