

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Q&A

with **Yaneli Cruz,**
Third-Year Engineering
Student from Los Angeles,
California



What made you choose engineering?

My sister went to the University of California, Berkeley, for mechanical engineering when I was 2 years old, and she always made engineering seem fun and cool, so she quickly became someone I looked up to and wanted to emulate.

What has been your favorite class and why?

My favorite class so far has been one that I took for my ethnic studies minor, SPAN 350 with Professor René Carrasco. As important as STEM is for innovation and advancement in society, the arts and cultural studies are equally important for the human spirit. They help us understand identity, history and the social forces that shape our communities. Studying the arts and ethnic studies encourages empathy, critical thinking and self-reflection, qualities that are essential not only for being a well-rounded student but also for being a thoughtful and responsible member of society.

What made this class especially meaningful was the way Carrasco challenged us to think deeply about the narratives we have been told our entire lives. Rather than simply memorizing historical events or literary interpretations, he encouraged us to analyze where these narratives come from, whose perspectives they represent and whose voices might be missing. Through discussions and readings, we explored how history and culture are often shaped by those in positions of power, reinforcing the idea that history is written by the victors.

This approach pushed me to move beyond passive learning and actively question and



That experience helped me realize that engineering isn't just about building things. It's really a way of thinking. It involves asking questions, forming hypotheses, testing ideas and improving designs based on results.

interpret the material. It taught me to look at stories, history and cultural narratives with a more critical lens and to consider how different perspectives can reshape our understanding of the past and present. That intellectual challenge, combined with the opportunity to explore my own cultural background and identity, made SPAN 350 one of the most impactful and memorable classes I have taken so far.

What's your dream job after graduation?

After graduation, I'd love to be an analyst for the Los Angeles Dodgers. Being from L.A. and having a family that bleeds blue, all I've known growing up is Dodger baseball, so it would be very exciting to work at the stadium in day-to-day operations and analytics.

What is your favorite place in San Luis Obispo County and why?

My favorite place is definitely Avila Beach because I love to swim, but anywhere with my friends will always be fun.

Are you part of any extracurriculars on or off campus?

Tons! I'm currently a tech officer with Women Involved in Software and Hardware, the social media manager for Color Coded, a mentor with Cal Poly Scholars, a community adviser in continuing student housing, the recording secretary for the coed engineering fraternity Theta Tau and a research scholar through the BEACoN research program.

If you have taken part in an internship recently, would you mind sharing your experience?

Recently, I served as the operations lead intern for the San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services during the annual Point-in-Time Count, a nationwide effort that collects data on unsheltered homelessness to inform funding and policy decisions. In this role, I coordinated operational logistics for over 200 volunteers across multiple survey locations, developed standardized field protocols for dozens of survey teams and helped test the county's survey collection app prior to deployment to ensure the data collection process ran smoothly. The experience was incredibly rewarding because I was able to contribute to work that directly impacts people facing homelessness in the community. It showed me how technology, organization and data-driven decision-making can support meaningful social change.