

Kanksha Patel

*IDEA Center's Spotlight on UCSD's
GEAR Program*



Quick Facts

Grade: 3rd Year (undergrad)

Major: Bioengineering: Biotechnology

Outside interests: Tennis, Concerts, Hiking & Art

Questions about your experiences:

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?

The reason I wanted to explore research was to determine if I would enjoy it and if it was a good fit for me after graduation. While course lectures are critical to learn information about the engineering field, something I really enjoy about research is that it gives me the chance to apply my learning. These applications allow me to use my research to benefit larger communities, such as the research projects I've worked on to help cystic fibrosis patients. If I could give any advice to students who are interested in pursuing research, I would tell them that perseverance and communication are key. It can be frustrating to revise an experiment or go back to the drawing board, but at times like that, it's important to remind yourself why you chose research to begin with!

How has GEAR helped you to get involved in research?

When I applied to the GEAR program in my second year, I didn't know what to expect. Being in this program developed my perspective of the research process and skills such as writing research proposals tailored to engineering topics. GEAR also introduced me to the research lab I currently work with and my BENG 199 mentors, Karsten and Cristal, who oversee my contribution to projects related to the human microbiome and community models.



Why did you become an IDEA Scholar and how has the program helped you?

One of the reasons I applied to become an IDEA Scholar is because I wanted to surround myself with people who had similar aspirations to contribute to the engineering field. This program has made a great impact on my undergraduate experience. Attending SEI helped me build a community of engineering students and familiarize myself with the campus while getting a headstart on courses. I'm extremely grateful for the friendships I have made through the IDEA Scholars program and advisors at the IDEA Center like Ruben who have always served as encouragement and support in my journey through engineering.



How has SWE (Society of Women Engineers) benefitted you? How have you benefitted others through SWE?

As a first year student, I didn't realize how intimidating it can be studying in a male-dominated field. I joined SWE with the hope to meet women that are as passionate for engineering as I am and I'm glad that I have formed valuable friendships through the org. Through my involvement with outreach programs like Envision and current committee role with EDGE, I hope to encourage more young women to pursue STEM-related careers.



What are your plans for the next 2-3 years?

If you had asked me this question a year ago, I would've had little idea deciding between industry or research. The GEAR program combined with my experience working in the Zengler Lab has allowed me to discover my interest in the research field. My plan after completing my undergraduate education is pursue a Ph.D. program to learn more about tissue engineering.

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

Everyone's journey through engineering is personal and different-- don't compare your experience to others. Also, apply to every opportunity you can. Don't sell yourself short and believe in yourself!

