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**Speaker 1** [00:00:00] My name is Brian Alvarez. Hernandez Yeah. I'm a student. Oregon State University. I consider myself part of this community because. I am a first generation college student. My parents didn't go to college. I'm a first generation immigrant, technically. I'm a veteran. And my first language since I can remember was Spanish until fifth grade.

**Speaker 2** [00:00:32] Thanks so much for being here with us and being willing to tell your story about your experience in the X engineering program at USC. O'Brien. So to get started, I'll just start off with our first prompt for your for your narrative. And the prompts asks you to tell the story of your experience so far as an engineering student, including your background. What brought you to pursue the program and your initial impression of the program?

**Speaker 1** [00:01:08] Okay. Let's start. So my. My father always wanted me to go to college, and he worked very hard to give me and my sisters a better life by coming here into the U.S.. These work, like many manual labor jobs across his life, and I wasn't always sure that's what I wanted for myself. And so when I first attended OSU back in 20. 2012. I wasn't really going for myself. I was going for my father and such. I really Bedford's kind of wasted an opportunity that I had. And so that direction, what I really wanted to do was trying to military. Searching for a sense of belonging, especially since leaving all my friends back in Mexico. I never really had a close knit group of friends. And so I joined the military. I came back. I tried to school again. I joined the Reserves, the Marine Corps Reserves and the Army later on. But. Again, going back to college, I wanted to try it again. Still nothing. And then 2019, 2020, I deployed to Jordan. That was a life changing experience for me. And I got injured over there. And when I returned. But the injuries that I had, I wasn't able to work a man or a job like I originally kind of thought about. And so I spoke with the veteran's resource counselor and she looked over at my disabilities and she basically gave me some aptitude testing. And she said that College of Engineering or an engineering job would be good for me. And so. I. I talked it over with my wife. We were married for about six years now. It was a long conversation that I had with her and. Knowing that I had failed before, I was really hesitant to go back into it because I knew that if I tried it again, I wanted it to be real. And I came back into it. Thankfully, I was readmitted into the program and this is now my third term in the College of Engineering for X and things have been going well. I don't want to say brag, but. I've been trying really hard and this to first turns. I've gotten all A's where looking back on my transcript, I've had ups and these and I feel like a lot of that was me finally. Trying to do this for the right reasons.

**Speaker 2** [00:04:22] That must feel like a big success, like a big triumph.

**Speaker 1** [00:04:28] It's it's a kind of can't believe that sometimes myself. My wife has been a huge supporter of me and she has. She's working on her masters right now. Looking at her and how smart she is. She really kind of inspired me a lot.

**Speaker 2** [00:04:45] And my next question is about now that you're in the program and you were just mentioning how you feel that you're doing in the program and kind of following up on that. And my next prompt talks about how you feel like the program fits into your life and how you feel like you fit into the program, or perhaps ways that you don't feel like you fit into the program and how, like your life aligns with being an A student and ex. That was you.

**Speaker 1** [00:05:23] Yeah. I'll be honest that. I still don't think I fully belong into the program. And not because. The professors or the faculty don't take the time to make you feel like you're part of it. I mean, obviously they're really busy, but. I remember having a couple of conversations with my wife, at least the first two terms towards the beginning, and I just told her that. I don't I don't think I should be here. And I had a lot of doubt in my mind. And part of that I feel like stemmed from. There are a lot of students that I saw that already had experience with specifically coding C++ and Python and the conversations that I would overhear while I'm doing the lectures and the questions that they would ask, asking if they could use certain functions or if they could use certain programs. To me, that was extremely foreign and it had no idea. And so that kind of sped up the pace of the class and. I actually went to one of my professors and asked her if she could write down like a like a list of terms that I could at least familiarize myself with. And she kind of took a step back and she said, I hadn't really thought about that. Thank you for bringing that up. And she posted it. And I later found out from other students who were also struggling that that they found that really helpful. And I'm glad I kind of was able to speak up then. And so. I haven't really worked with anybody who is also kind of from my origins, like Mexican. Most of the students are are white, and there's obviously nothing wrong with that. But I haven't really been able to speak with anybody that. I guess I had a similar upbringing or something like that. And so a lot of the things that we talk about, it's something that I'm kind of having to learn about their culture and stuff. And and for them it's kind of a little bit more familiar.

**Speaker 2** [00:07:35] Yeah, I think that's really understandable. Let's see. So it kind of goes into this next point for the question prompts. Maybe you could talk a little bit about how your culture and that you mentioned in background upbringing, how that is impacting your experience in the engineering program or in engineering culture. And I don't know you might want to mention your experience in the military or not, and then just how your values, culture or beliefs have impacted your experience as a student so far.

**Speaker 1** [00:08:16] Absolutely. Well, as I mentioned before, I was born in Mexico and emigrated when I was in fifth grade here and into Hillsboro. And to this day, I can remember seeing everything and obviously everything important. But sitting in a classroom and having to ask another student there. And luckily for me, she spoke both English and Spanish. And I remember I really needed to go to the restaurant, but I couldn't ask. And so I told her, like, hey, could you ask her, see if I could go? And and she I remember her saying gibberish. And then the teacher, like, pointed out, and finally I was able to try to find the restroom. And so obviously there's a language barrier sometimes. Especially with certain terminology that is used around the college and and especially since it's all geared toward math. Like, there's there's things that I've already learned in classes that I'm barely beginning to learn. And calculus classes. And so it's kind of like some overlap. And so growing up, my father was always really hard working. And coming into the US and really trying to achieve something so that I'm able to to show that sacrifice that he made by traveling here. It's something that's always been on my mind. But I never found it to be like I needed to do it for me as well so that I could pour all of my effort into it. And then with the military. It's such a different. Such a different contrast of an environment. But. Academically. I've never been challenged like I have been anywhere in my life, like I am in this program. And I've talked to some people about it where I've been challenged very heavily physically through deployment, through training missions, all these things. And I can look back and say that was a really tough experience, but to me. At least the engineering classes, specifically one of three in one or two has been extremely challenging for me to the point where. Think I'll just. I'll just trying to study and. And really pushed through. And that's always been a really big factor for me.

