

# Xochilth Saldana

*IDEA Center's Spotlight on Engineering  
Overnight Program Participants*

## Quick Facts

Grade: Senior

Major: Mechanical Engineering

Outside interests: Film, Painting, Outreach,  
Horseback Riding



## Questions about your experiences:

**What made you want to participate in the overnight program? How did your experiences during this program influence you?**

I am originally from Northern California so I really wanted to get a feel for the community at UCSD before deciding to move so far from home. Attending the Engineering Overnight Program (EOP) encouraged me to attend the Summer Engineering Institute (SEI). I am extremely happy that I chose to attend both EOP and SEI because now I am an IDEA Scholar and without the IDEA Center (aka Ruben) I would not have had the confidence to do research and apply to graduate school.

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## **What notable extracurricular activities/organizations are you involved in and why did you get involved with them?**

I am the most involved in the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE). To meet other engineering students my freshman year, I began going to SHPE's youth outreach events, which caters to under-resourced, predominantly Hispanic, communities in San Diego. What began as a way to meet friends, quickly became a fun activity and I found myself becoming invested in the education of younger students. Now I have been the outreach chair of SHPE for two years.



## **Why did you get into research and what aspects do you enjoy? What advice would you give to students who are interested in pursuing research?**

I got involved in research because I needed to find out if I would enjoy research. I have always wanted to teach, but I wasn't sure if I wanted to be a Lecturer or Research Professor. I enjoy the learning process of doing research and needing to understand at a fundamental level why certain reactions occur. I would tell students that they should start as soon as they get to UCSD. There's programs here that are established for students with zero experience. With that in mind, go to office hours and get to know your professors so they can vouch for you when the time comes to apply to these. Also, apply to Summer Research Experiences (REU) at other institutions. In my case, I knew I wanted to do agricultural research, but UCSD does not have that. I ended up applying and being accepted to an REU at Purdue University for this past summer. It was an amazing experience and my PI has allowed me to continue working on the project, even though the program has ended. Overall, I would recommend to just apply and don't ever think you are not capable of conducting research!





## What are your plans for the future and why?

In the future, I want to become a professor at a research institution and conduct research on implementing economically efficient sustainable agriculture techniques in developing countries. My passion for agriculture has come from my experiences in Mexico where I have witnessed farmers deal with water scarcity and plagues, leading to lower harvest yields and income loss. The teaching and mentoring aspect of becoming a professor comes from my experiences in college dealing with imposter syndrome, which kept me from seeking research and internship opportunities my first and second year. This in combination with my experiences as outreach chair has highlighted the need to create innovative programs for first generation students to cultivate a future for more diverse scientists and engineers.

## From your experiences, what advice would you offer current students?

I would tell current students to never let their lack of confidence prevent them from seeking opportunities. Without seeking opportunities, you will never begin the journey towards building your confidence. There is really nothing to lose by applying to internships, research, project teams, etc. Put yourself out there and believe in yourself!

