Gabriel Gutierrez
IDEA Center's Spotlight on UCSD's Graduating Engineers

Quick Facts

Grade: Senior

Major: Structural Engineering

Student Involvement: IDEA Scholar and SHPE

Questions about your experiences:

What has been your most memorable experience so far?

I've created a lot of memories over the past 4 years, it's hard to pick. I think one of the most memorable though was one time during my first year my roommates at the time knew I was a huge Chivas fan. During my birthday weekend I went home, and during that time they bought a blank white shirt and markers and literally colored it in so it would look like an exact replica of a Chivas jersey. It was the coolest thing ever, and I still have that jersey to this day. Shout out to them if they're reading this.

What has been your greatest achievement so far?

To be honest, it probably had to be our SHPE chapter being recognized with the "Large Chapter of the Year" award by the SHPE San Diego Professional Chapter in 2019 when I was president. I had a lot of doubts about myself going into the leadership role. However, knowing that SHPE at UCSD was awarded with something like this made me feel better about

the job I did, and happy that our board and members were being recognized by an external institution.

From your experience, what advice would you offer current students?

Some people might not agree with me, but my advice is that deadlines and other "rules" are really just guidelines, especially at UCSD. Two examples: (1) when I was applying to graduate school, I missed the deadline to apply for the Structural Engineering Master's. (2) My org was missing a few documents to apply for a grant to go to the national conference in 2018. In both cases, I communicated with the corresponding staff and was able to get the deadline extended or some other accommodation, and everything worked out fine. My point is, the "system" isn't always against you, and people are willing to work with you. If something isn't going your way, talk to the right people, ask questions, use your network, and remember, rules are just guidelines.

Could you share with us how being an IDEA Scholar has benefited you?

I have nothing but good things to say about the IDEA Scholars Program. Through the Summer Engineering Institute, I gained project experience during ENG 10 that instilled confidence in me to tackle a project on my own during my first year at UCSD (3D printed heart-shaped box with an Arduino LCD screen, a gift for my mom). Also, the friendships I made not only introduced me to people I can actually confide in, but it expanded my network which has been super helpful over the years. In addition, IDEA set up a networking event with Boeing that ultimately led me to my very first internship with them. Lastly, and most importantly, being an IDEA Scholar has given me a platform for my voice. I have been invited back for panels, events, and now this student spotlight, which continually allows me to keep paying it forward to the next generation of engineering students.

How has your experience with SHPE benefited you?

I can't thank SHPE at UCSD enough for its impact on my college life. I remember my first committee meeting for REACh when I was a first year, I was practically silent the entire time. At the time, I didn't feel like I had any value to contribute. But with time, I went from being a quiet SHPE member to an active one. SHPE has undoubtedly improved my soft skills when talking to recruiters, working with others, and being a leader. It has given me a lot of substance to write about when applying to graduate school and other scholarships. To anyone thinking about joining SHPE or any club really, be committed. With time, you'll grow in that position and it will help you a lot along the way.

Question about the future:

What are your plans after you graduate?

I am very fortunate to say that I will be pursuing a Master's Degree in Aeronautical and Astronautical Engineering at Purdue University as a David M. Knox Fellow. I will be doing research in aerospace-grade matrix-fiber composites with Dr. Pipes at the Indiana Manufacturing Institute.