



# STEM Professor Profile



## Professor Angel Pilar

*Math Professor*

### Advice for Students:

- Attend the Academic Excellence Workshops to improve your calculus skills in a collaborative environment and to make friends with other students
- Know that everyone has gaps in their understanding, and that this is not a reflection of your math ability



Every Friday morning after Professor Angel Pilar's class, dozens of students file inside for another two hours of learning. The sessions, dubbed Academic Excellence Workshops, offer calculus review with an emphasis on collaborative learning.

"Students get an opportunity to practice, to deepen their understanding of the material," Pilar said. "But the intention is not just to practice, but to also to build friendships with people from other calculus classes."

During the workshops, students divide into pairs, tackling calculus problems on whiteboards. The workshops also feature in-depth discussion sessions, where students can get individualized help. In a survey, 95% of attendees said the workshops were "very helpful."

Pilar hopes his students can build confidence in their math skills, and enjoy the process. "Whenever I teach, I tell my students, it doesn't feel like work because I'm having so much fun," he said.

Pilar immigrated from Mexico when he was just 10 years old. For years, he struggled to learn English, but math seemed to transcend language. He studied applied math at UC Berkeley as a first-generation college student. Later, he attended San Francisco State University to pursue a master's degree. Working as a graduate student instructor, he fell in love with teaching. "I think the medium where I knew how to communicate was through math," Pilar said.

Pilar describes his teaching style as patient and empathetic. He encourages stu-

dents to be vulnerable and willing to make mistakes, and within the first week of classes, he learns all of his students' names.

*"Everyone has gaps, including myself. It does not say anything about whether or not you are good at math."*

As a first-generation college student and a Mexican immigrant, his journey mirrors that of many of his students. "This is a great opportunity to give back to my community," Pilar said. "It makes me feel a sense of fulfillment, of joy."

Each semester, the first two workshops are algebra

review, so that participants understand fundamentals before moving onto calculus. He hires passionate student tutors to recruit new participants and help lead group work. The workshops are structured with students' varying levels of math experience in mind.

"Everyone has gaps, including myself," Pilar said. "It doesn't say anything about whether or not you are good at math. It just means that you didn't have the resources in your school to tackle those gaps."

Many of the participants of the workshops go on to create their own study groups. Students can attend as many or as few of the sessions they like, but almost all see results. "You can improve your calculus skills in an open, collaborative learning environment," Pilar said.