

Dr. Ellen Ochoa

International Communities

“Well, certainly as we're building the international space station, it very much has a global perspective. Our main partner is Russia, and we work extensively with the Russian space agency and all their contractors. But we have many other partners, too--the European space agency, [for example]. There [are] a number of countries that support that. The Japanese space agency is providing major laboratory modules. The Canadian space agency is providing the robot arm. Then we have a number of other countries [that] are providing, perhaps, smaller pieces of equipment or experiments that will fly on the international space station. So, it very much has moved from a U.S. space program--which is really what it was when I started here--into an international effort.”

Mentorship

“I think probably, overall, my mother had the biggest impression on us. Of course, she was there throughout my life. She was very interested in education and not just because she thought [or] felt that would get us a good career. She was just a person who was very interested in learning. She finds learning about new subjects very interesting, and, I think, you know, [that] sort of passed . . . on to all of us. So, certainly that was very important in all the years that we were growing up . . . As I've gone through school . . . obviously . . . [people] helped me out--my advisors at Stanford [who] helped me develop my research skills and get me on a path for a good career, and the supervisors that I've had in my jobs [who] helped provide new opportunities along the way. I mean, all those people made a difference in my life.”

Women's Suffrage

“I was on a Presidential commission a few years ago on the celebration of women in American history, and so we [the members] had lots of opportunity to learn about many of the women that have sort of gotten us to where we are today . . . I went up on a space flight about a year after that, and I had the opportunity to take a banner into space with me that was carried by women in the National Women's Party as they were trying to get women the right to vote in the early part of the 20th century.

So, I really felt the connection between all the women . . . It took seventy-five years from the first sort of women's suffrage meeting back in 1850 until 1920--it was actually [from] the 1840's til 1920-- . . . for women to earn the right to vote, and, clearly, getting that right to vote and getting a voice in the political process, I mean, is directly related to all the changes that took place in our government in terms of encouraging and requiring that people hire women. And, obviously, that eventually led to NASA selecting women astronauts for the first time in 1978, and eventually to my selection.

So, I know without all those women that fought for seventy-five years to get us involved in the political process and start changing some of the laws of the country . . . I never would have gotten the chance to have been selected by NASA to have gone into

space. So, it was real important for me to take that banner into space . . . We got a picture. We had three women on my crew, on this crew of seven. So, we took a picture of us with the banner in the middle of the international space station.”