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**Speaker 1** [00:00:02] Okay. Hi. Welcome. Thank you again so much for being here with us. We're here today with Fernando Rodriguez Estrada, and he is here to give his story for the Cesp Project. ECF Student Experience StoryCorps Archive Project. And so I will read the main prompts for our project that Fernando was given before this interview. Let's tell the story of your experience so far. As an engineering student, you may want to start with your background and what brought you to pursue this program. And you may want to include your initial impression of the program and how you began to understand how the program fits into your life or doesn't, and how you fit into the program or you don't. You may also want to include the most important characteristics of the program for you or impact you hope it will have on your life or community. And so with that, I will hand it over to Fernando to give his account. Thank you, Fernando.

**Speaker 2** [00:01:17] Thank you. Hi. My name is Fernando Estrada. I'm a computer science student for the College of Engineering, and I'm Hispanic. Both of my parents are from Mexico. I'm the third one of my six siblings to go to. To go to college. So my sister went to Oregon State also. And she got a degree in education. And my my sister, who is about seven years older than me, got a degree. And now she's working as a probation officer and living locally and within within the gorge. And that happens to be where I'm from. I'm from Hood River, Oregon. That's a great, nice little town for tourism and agriculture and pears, apples and all that sorts. That's what my that's what brought my dad to Mexico or two from Mexico in college land to the United States in the year 1980. Then after a couple of years, my mom followed him as they were together before. And they got here. He got here through his sister, who was ah, who had already been established for a few years. He he didn't immigrate legally and he got his residential status soon after and became a citizen in about 27 and. That is his participation in an agricultural work and. That sort of thing got me involved into the migrant program at Oregon State, and that's one thing that attracted me about about Oregon State in the first place, is that they had already established a lot of foundations and a lot of support networks within the community at Oregon State. I moved to Corvallis in 2019 and I was welcomed by the camp program that they had down there. There are a few mentors who really helped me along the way. Along the way during my first couple of years of education and then in 2020 COVID hit. At that time I had been a bioengineering major and we had to switch to doing online and virtual. And but before that, I guess what attracted me to the engineering in the first place, part of it was the the medicine aspect of bioengineering. I was interested in medicine. And still to this day, I find I find like just general, like even as far as just for like exercise, recovery, nutrition, all of that sort of I feel like getting over injuries just as an athlete. Not at not August at the end, fortunately, but just in general. That's incredibly intriguing. But then also the side of the engineering part of it is go into a field where you can solve a problem fixing issue, improve society and. Just. Find a way to make someone's life better. I. I grew up. I grew up. And so in Hood River, I went to the high school there, the public high school. And I had a mentor of mine while I was in the and the robotics program that they had at the high school. And we we built robots and I was one of the programmers on the team. There's a team of three programmers. One one of the programmers graduated one year behind me and since I was the oldest of at that time, the the last last programmer who was on that team got must have graduated two years ago. Since, since I graduated high school and high school in 2019, uh, that would have, you would have been a freshman at that time. So just during, during that engineering endeavor with the robotics team, there is a mentor of mine who had, uh, who had engineering experience in their field of robotics, and I'm not sure if it's called animatronics is the word that I wanted to say, but it's, it's like, it's like. It's like bionics for for people like. Like Robot Arms are doing like reconstruction of, like fingers and hands and just that integration of that mass interest that I had and also the engineering of. From from the capacity that I seen it executed through my experiences with the robotics program. That's something that I wanted to jump towards and latch onto because it's very intriguing and I'm very math oriented, even though I have a lot of varying interests. It was something that I wanted to I wanted to try, and especially because engineering such as engineering is such a strength for you. I went into the I finished off before COVID as a bioengineering major, but then after COVID or I guess during COVID, I switched into the School of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. That was more of a convenience thing for me because it's. It's it was all remote and working remotely is it's attractive in the sense that you can get your work done and still go outside. There are a lot of winters here. Unfortunately, I don't winter, but I do like to like, play basketball outside or I go read a book at the beach or even working the beach, as in the Columbia River Beach. Maybe not a beach, but like being. Being remote and working anywhere that that you like is, like, very lucrative to me. And I thought, well, since I'm already working remotely as and there is a global pandemic going on, you almost can't leave your house. It's I thought the School of Electrical Engineering and Computer science would be the right place for me. And as as of lately, it's turned out that it is. And most generally I do feel accepted as in there are I don't feel that there is like an explicit. Like an explicit barrier or wall or someone like trying to keep me out of making progress in the School of engineering. But as in there might be or I, I assume there would be for like those weed out classes. I didn't really see them as weed out classes or any sort of that. But I do see a lot of people struggling with the introduction to computer science and engineering, the engineering class that they have. That's the 103 engineering course. That is an introductory aid to computer science. Best, and I didn't see it as a barrier because I had been working on my programing skills. So it wasn't much of much more than nothing. Nothing much new at the time for me. But I was like, as more as I talked to some of my peers, they definitely had found that class challenging. There was there was a friend of mine who mentioned even just yesterday that there's like there was barely. They barely were even able to pass it because their their roommate happened to be a computer science major and