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**Speaker 1** [00:00:01] Okay. Welcome. We're here today with Bolivar. He is a student in electrical and computer engineering. Let him introduce himself. Thank you so much for being here with us today with the X Student Experience, StoryCorps Archive Project Auto Ethnographic Account. And so the main prompts. I'll go ahead and read that we have asked our auto ethnography authors to address is to tell the story of your experience so far as an engineering student. You may want to start with your background. What brought you to pursue the program? You may want to include your initial impression of the program, how you began to understand how you fit into the program, how it fits into your life, or it doesn't or you don't. And you may also want to include important characteristics for you or the impact you hope it will have on your life or community. So with that, I will go ahead and let Bolivar continue. Thank you, Bolivar.

**Speaker 2** [00:01:12] Hello, everyone. My name is Bolivar Blend. You are an international student or, you know, from Panama. Panama City, Panama. I'm studying an undergrad in electrical engineering and computer science. Identify my gender. Pronouns are he and him, and I just want to share a little bit about myself. So since very young, I was born and raised in Panama City in a middle class household, I've always been very passionate about math and physics, and sometime in my high school career I was able to compete internationally with other of my peers. In Panama, we went to Bolivia to a Physics Olympiad, and I realized that culture and people, people have so many different experiences from their own studies, like in the respective countries. So from then I realized that I maybe wanted to experience and explore a little bit out of my comfort zone. To be frank, my mom was also a very pivotal. In incentivized or someone that actually wanted me to to do this, even though we didn't have like the economical means. I say live the I live in a single parent household. She was very, very eager to. For for, for me and my brothers to experience this. So I became a started preparing for for scholarships and opportunities like this. And in 2015 and I was able to go to Taiwan to study the language which is mentoring and to start the mechanical engineering program there. So I did and I spent from 2016 to 2018 studying Mandarin and also studying and undergrad in mechanical engineering. Oh, well, being there I, I experienced a lot of, of the community. It's really different. Amongst the things that impacted me the most was the difference in. Health investment like health public programs, even for international students as myself, was very accessible, very, very different from from what I experienced in my country because public health care suffered in my country. But it's really slow and really tedious. Like you could wait months for for appointment. And one is really, really, really advanced in this aspect. So it was kind of a culture shock. Of course, also the the language barrier was very difficult and the way people interacted was very different from from what I was used to in Panama. So as I said, that they spent two years there and I got curious about electrical engineering, mainly because and to be completely frank, meeting of my teachers, even in mechanical engineering, very like guys, electrical engineering is where the money said. So I, I grew curious and that wasn't a topic that was foreign to me because I used to study a lot of physics. So I decided to go into night classes and study a little bit of electrical engineering classes, of course, taught entirely in Mandarin. And I realized that they like this, this degree and these these topics. And around 2000, 17 or 18, if I'm not mistaken, Panama opened up. Panama rotates with with the government of Taiwan. So I basically lost my scholarship and I had a decision and I kind of had to decide between going back to Panama, finishing my degree, or maybe exploring other alternatives. And along my explorations, I found that Oregon State offered this is this program is called into OSU. And at this point they was very, very eager to make a transition from electrical engineer, mechanical engineering to electrical. And I said to myself that they would this would have been a great opportunity to do this change. I research into a lot of schools, of course, and also I pondered heavily about just staying in Taiwan, finishing my degree because I was only like two years away from my mechanical undergrad degree. But I decided that I wanted to take a leap. Another big factor that led me to making this decision was that at this point my younger brother was also graduating and he was also choosing which school he was going to. And we decided that maybe meeting in in the U.S. would have been a good decision because it's relatively closer to home and we would have access to to go back and just be with family if necessary. And also, it would have been thanks to the entire program, it felt like a very feasible. Path. So in 2018, I returned back to Panama for almost like two months, and then I jumped back in to LSU. So I started in the into program for maybe a term or two, and then I transitioned into oh. Actual issue. And a third of my life as an electrical engineering undergrad. And of course, that's always there was also a cultural clash, a culture and a clash shock. It was different, way different from Taiwan. Even now that I had grew accustomed a little bit to to the culture. A lot of things remain the same, but a lot of things also changed. Of course, the language language barrier was a lot less intense because at least I was able to speak a little bit of English. Oh, and I've been. It's been almost. Almost four years now. I think that I've been here in the U.S. studying electrical engineering, and it has been a pretty pleasant experience. Let's see. Yes. So I think my community values have impacted a lot, especially since I am international student. I'm very, very far away from from my family, friends and even university peers because they had peers from Taiwan and Panama. I'm used to growing small personal communities and being in a kind of a family environment. I have to admit the fact that my brother is here and has been here with me has been a very, very impactful and pivotal aspect of my life, which has allowed me to be more comfortable with with just life overall. As I said, there's a lot of cultural differences. I'm not sure if it's just because of my personality, because I'm Canadian, introverted, but I've found that sometimes it's kind of difficult for me to to create and foster these small communities, which I'm used to back in Panama. Even in university, I think and this is an interesting observation that I must add in Panama also, I spent a semester in Panama