

Obadiah Valdez

*IDEA Center's Spotlight on UCSD's
First Gen Students*

Quick Facts

Grade: Sophomore

Major: Mechanical Engineering

Outside interests: Art, Reading, Gaming,
Exploring



Questions about your experiences:

How has being a first-generation student impacted your experience at UCSD? What resources would you recommend to other students who identify as first gen?

Well, the two most obvious impacts are resources and connections. Like many first-gen students, we come to college with not much help behind our backs. It's been really challenging trying to find my place here at UCSD, especially when we're all online. However, I had good mentors to help me through IDEA and SHPE, and would definitely recommend any first-gen students to take advantage of these programs, as well as the other engineering diversity organizations. You'd be surprised by how many people are willing to lend a helping hand.





Could you share with us your experiences as an IDEA Scholar?

The funny thing about this question is that I actually almost didn't become an IDEA Scholar. I applied to SEI after attending the Overnight Program, and while I was accepted to participate in SEI, I was rejected for a spot in the IDEA Scholars program. I was thinking of dropping SEI, but then a few weeks later I was given the offer. I accepted, had a great time at SEI, met many amazing people who have been super helpful and learned a lot about being a college student and an engineer. Being an IDEA Scholar opened the doors to this opportunity, and I don't regret joining. From SEI to weekly meetings with Ruben, all of them have been a joy to take advantage of, and I hope future generations will feel the same.

Why did you participate in the Guided Engineering Apprenticeship in Engineering (GEAR) program and what did you get from this research program?

Truthfully, I had no plans for research in my freshman year. The industry seemed more attractive to me. But then Ruben and my IDEA Scholar Big recommended to apply, and during Spring Quarter I decided it was better to apply than not to. While the pandemic has taken away some of the experience of being in a lab, a lot of the course has still been rewarding. I've learned a lot more about practicing research and the specific topics my lab focuses on, and while I'm still undecided whether I want to continue into research, I'm glad to say that I can still benefit from this experience.

What are your plans for the future?

I don't have anything concrete, partly because mechanical engineering is such a broad major. Currently, I'm exploring research to see if I would like to pursue it further, as I'm enjoying the GEAR program. I've also thought about becoming a Mechanical Design engineer, as I've always been interested in the ideation and creation of things, and I enjoy 3D CAD work as well. So, for now my future hangs between going to grad school or applying to the industry.

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

Firstly, don't panic. College gets heavily stressful, but there are plenty of resources out here to help you. Second, branch out. Even if you're super talented and can do everything with ease, it still helps to know people that are going through the same challenges as you. Find clubs and organizations that not only help you but you can also learn from and enjoy. Third, don't eat all your food at a dining hall.