they helped him. And it happens. It happens that he has his back and. And. It might be the case. And it's the hope of I see it in this study is something that can come out of it is that there is. There are certainly and ways to expose it and address. And and. Sort of. Correct and bring attention to any implicit biases that might exist within the School of Electrical and engineering and computer science, and something that I see with and struggle with myself just as someone who didn't have I didn't have any like quite. My college mentorship as far as. As far as like someone being, like, present with me while I was growing up just because my sisters did not live with me. And there even though they they did go to college and they had they had that experience there. I didn't quite get that. So when I when I moved to the crevasse, the most the most challenging thing for me was. Probably. Understanding about how how colleges and necessarily a place where where like you attend it and graduate and. And be in a position where you are, you will be successful. It's absolutely a route that I believe and that sort of value that's been instilled in my culture, that being the Hispanic, specifically Mexican culture and that education is important and it's an avenue that lets people out of poverty and that does it does a lot of great things. But at the same time, those. Those like policies or those. Those values are don't necessarily puts the same emphasis as my far says like as well I can just call it like maybe more the dominant culture in the sense that yeah people I see are there to learn and they want to expand their mind and grow as a person. But more that I see that people who are in a more privileged situation is that they're more aware of how the process of education and the system of. The system in general as an go to school, get a job in that process. Works in such a way that they have their priorities aligned with the specific criteria, almost as in not not necessarily blaming any any particular person and specific, but just as a more general trend. And what I see is that people. People like, maneuver their way around. Like what? The obstacles that are put there so that. So that they're given. Given tools and. Pick up pick up new skills or. Just like the general. The general like purpose or what what I think should be the the essential purpose of getting into education is which is like it's a learning institution. So maybe learning would be the main priority, but it's almost as it's like I, I feel sometimes at a disadvantage because I don't I didn't go in knowing, well, maybe if I, maybe if I when I go to college then I you. I had never I've never been in this like mindset. But you maybe work on your GPA the most, and then as you approach as you approach your senior levels of classes, maybe your your third year or fourth year as individual, then you start reaching out. Maybe you have to have an internship. And then by the time that you have an internship, then you then you look out for prospective companies who might be who might be hiring after you graduate. And the most important part is that you have something that looks good on your resume. Rather than. Bing having come from a background where. Where higher education is not something like incredibly prevalent in my family. Like I don't have any any uncles or any maybe have one cousin who who I can think of in my extended family who went to college. So we're necessarily in a place to explain any sort of process of that to me, of how it works and where other people's priorities lie and how that puts your head in and. How that puts your head in the. The field or how you advance your career. It's. I guess for like, as far as like. Like being like getting started into the engineering program, as when I remember, is that they wanted to, like, really like get us thinking into the engineering mindset and just thinking like, this is. This is like what the engineering process looks like and this is how this is how we. We build. Like this is how we we use the engineering process to solve a problem. But I was never told. Well, this is definitely you should definitely be aware that after you graduate, you if you don't if you don't get a job, you have to pay off your student loans. And if you can't if you can't pay off your student loans, then well, it's it's not very good then. Then like more into the intermediate, intermediate intermediary. It's a tough word to process and to the intermediary step into the engineering field, then into the engineering educational process is. It might be the case that my experience is a little bit more different than some of the other students, and giving this self ethnography is because I had primarily a campus experience. Since I switched fully to in campus should have of the notion that. A little bit earlier when I was talking about how we switched to doing online and I chose to say I might have alluded to it that chose to stay online just because it seemed so lucrative to be on your remote and work at a time that you that is most convenient to me. And, and to that extent, my experience is a little bit as well. And the campus experience. And as an E campus student in the College of Engineering, it's a little I didn't realize there would have been a little bit more difficult to. To conceptualize the the process or the, uh, the skills or some of the. Some of the activities are opportunities that could have been engaged in gaged in a little bit earlier if. And. It wasn't. I mean, I don't. I don't I don't blame anyone in particular because those opportunities were definitely presented to me. Absolutely. But more put it, I felt as as to. Maybe not the. Maybe not necessarily to like assign blame to anyone, but it was a little bit difficult to just stay like have a grasp on everything going on around around me because I was in a different time because I'm in a different environment and it's not. It's it's not like a constant reminder of or maybe it doesn't. I don't I didn't take the opportunity to dig into much of like, what? What could be. As someone who as someone who is looking to pursue an education in computer science and have that flow into their career. I didn't pursue those opportunities actively, which made it a little bit more difficult to maybe connect or even. Even engaged with all that I could have as a. As a member of the and the electrical engineering and computer science community. It was not until recently where I kind of figured out that it's a little bit it's almost just as important to to be connected with with the other people and faculty and even though it might even be asynchronous. To have a good one on one with your instructors and your. And. Even your peers. I guess that's another disadvantage that I kind of came in with the with not having much college experience and my family was there. It's not really aware that that the relationship that you build with your instructors and how how you. Coordinate