



Dr. Frank Talamantes – Endocrinologist

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I was born in Los Angeles, California and raised in El Paso, Texas. I have three sisters, all younger. In El Paso, many of the professionals were Hispanic, including a previous mayor. El Paso is a very "Latino" city. I grew up believing that I could enter any profession I desired.

In my family, it was essential and traditional that you attend Catholic schools for your entire education, including college. One very positive thing about Catholic schools is that they do not discriminate against anyone for reasons of race, color, or gender. The emphasis is on discipline and religion. In my elementary and high school, science was not emphasized due to a lack of science-based courses. I had no one in my immediate family to provide me with the guidance and direction as to what to do with my future, so I wasted valuable time during high school and first years or so of college.

I went through high school heavily involved in playing sports. Unfortunately, I was never enrolled in high school courses that prepared me for college. I believed that I would play football in college. Because I went to a Catholic high school, Cathedral High, I was inclined to apply to five or six Catholic colleges. I accepted an offer and attended the University of St. Thomas in Houston (www.stthom.edu), Texas. I had no idea of what I wanted to do in college but I had a strong urging from my parents to be a dentist due to the high salary they made. Fortunately, while in college I started doing some research at the Texas Medical Center (www.tmc.edu) and this experience influenced me to develop an interest in science.

Many of the biology professors at the University of St. Thomas were full-time faculty at the Texas Medical Center, and very well established in their disciplines. One such professor was Dr. Henry Browning, Chair of the Department of Anatomy at the University of Texas Medical Branch (www.utmb.edu). His expertise and research was in endocrinology. He made a major impact on my life and the lives of many other students by introducing us to the field of endocrinology and by allowing us to do research in his lab. Endocrinology is the study of the endocrine system which is a system consisting of glands, hormones and target organs. The endocrine system is one of the two major physiological controlling systems in the body. To explain it another way, hormones are chemical mediators which regulate a variety of bodily functions including growth, development, reproduction, and metabolism. One should visit the library to find pictures and simple definitions of the endocrine system.

One of the difficulties many of you could encounter in pursuing higher education is that you may not be able to study and/or work near your parents, which we all want to do. You may have to teach or do research at an institute that is far from your parents' home. It seems that the more education you obtain the less likely you are to live near your parents. However, you do learn how to work and live a distance away from "home." Scientific research can be very lonely and you work on your own much of the time. Academics is hard work but since we Chicano(a)s are used to working very hard in general, the work encountered in academics is a "piece of cake." If you chose to become a scientist, your family may never understand what you do. My parents always believed that success was being a doctor or a dentist. My grandmother called me a "mouse doctor" because she knew that mice were part of my work. When I became a professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz (www.ucsc.edu), my main focus was on teaching and doing research that was biomedically relevant. I worked very hard for many years, often putting in sixteen hour days. Now that I have been a professor for some twenty-plus years, I have been thinking that trying to do administration might be interesting and fun.

The culture you grew up in is probably very different from the academic culture. For example, in our culture you are raised to not question authority. You are also taught that blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. Unfortunately, this does not apply to academics. Looking back at my life, my Chicano culture and/or background has taught me the importance of hard work and to work well with others. Throughout early life you will learn many skills that will be important later, although you may not know it at the time. The social skills we are taught in our culture have really helped in my profession as an academic. I was taught the value of hard work at a young age, which has paid off for me. Overall, my life as a professor and scientist has been very exciting and rewarding.