



Ferdinand Rodriguez

July 8, 1928 – September 6, 2023

Ferdinand Rodriguez, a professor emeritus who spent four decades teaching chemical engineering at Cornell, passed away on September 6, 2023, at the age of 95.

Rodriguez studied chemical engineering at Case Institute of Technology, receiving a B.S. in 1950 and an M.S. in 1954 while working as a research engineer and director of product development for Ferro Chemical in Bedford, Ohio. He served two years in the U.S. Army Chemical Corps after being drafted, and later entered graduate school at Cornell in 1956. He accepted a faculty position in 1958 at what was then the School of Chemical Engineering at Cornell, where he became the first faculty member of Hispanic origin within the school.

For 41 years, Rodriguez taught polymers and other chemical engineering courses, and became known for his lecture demonstrations that incorporated toys such as poppit beads and the Vac-U-Form. He was a recipient of the Cornell Society of Engineers Excellence in Teaching Award, the Dean's Excellence in Teaching Award and the Hispanic Engineer National Achievement Education-Research Award. He was a faculty adviser to the Cornell student chapter of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers for more than 15 years.

Rodriguez was also an outstanding researcher, publishing on the synthesis, properties and applications of polymers. He was the author of more than 120 technical publications and his textbook, "Principles of Polymer Systems," is in its sixth edition. His work was especially notable for the connections of polymeric applications to the semiconductor industry.

Rodriguez was a fellow of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers and a member of the American Chemical Society, the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers and the Society of Plastics Engineers.

Rodriguez retired from Cornell in 1999 and returned to Cleveland, Ohio, where he was born.

Each year, Cornell's Smith School of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering honors Rodriguez's legacy by bestowing the F. Rodriguez Outstanding Student Award in Polymers and Electronic Materials to an undergraduate or master's level student.

Outside of academia, Rodriguez was a published gospel song writer and led the Trinity Lutheran Church choir for several decades. He also sung with a local opera company and played saxophone and clarinet with the Ithaca Summer Concert Band.

Ferdinand was preceded in death by his wife, Ethel, and four siblings. He is survived by his daughters Holly and Lida, five grandchildren and five great grandchildren.

Written by Susan Daniel, Mike Duncan, and Syl Kacapyr