

Feniosky Peña: New Dean of Tec's School of Engineering



Feniosky Peña Mora, a civil engineer who has taught at various universities for over 30 years, including **MIT**, has been appointed Dean of [Tec de Monterrey's School of Engineering and Sciences \(EIC\)](#).

Feniosky's track record includes leading the reconstruction of **Times Square** and the Queens Police Academy **in New York**; spearheading construction of the urban train in **Puerto Rico**, as well as museums, bridges, and many other constructions around the world.

He is also the author and co-author of over **230 academic publications** and holds **7 patents**. In 2023, he was awarded the **American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) [President's Medal](#)**, along with **Joe Biden**, President of the United States.

Since he began his tenure as dean on July 1, **Feniosky has visited 12 campuses to understand the Tec's essence** and develop projects that **embody its values**.

*"I'm in the process of understanding the Tec's culture, of appreciating its history and achievements. The conversations I've had have highlighted values that I also prioritize, such as **research, innovation, internationalization, entrepreneurship, and human flourishing.**"*



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Feniosky's style at the Tec

In an interview with [CONECTA](#), **Feniosky** points out that his main goal at the present time is to learn.

"The best way to learn is to teach. It's a way to gain deeper knowledge, because you make sure that someone else understands what you understand."

This is something he wants to continue to apply at the Tec's School of Engineering and Sciences to help **communicate his values**.

*"I've always tried to make sure that my projects contain values that we want to represent as a society, such as **sustainability, equity, resilience, and healthy living**."*

"I want to work together to define the future we want to achieve."

Notable achievements in his career

The President's Medal is one of the highest awards bestowed by ASCE and recognizes the **accomplishments and contributions of eminent engineers** to the profession, society, or the public.

ASCE was founded in 1852 and currently represents more than **150,000 civil engineers** in **177 countries**. It's the world's largest civil engineering publisher, and an authoritative source for drafting public plans and regulations.

Feniosky will receive the medal along with the President of the United States at the Society's annual convention in **October 2023**.

The Dean of the EIC has spearheaded major constructions, such as the [Salt Shed, 1/2/5 Garage](#) in New York, which hosted **Fashion Week** in 2016.

What's more, his research topics are focused on **information technology for the collaborative design of large-scale civil engineering** systems.

According to Feniosky, his hallmark is **the embodiment of values**, and making people feel that the space or project is made for them.

*"Sometimes we look at infrastructure and buildings as the function they provide, but I see them as **embodying our values**.*

"(I want) people to feel like it was made for them, to connect with people, to celebrate our history, and at the same time, to introduce us to the future."



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His curiosity opened the door to academia

Feniosky **was born and raised in the Dominican Republic**. He recalls that, ever since he was a child, he was very curious and liked to know how things worked.

At age 7, **he built his first bridge** using wooden popsicle sticks. The construction connected his toy gas station to his sister's Barbie house.

"I was restless, and unlike other kids my age, my mom didn't have to battle for me to study."

That curiosity led him to study **civil engineering** at the [Pedro Henríquez Ureña National University \(UNPHU\)](#) in Santo Domingo, in the Dominican Republic.

During his academic career, he was an assistant professor at the Pedro Henríquez Ureña National University; professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology ([MIT](#)); the University of Illinois; and Dean at [Columbia University](#), in New York City.



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The challenge of developing critical thinking

When Feniosky was 21 years old, he emigrated to the United States to live with his mother, who had lived there since he was 10 years old. One of his **first challenges was learning English**.

He recalls that his goal was to **master the language in 9 months**. His day would begin at 6 in the morning and end at 11 at night. He had several language classes, including joining a **choir to improve his pronunciation**.

On weekends, he would prepare to apply to a graduate degree at MIT.

"It was a very difficult time because I had to pass several language exams in time. If not, I couldn't apply to the university and I had just enough time."

He successfully mastered the language and **won a fellowship as a research assistant at MIT**, but that was when the real challenge began.

“The best way to learn is to teach. It’s a way to gain deeper knowledge, because you make sure that someone else understands what you understand.”

He recalls **suffering from anxiety** during the first semester of his master’s degree.

“I would call my mom every night to save dinner for me, because I used to always think I’d be kicked out the next day.”

Feniosky was **excellent at applying formulas**, which had enabled him to stand out in his country, but **that wasn’t enough** for the professor he was assisting with research.

*“When I presented him with a project that worked, he would ask me: ‘Why does it work?’ And that question was terrifying, (since) **I didn’t think critically**. I didn’t question the formula.”*

So, he began studying differently: it wasn’t just important to make a project work, but also **to know why it worked and how he had formulated it**.

Over time, **he changed his way of thinking, even about such mundane matters** as ordering a ham and cheese sandwich.

Laughing, he explains that if he asked for such a sandwich in his country, they would give it to him and that would be that, but in the United States, they would ask him everything: what bread he would like, what cheese he would like, what ham he would like, or if he’d like tomato or butter.

“Now I go to a restaurant and change almost all the chef’s prepared condiments. I transformed from a person who didn’t question anything to one who questions everything.”

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