with the people around you and your team, even while you're working on projects or. The more social aspects of of college. Like how how important does it be? And it's not it's not to say that the that the College of Engineering doesn't really make that maybe maybe I would make the claim that the College of Engineering, at least in the E campus, doesn't really make that huge leap of trying to get people connected. This term, I'm taking a software engineering course, the introductory course. And the professor of my he did mention and it doesn't seem like there are tons of people who stop by his office hours, but when like person office hours. But he did mention that one of one of the priorities that that I should have as a member of his class and then school of engineering in general, is that engaging with the community and and and creating a strong bond with your peers. Is something that is a little bit more on the priority side, and that was not really communicated to me in the in the engineering introductory courses that I took. It was more about here's the software are here is the engineering development process and here are some skills that you may need and the. In the distant future or may not need it was more centered around. I think that the more center round of center round. Of being able to. Say that there that Oregon State is one of the top engineering schools and maybe it's in Oregon, where really good engineering. But that does leave out a little bit of. Well, how should that look? What kind of culture should you create within your community and whether that was the kind of. What is the kind of community that should be built from the first place? There is no really. There's no really like pushing to say at least in that you campus to have a strong or even build a relationship with your partners that you work with the team projects or. In my cultural background, there is a big, big emphasis on I already talked about how education and that plays a huge role on. What my goals are and how I want to. Align my career with. With what goes on. But one of the biggest the biggest things that I can contribute in the sense that. And that. Contribute in their college of engineering. And something that gives me gives me a good. Like boost in and like saying just. Like one of my strengths, just to say, is also the cultural identity that comes from my background about like perseverance and hard work. I and at this point I almost see those as a granted, like to some extent, I sometimes I absolutely feel that I have to work harder than my peers just because, I mean, I think it's explicitly stated and some of the research and not not quite the place or time to get into that. But as like maybe like perseverance is one of the best strengths, bigger strength that I would. Align myself with. And that just comes from I think more stems from like knowing. Knowing that something that you want to accomplish takes a lot of hard work. And without that hard work, there is nothing you can accomplish. I admire and I so I also have a little bit of a wrestling background. One of my one of my wrestling teammates, he he was a very good wrestler and he's now. I think. I think he's. I think he has one more year at Oregon State. He. He's like he would have, like, hard work mottos and. And I mean, like, his biggest secret about being so successful in wrestling. And that's kind of a little bit about how I see it myself. And the ironic thing is that it's not really a secret at all. And it's a little bit interesting about how it come from two completely different cultures because he does not identify as Hispanic as he is white and has. Isn't a is in a different social and economic classes. Me But I mean both of us having a wrestling background and before that, like having my dad had. Like, worked as hard as he did and that kind of give it away but. The biggest secret is that, like, hard work pays off and you, like, you put in the work. You set aside the hours, you you, you sit down. You put a pen to pen to a paper. I mean, like 30 years ago, it was it was not necessarily that you put a pen to paper. It's that you put a. A cherry bucket and strapped to your back, as my dad did when I first got here. I guess maybe a little bit more than 30 years ago. Put a pen to paper, sit down, do the work. And as I mean, you have to have the tools. You have to be able to know. What strokes to make, where the strokes go. But as in pencil strokes, you sit down and you put in the hours. I think. And. And it pays off. I mean. It comes. I think it comes at a pretty big price for being as far as being like part of the School of Electrical Engineering and Computer science just because I mean, it's a STEM field. It's a it's a STEM field and that we want to. It's a STEM field and we want to do our best to. I mean, it's a difficult subject. This is what I meant. And. I did get thrown a little bit off drive, but. That kind of does tie in to how. How it takes a very, very lot of strokes for the College of Engineering. Electrical engineering and computer science. And that might be something worth worth exploring in the as an administrator or someone who directs the curriculum for how the College of Engineering works, I think there are definitely ways that people, people can get around. I like doing doing what is expected of them. And but at the same time, it's also a balance of you want to. You want to be able to find a way to challenge your students and maybe prioritize a little bit more about their well-being and how how that turns out, especially if they come from an underprivileged background. And that is probably the. The gists and. I think. I'd like to. And. Think of some of the final thoughts that I might have for for this self ethnography is that this approach for figuring out what is kind of what some of the themes for the underserved communities at Oregon State is. I mean, it's a great approach. But if if we kind of just sit back and hand it over to administration, it might be something that gets tossed to the side or ignored. But it has to kind of have to come. Come from the bottom up. And it's it's all about how how we can empower students to to commit themselves and to be advocates of what's going on. And I think the communities and how how we can empower empower the students and create more of a collective consciousness about how how change happens and what needs to. What's what's going on in the first place, which is why it's such a great study and how do we get from where we are now and where we like to be within the College of UCSD and how that takes and should involve like student direct input and student directed and student led outreach and. And. And that overall Oregon State is a really great place. But but there's always, always, always room for improvement. So. Thank you for. Listening to my self ethnography.

**Speaker 1** [00:35:30] Thank you so much, Fernando, for offering your story.

**Speaker 2** [00:35:36] Yeah.