

Dr. Ellen Ochoa

Astronaut, Role Model, and Visionary

Dr. Ellen Ochoa, a veteran astronaut, is the current director of the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. Ochoa is JSC's first Hispanic director, and its second female director. Ochoa, originally from Los Angeles, Calif., became the first Hispanic woman to go to space when she served on a nine-day mission aboard the space shuttle Discovery in 1993.

She has flown in space four times, logging nearly 1,000 hours in orbit. Prior to her astronaut career, she was a research engineer and inventor, with three patents for optical systems. Ochoa earned a bachelor's degree in physics from San Diego State University and a master's degree and doctorate in electrical engineering from Stanford University.

As a doctoral student at Stanford, and later as a researcher at Sandia National Laboratories and NASA Ames Research Center in California, Ochoa investigated optical systems for performing information processing. She is a co-inventor on three patents for an optical inspection system, an optical object recognition method, and a method for noise removal in images.

Ochoa has been recognized with NASA's Distinguished Service Medal, Outstanding Leadership Medal, and four Space Flight Medals. She also is a recipient of numerous awards, including the Harvard Foundation Science Award, Women in Aerospace Outstanding Achievement Award, The Hispanic Engineer Albert Baez Award for Outstanding Technical Contribution to Humanity, and the Hispanic Heritage Leadership Award.

Ochoa serves on the board of Service Corporation International, is an ex-officio board member of the Houston Technology Center and the Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership, and is Director Emerita of the Manned Space Flight Education Foundation, Inc. which operates Space Center Houston. She is also Chair of the Nomination Evaluation Committee for the National Medal of Technology and Innovation.