**Speaker 2** [00:10:51] And then the next prompt I have relates to the strengths that you feel like you bring to the engineering program, to engineering as a discipline in general, you know, in terms of your personal strengths or important contributions you think that you have to make from your perspective.

**Speaker 1** [00:11:17] Yeah. So. Some of the contributions I think I might be able to help with. This is an outside perspective. Coming from Mexico and representing different communities. I have. I've seen like. I mean, I grew up on a dirt road and my mom, you know, and like my grandma, she she grew up on like a like a strong mud hut, you know, kind of Mexico. And you get to see, like, what poverty can look like in a in a country like that. And you see that there's certain things that you want to help fix an idea of. And ever since I was I was younger, I always wanted to build something that that will make people's lives a little bit easier or or give them a little bit of an upper edge. And so I think that if I were to able to to join a group or or a team. I can at least try to provide some kind of perspective. So say these are some of the struggles that maybe we're not talking about, maybe like retiring a software attitude when people who don't have the money to replace an iPhone or another another device, maybe we just keep it alive a little bit longer because to people it might be a device, but then they can't afford it. It's either that or or an appliance that they have to replace. And so. I like to think of those things as not sunsetting certain things too quickly.

**Speaker 2** [00:12:59] Absolutely. Yeah, I think that's that that's a huge strength in perspective and it kind of relates to this other prompts that we have for the narratives. On what impact do you think your involvement in engineering education, in engineering will have in a broader sense on your life or your community?

**Speaker 1** [00:13:36] It's interesting because I think there's a lot of misconceptions about software engineering that it can be very difficult, which it is, but it's almost an accessible it's almost like you see it in movies and it's like that's a fantasy that like, oh, they're doing something that some comprehensible. But if I'm able to do it and I'm a I'm a slow learner and I'm not doing that to try to downplay myself, but I recognize that and that I have to work a little bit harder to try to understand things. If I'm able to at least struggle through it and do it, then maybe that can inspire. Maybe like somebody else that has a desire to make a positive impact and try to do it. And I don't have kids yet, but we will hopefully in the near future, if they're able to see their father or the fact that their mom, you know, she went to school and. And that we're able to achieve something and not just use it for personal gain, but to help. I can see that as like the old one.

**Speaker 2** [00:14:45] Wonderful. Thank you so much. And then I also wonder if you want to say anything. As a last point I have on important changes you think should happen in engineering, education or in the industry so that others from underserved communities like you are like your underserved community that you mentioned or others can better be supported and empowered to succeed. And what changes would you like to?

**Speaker 1** [00:15:20] I would like to see. More support for renewing or underserved members of underserved communities in the beginning stages of the program. I had to do a lot of self teaching. I had to do a lot of research on my own. And luckily for me, I knew. Where to try to find stuff, but the information is very, very specific that you need to find. And so you have to sift through a lot of different documents and websites and try to find something. And so. I would. I'm just worried that maybe there are some students out there who have absolutely no prior knowledge about computers, an operating software, or even a text editor. And if there's a class before even the 100 series that is able to just give them some literacy about how to use these programs and it turns. That will set them up for success because. It almost felt like when I was learning English again, I had to basically try to stay afloat. And for somebody who doesn't have a lot of experience, I felt this is an issue for sure, especially when you hear about other people who are already talking about much more advanced concepts that are being covered in.

**Speaker 2** [00:16:45] You know, I think that's extremely good recommendation. And I think that that's something that would potentially be really useful to the program leaders. So, yeah. And for everything that you've offered, I would just want to.

**Speaker 1** [00:16:59] Mm hmm. Sorry. I want to add one more thing. Yes. If that's okay. I just popped into my mind, so. It's so new that I almost forgot to mention it. But before I came back to school, my wife, who got her degree in psychology, she noticed some things and she said that she would think it'd be a good idea for me to be assessed for ADHD. And I went through two different doctors, one through the V.A. and once you're like a civilian doctor, and they both basically said that I had it. And so part of me thinks that maybe I've always had a trouble with learning certain subjects. And so I had to reread a lot of stuff and my concentration. There's a lot of self-esteem issues there because I really wanted to do a test, but just for some reason, sometimes I didn't have the motivation. And. That played a big factor. So when I got diagnosed, I start taking medicine, which is really helping me. But it's like sometimes things can go really quickly. And so again, having that support in the beginning definitely would help level the playing field.

**Speaker 2** [00:18:14] Is there anything else that you can think of that we didn't touch on that you would want to add?

**Speaker 1** [00:18:19] No, that's it, I promise.

**Speaker 2** [00:18:23] Well, again, I want to thank you, Brian, for being willing to share about your experience. I think that what you've shared is going to be extremely valuable for others, too, to be able to know about your experience in the program. And so I'm going to start by recording now.