

BELONGING IN *ceat* with Jonathan Bernal

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Programs

Jonathan Bernal is a senior majoring in Fire Protection and Safety Engineering Technology in the College of Engineering, Architecture and Technology (CEAT) at Oklahoma State University (OSU).

Jonathan has always been intrigued with fire science and life safety. In New York City, New York, he worked as a commercial fire alarm technician and a volunteer fire fighter. While serving in these two roles Jonathan quickly learned his colleagues were twice his age and did not have a four-year college degree. This motivated him to go back to college.



Seeking a fire protection degree led Jonathan to realize that universities with degrees in this field were limited. He decided to tour the Oklahoma State Stillwater campus which would be over 1,500 miles away from home. During Jonathan's flight to Oklahoma, he met an OSU student who offered him a ride to his hotel. Being a native New Yorker this odd gesture took him by surprise.

The following day, Jonathan toured the campus and met numerous people who were very helpful and went out of their way to accommodate him and answer his questions. The generosity and hospitality of strangers who would soon be advisors, professors, and peers led Jonathan to attend at Oklahoma State University.

Jonathan shared that as a non-traditional student he has experienced personal challenges when sharing his life experiences with his peers on group projects. He has learned to put ego and experience aside and let his

younger peers take the lead.

Other challenges Jonathan has faced as a CEAT student has been micro-aggressions from his peers. He learned to ask himself if certain situations are worth a response and when he did address issues to stand behind his convictions.

Jonathan shared that dealing with micro-aggressions is very hard because sometimes he is unaware its taking place and the other is deciding not to give value to that voice. He continued by saying, people are unaware of their unconscious biases, especially in the classroom where the topic is technical and unrelated to the problems in society.

Academically, Jonathan has taken advantage of the tutoring resources at the Math Learning Success Center and shared that his two biggest support systems have been his friends of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE) and the brotherhood of the Sigma Lambda Beta Fraternity.



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Jonathan said, attending SHPE's national conference with over 7,000 latinx people was very inspirational--seeing thousands of other engineers who looked like him was the motivation he needed to continue his career.

Jonathan shared, the person who has impacted him the most is Mr. Craig Carter of CEAT Student Academic Services. He has provided Jonathan with a vast number of resources such as, seeking financial assistance, the Oklahoma Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (OK-LSAMP), letters of recommendation, and meeting his parents, to name a few.

The guidance Mr. Carter provided was very impactful for Jonathan because his parents have been out of college for a while and when they attended they spoke very little English, which resulted in Jonathan being privy to certain information.

Since coming to OSU in 2017, Jonathan has actively served in the

OSU CEAT Community as an Ambassador of CEAT Prospective Student Services, an executive board member of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers and as a board member of the CEAT Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Student Advisory Board. These active roles have helped Jonathan start and build valuable relationships with other CEAT students and organizations.

Jonathan has given back to the OSU CEAT community by helping fundraise for SHPE members to attend regional conferences, led rewriting SHPE's by-laws for efficiency, career fair preparation, and mentored the current SHPE President, Armando Covarrubias.

Jonathan remembered his own adversity and wanted to share the wisdom he received from his own mentors. He believes having a support system is the cornerstone to success.

Jonathan's advice to anyone

interested in pursuing an engineering degree is to become a CEAT Ambassador early. Secondly, do not rush getting the degree. He says, "the degree will only say your name, not how long it took to finish." He encourages to stay focused on the degree and not student organizations. To learn personal limitations and get comfortable saying no. He continued, that there is no proving one's belonging, just do the work and be yourself.

For Jonathan, inclusion is communication with a goal of collaboration, because without communication diversity and inclusion cease to exist.

Jonathan Bernal belongs in CEAT because who does not? Reach for the sky.

Belonging In CEAT is a Diversity and Inclusion publication that highlights academic experiences of students in the College of Engineering, Architecture and Technology at Oklahoma State University.

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