

# Nianza Delfin

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*IDEA Center's Spotlight for UC San Diego's  
César E. Chávez Celebration Month*



## Quick Facts

Grade: Class of 2024

Major: Mechanical Engineering

Outside Interests: Disney, Outreach

## Questions about your experiences:

**In April, UC San Diego will be holding the 21st annual César E. Chávez month-long celebration. What has been your experience so far as a Latinx engineering student at UC San Diego? What action have you taken that has most positively impacted your UCSD experience?**

Being a first-gen Latina engineering student at UCSD has been a learning experience. As the first in my family to pursue higher education, I was not fully aware of the academic rigor of college especially in engineering. I have been fortunate enough to have found an amazing community with the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE) early on which helped me navigate my first year at UCSD. Finding supportive communities like SHPE and continuing to be involved has definitely impacted my journey at UCSD. Getting out of my comfort zone and expanding my social and professional network has been a result of being involved. Through hard work and time management I have been able to be active in my community through SHPE and my work with UCSD TRiO while being a full time student. As a Latina engineering student, there have been times where it feels difficult navigating a career that is male dominated. Nevertheless, through my support systems and my determination I have continued to push through barriers that present themselves.

**What has your experience been like with SHPE? What impact has this student organization had in your college journey at UC San Diego?**

SHPE has been an incredible key part of my college journey at UCSD. I joined SHPE at the beginning of my first year, fall 2020, where I served as the Academic Chair Intern. I resonated with SHPE's mission of empowering Hispanics and all our members to reach their fullest potential and I knew of SHPE before coming to UCSD since I had participated in the annual EMPOWER high school conference as a high school student. SHPE has become a familia for me where we support each other not only academically and professionally but in every aspect. Working towards a common goal I wanted to continue being part of this amazing community and give back to our members. Since joining SHPE I have served as the Jr. Representative my second year, where I worked with our high school SHPE chapters and our freshmen committee, and am currently serving as the Vice President External, where I communicate with company sponsors and representatives to schedule events/workshops. Working with our SHPE chapter and the San Diego Professional chapter has been extremely rewarding as I expand my network and knowledge of industry work that I can then share with others.

**You were a member of the planning committee that recently coordinated the first in-person Professional Evening with Industry since the pandemic. What was the most rewarding part of this experience? What would you have done differently?**

Planning and seeing through the in-person Professional Evening with Industry event was extremely rewarding. Prior to PEI I had no idea how much work and dedication went into planning an in-person event. I am proud of our PEI committee who put in a lot of work to make this a memorable event that attendees took advantage of and enjoyed. There is always room for improvement, but I think this year's PEI exceeded my expectations. Seeing the student interest and company presence I don't think I would have done anything differently, aside from bringing more companies.

**You are also currently an event coordinator with the TRIO Upward Bound program at UCSD. Can you share with us what this program is? How has this involvement contributed to your college journey?!**

TRiO at UCSD is an outreach program for underrepresented, first-gen, low-income high school students that informs and helps students reach higher education. TRiO serves specific high school sites offering tutoring, college advising, and college tours during the academic year and a summer residential program during the summer. A smaller number of students get to

experience dorm life at UCSD during the summer for 2-3 weeks where they get to take some fun classes and learn more about UCSD. I was a student of the program back in high school which helped prepare me for the college application process and expanded my horizons of other academic institutions. Being an alumni of the program, I want to empower our students and help plan events. I started working for TRiO the summer of 2021 as an Event Coordinator and have since been with TRiO, helping impact our upcoming generations inspiring them to pursue higher education. Last summer I worked on the first in-person summer residential program since 2019 and it was extremely rewarding to see the students we serve going through the experiences I once participated in. Working part time along with my academics has been rewarding since I get to do what I am passionate about while being a full time student. It takes time management skills to find the right balance, but nonetheless I wouldn't change it for anything.

### **Having started at UCSD during the height of the pandemic, how has the shift to fully in-person classes been like for you?**

Starting at UCSD during the height of the pandemic was different and difficult at first academic wise. Having to take classes online was beneficial since it saved time being able to take classes back to back and not having to run across campus, but it was more difficult to concentrate. Remote classes have their pros and cons, in one way I miss them because it made organizing much easier and lectures were recorded, but in-person classes are more interactive. Shifting from fully remote to hybrid to fully in-person was not easy. It took a little to get used to in regards to time and commuting to campus. As a commuter student that relies on the trolley sometimes, time became a very important factor in choosing classes and organizing outside involvements. This change made google calendar crucial to my day to day schedule.

### **As a Latinx engineering student, do you feel supported by UC San Diego Jacobs School of Engineering? What could they do better?**

As a Latinx engineering student, I feel supported by UC San Diego Jacobs School of Engineering. Especially by the variety of resources that are provided by the IDEA Center and the diversity organizations. Having access to the IDEA Center and their amazing welcoming staff has been of great help as a student and an organization leader.

Another JSOE program that was extremely helpful and rewarding was the virtual Summer Prep program which I participated in prior to starting my first year at UCSD in 2020. I was able to learn

more about the resources on campus and built a smaller community with the students in my group, creating lasting friendships and a support system. Creating a virtual community during a global pandemic was a fundamental way of creating bonds and adapting to a new normal. We learned to seek and also create our own support systems to succeed at UCSD within JSOE.

Experiencing fully virtual, hybrid, and fully in-person classes I have seen the impact course modalities have on students. As a commuter student having 14 hour days (including commute) with long gaps in between classes and relying on public transportation, having a hybrid option for courses would be extremely helpful. Something helpful that arose from the pandemic was adapting to a hybrid format, using technology to have a larger reach. By having classes podcasted or recorded, students would be able to take classes from anywhere and not have to worry about missing class in case of an emergency or not being able to take a class because it is too late in the day. If JSOE can implement the requirement of recording or podcasting classes, a barrier would be lifted from students who may be commuters, involved in organizations, project teams, or even sports. This would help students not have to make a decision of taking a class over another commitment or involvement.

### **What advice would you offer current or future undergraduate students from historically minoritized communities?**

My advice to current or future undergraduate students from historically minoritized communities is to have a four year plan from the start or as soon as possible. Each quarter is difficult to plan on the spot if you don't know how many or which classes you need to take to be on track to graduate. The plan itself will change as quarters pass by and everyone has a different path, timelines can also change and that is completely normal, but having one is key to organizing your schedule. Find a community, a family, or some group where you may feel identified to create a sense of belongingness and find support and resources. At first it is hard to navigate a new environment and finding a community is extremely helpful. Also, not being afraid of exploring the unknown, whether that be in terms of organizational involvement or applying to internships. Our only obstacle is ourselves, anything can be accomplished.