before going to Taiwan, so I have experienced at least a little bit of the university experience in Panama, Taiwan and then also here. And my idea was that at least in Panama and also kind of Taiwan, we move in semester basis. So we spend a lot of time with the same people and usually it's the same classes. So in that sense, at least for me, I it was easier for me to kinda cultivate and grow a kind of community with my peers that later on became friends, that later on became kind of like family here in, in OSU. At least for me. I have experienced that because the classes there's so many people in classes and then the terms are so short and then there's so many have so much diversity in courses. So for example, usually for my courses in, in engineering, I get to see the regular set of people and we're able to to become friends and grow a kind of a small community. But also I believe that it's a little bit more difficult because of the fast pace. A small example is that some friends that I when I got here I met, they're long gone because they graduated. So there's a little bit of a fast pace in what I would consider just life overall, which makes it a little bit different from from what I'm accustomed to. So regarding to the engineering program, I have to admit that I do see a lot of diversity. It's not too to discredit Taiwanese education, but there's not that much of diversity in in Taiwanese application simply because I chose a program and an intern that was very far from the big cities. But I see that at least here in in Oregon State, there's a big push and a big incentive in in having a lot of diversity and inclusion, which I kind of appreciate. It's been nice being able to actually hear, talk and discuss topics that to to be frank. Even in my country, we we don't talk about and it's like an underlying area of our of misinformation and different topics that we either don't have the resources to to to discuss or even the the interest. So in that sense here, I have experience on a more active level these, these constant discussion. Verse two, for lack of a better word. So regarding strengthen and protect contributions, should I bring to two engineering programs? I think because I've been able to experience many different cultures, I still to this day, I'm still learning a lot about different cultures. But I think I just because, like I was raised in by the fact it's just a different environment and overall just different culture. I think I have a I have had at least the opportunity to try to. I am forgetting the word for this. There's a specific term for this, but, uh, I've had the opportunity to, to experience different points of views and ideas, and I think that's greatly appreciated in, in a for example, in hearing the ingenuity and ingenuity Canadian program, sorry. And what I was going to actually address was, for example, work. So thanks to you, I was able to participate in the make up program which allocates internships. And in these internships we have been able to experience not only like this academic experience, we have also been able to experience a more professional environment. And in this environment, because you, as I mentioned before, you get to see these people and this person, the yeah, this community, which is work every day for an extended period of time. And in that sense you get to grow a small community, you get to know them better. And it is truly amazing to just experience and even talk about differences in how you perceive things. I always remember this kind of silly example, but for some reason in Panama I was used to to always peel oranges and then cut them. And I had never, for whatever reason, experienced someone actually like eating them. And I saw one of my coworkers hitting one of those and I was like, What are you doing? And she was like, Yeah, I'm just eating an orange. What's wrong with it? I'm like, I was I had never seen something like that, which is kind of funny to me. And now looking back at it, it's, it's become it's became a meme in, in Canada the company like just good fun and I always laugh about that And I remember I even sent a poll back to Panama, my friends in Panama, to see how many of them had actually like actually eaten an orange drink and orange. And when I say that to two people here in the U.S. and they were like, there's no way. Like, of course you can drink it like in juice, but we like actually juice it and drink it. So that's that that's just a little bit kind of fun experiences that we've had sharing and and just experiencing different perspectives and and backgrounds. So important changes they think should happen in the U.S. engineering education. So this is a question that I've been pondering a lot because this is a phenomenon that not only occurs in education, it occurs in a lot of different circles. I'm a very chess a big chess fan. And chess, for example, has been an institution that has not been very open to diversity and and inclusion. This has been tried to be changed recently, like in the last couple of ten years. But still, there's not a big impacts or push. But I think there is still a movement going forward. And there's a big thing in chess that. If I'm not mistaken, I will have to search the numbers. But. There's a very big gap disproportionate between. Girls and boys sing in chess, but their skills and interests when they're young, it's it's very similar and it's almost in in indiscernible. It's there's not a big difference. But once you go to like higher levels, the level of of of female chess players is not as big. And I think the reason for this is the the amount of encouragement resources and plain old just like. Support and outreach like, simply put. And I think if we translate this into other other circles, I think one big very important aspect that we can help promote and increase is access and outreach to in for engineering education. And I wholeheartedly believe that we're doing progress and we're doing our best. Maybe not our best. Actually, we're doing something, but I think more emphasis should be should be invested into into this. Of course, there's other ways we could impact in this in these areas as more diverse faculty, maybe role models. If it's not a means to. To. To criticize, but maybe there could be a little improvement in some of these areas.

**Speaker 1** [00:18:59] Thank you for offering your story. Is there anything else that you want to add before we end?

**Speaker 2** [00:19:07] Nothing comes to mind. If you have any questions, I'm sure maybe anecdotes or or just say this will come to mind. But for now, I think that's a pretty good description.

**Speaker 1** [00:19:18] Yeah. Thank you so much for your your story and for everything that you've included. And we look forward to seeing your recording in the library website.

**Speaker 2** [00:19:31] Thanks for having me.