

Jennifer Hernandez-Mora

*IDEA Center's Spotlight on UC San Diego's
First Generation Engineers*



Quick Facts

Grade: 4th Year

Major: Mechanical Engineering

Outside Interests: Space, Fashion, Music

Questions about your experiences:

How has your perspective as a first-generation college student influenced your experience at UCSD?

Originally being first-gen felt like a huge disadvantage and I consistently felt unsure of what to do, especially within my engineering classes. Although guiding workshops existed, it felt easier said than done. However, being first gen has given me a bigger drive to succeed as I felt that I had to break a cycle. I sought help more often, I consistently stepped out of my comfort zone to achieve what I wanted, and I banded together with other first gen students to help one another achieve our goals.

What has been your proudest moment at UCSD? Why?

My beginning years at UCSD, I felt very unsuccessful. Although I had small achievements, I never felt that anything I did was big. It was not until this year that I felt the most proud of myself as I became President of SHPE and I won three scholarships in a row! One of these scholarships being the Galactic Unite- Scott Borden Prize which I had coveted since my freshman year. These achievements felt like a culmination of all of my efforts from my first year until now and it felt fulfilling to have been recognized.

What is one resource that is helping you throughout your time at UCSD? How is it supporting you?

Being first gen, I consistently sought resources from all over, thus I can name so many. But, it was the IDEA Scholars Program which has helped me throughout my time at UCSD. I have participated in so many IDEA programs, from the Summer Engineering Institute, to GEAR to EOP as a Programming Assistant, and I have been both a Little and a Big within the IDEA Scholars Little, Big Program. Being an IDEA Scholar was what drew me to a lot of opportunities as well as helped to make me feel more welcome at the beginning of my college experience.

What was your experience assisting the EOP Program? What did you like the most about it?

I was able to serve within 2 roles during the EOP program- as an EOP committee member and as an EOP Programming Assistant. I spent many hours planning for the week-long event, and I executed two different events on the same day. The overall payoff of the hours I put in was definitely worth it, as many of the attendees enjoyed it and my current mentee even told me that she chose UCSD because of the socials I helped to plan. The ability to create impact was definitely what I liked the most!

What do you hope to achieve as this year's SHPE President? Do you feel you're ready to be president? Why/Why not?

I hope to be able to rebuild our membership, as many of our beloved, recurring members graduated and I hope to encourage these new members to stay throughout the rest of their college experience, just as I have. SHPE at UCSD has so many events and opportunities, that you can find everything in one place- from community to professional development. I hope to showcase our chapter and to continue to foster an inclusive environment where members can grow in various areas of their lives and see them thrive.

With Fall Quarter almost over, and a couple of weeks in, I feel the most ready I have ever felt in my role! Yet, the beginning was tumultuous, as I lacked confidence in myself, had a lot of self doubt, and was unsure of what challenges I would face and didn't know if I had the courage to face them. But, I overcame the internal challenges and am ready to charge full speed ahead this Winter and Spring!

As a First-generation student, do you feel supported by UCSD/JSOE? What could they do better?

My earlier years at UCSD, I did not feel supported by JSOE and that feeling lingers now. After having been accepted, there was much that I had to figure out on my own. Particularly, as someone who enrolled with environmental engineering, there was much uncertainty my first year and administrative decisions only fueled the stress. My beginning classes were extremely challenging due to my previous schooling at my lower income high school and my needs were not met within the classes. UCSD and JSOE struggle with personalization. In high school, the support from the staff made all the difference in my success and in my first year of college, one monthly meeting with our one advisor was not enough. These were the meetings that helped me stay afloat. I definitely wish that JSOE expanded the IDEA Center and added more IDEA Scholar advisors.

What advice would you give to an incoming First-Generation College student?

My biggest advice is to be proactive and look for resources! My experience at UCSD would not have been the same without SEI, IDEA, SEDS, SHPE, and my friends and mentors which I gained in all of these programs and orgs. Many of these opportunities led to the next.

I learned about SEI from SHPE members tabling on Triton day. Because of my participation in SEI, I further learned about SHPE from my peer facilitators and became super involved. I also learned about what IDEA offered as an IDEA scholar. And because of my roommate from SEI I was introduced to SEDS and subsequently became a member my 2nd year. Don't be intimidated, you are just as valid as anyone else here at UCSD and deserve to have all of the opportunities you want!