

Laura Vogt:

Hello and welcome to The (Not So) Secret Guide to Being a Berkeley Engineer. I'm your host Laura Vogt, the Associate Director for Marketing and Communications for the College of Engineering. And this week we have two Berkeley engineering students, Sydney Tsai and Hitesh Kamisetty, and they're here to tell us about the Engineering Student Council and student organizations. So, thank you both so much for being here today.

Sydney Tsai:

Yeah, of course. Thank you so much for having us.

Hitesh Kamisetty:

Yeah, we definitely appreciate the invite.

Laura Vogt:

And so let's start with some introductions. Sydney, why don't you tell us about your major and maybe a student organization that you would recommend and what you do for fun in Berkeley?

Sydney Tsai:

Yeah, for sure. So, my name is Sydney and I'm going into my third year studying EECS. And then in terms of student orgs, I would say that they're all really great orgs on campus, but I would definitely recommend finding a fun social org that's not really related to what you're studying, because it really helps build a community of friends around you while also allowing you to balance your school and social life. And then as what I do for fun, I usually love trying out all the new restaurants around Berkeley just because there's so many. And then I also love just hopping on the 6 bus, going down Telegraph and maybe going to watch a concert at the Fox Theater.

Laura Vogt:

Oh, I hadn't even thought about how easy it is to get to the Fox Theater from the bus.

Sydney Tsai:

Yeah, it's so great, because my house, I live two minutes away from the 6 bus stop, so I can just get on the bus.

Laura Vogt:

That's awesome. Thank you. Thank you so much for being here today. Hitesh your turn. So, can you tell us your major and organization that you would recommend and what you do for fun?

Hitesh Kamisetty:

Yeah, so I'm currently studying EECS as well as economics, and I would definitely want to piggyback off what Sydney was able to say about I definitely think it's really important to be able to find a club where you really feel socially, because I think that's probably one of the main roles that the clubs have. And a lot of students find that most of their friend groups tend to revolve around the clubs that they join. Something that I did for fun that's completely independent for my

major is I joined a dance team here at Berkeley. I joined a team called Zahanat, and that's been a great experience getting to know some of the guys as well as being able to compete in a national circuit. We were able to find interest outside of academics.

But on the other hand, I do think it's pretty cool to join clubs that kind of relate to your major as well. For example, I know IUR has a great club called IISE that helps bring students of the same sort of major together. I think some of the fun stuff to do here at Berkeley in addition to the restaurants, I really enjoyed, I think the rock climbing place I just opened up on Telegraph. I think that's been a great experience as well as just walking down Telegraph. I think there's a lot of stuff that you get to see outside of just the restaurants. A lot of people you get to meet as and even I think Taco Tuesday is also a great sort of experience to go to if you're old enough, of course. So, yeah.

Laura Vogt:

Thank you. And again, thank you both so much for being here today. So, we spoke with Marvin Lopez, which I actually haven't done. We spoke with Marvin Lopez, the Director of Programs in Engineering Student Services about the importance of co-curricular activities. And one of the options of getting involved in outside of the classroom is definitely student organizations. So let's start with the organization that you're both here representing, which is Engineering Student Council or ESC and can you tell me more about your student council and what your roles are?

Sydney Tsai:

Yeah, so ESC is basically the student government of the College of Engineering. So, basically we're both co-presidents in the club and we put on a bunch of great events for the engineering students on campus as well as the Blue and Gold Certification Program, which we'll go into more in detail later on. But some events include E week. So, in February one of the biggest engineering events on campus is called E Week. And we just do a carnival. We have E ball, we have a bunch of arts and crafts, and it's just a way for us to celebrate engineering on campus. We also do stuff like research week, providing some tech talks on campus as well.

Hitesh Kamisetty:

And even beyond that, we also really focus on advocacy. So, our goal is to be able to advocate for the engineering student body and we hope that students see this as an avenue to be able to just serve as advocacy for them, whether it be about majors or whether it be with the college or stuff along those lines.

Laura Vogt:

And so how long have both of you been involved in ESC?

Sydney Tsai:

So, I joined my freshman year fall semester, so I've been in here, I'm going into my fifth semester in ESC, yeah.

Hitesh Kamisetty:

Yeah. And I've also been involved since my first semester. I was one of the, I guess lucky or unlucky as you can phrase it, group that came in during COVID. So, this is one of my first social groups, social as well as professional groups, I was able to be part of. So, I've been part of it my entire year. So, I'm entering my seventh semester.

Laura Vogt:

And if other students wanted to get involved, how do they do that?

Hitesh Kamisetty:

Yeah, so we have sort of a rolling admission cycle that opens up at the beginning of the fall and spring. We kind of do encourage students to join towards the beginnings of each semester, just it kind of helps us with their planning. And we're an open club. We are Blue and Gold certified. We have to be host the program and we'll dive into it a bit more in just a second. But idea being that we will want all students to be able to join and have a great experience within the College of Engineering.

Sydney Tsai:

Yeah, so we have a bunch of committees in our club. So, for example, we have an IVP, you can join the EVP committee, E week, [inaudible] treasurer, communications, internal affairs. So, there's really a wide range of different committees that you can join depending on what you are interested in.

Laura Vogt:

I like the idea that what you're doing isn't necessarily engineering related, so you can learn about communications, you can learn about being a treasurer and budgeting and things along those lines.

Sydney Tsai:

Yeah, exactly. That's kind of why I joined ESC because I knew that I would be bombarded with so many school classes to take so many technical courses that I wanted to make an impact on the College of Engineering without having to burn myself out with even more coding or projects.

Hitesh Kamisetty:

It's definitely a great avenue to be able to explore interests, maybe tangentially related to engineering, but maybe not directly engineering.

Laura Vogt:

So, let's dive a little bit more into the Blue and Gold Certification that we've mentioned a couple of times now. So, what is the Blue and Gold certification?

Hitesh Kamisetty:

Yeah, so the Blue and Gold Certification is a program that we have created in partnering with the ESS, essentially a way to make sure that students have an opportunity to be able to access organizations regardless of their background. So, we want to make sure students that might

have not had the same privileges as some other students to make sure they still are able to find a community. And kind of pointing back to what I was saying earlier, most students, including myself, have found their major friend groups as well as their major social experiences kind of surrounding student organizations.

And we want to make sure that we can get as many engineering students as possible to be able to find their own communities. And we've partnered with over 50 student organizations at this point that have the same sort of goal and that also help provide students the sort of technical experience and technical background that can help them in their future. So, essentially trying to create a marriage of a social experience as well as a technical experience without needing an arduous technical background just to be able to step foot into the organizations.

Laura Vogt:

So, the organizations- Oh sorry.

Sydney Tsai:

Oh no, go ahead.

Laura Vogt:

Oh, the organizations that have been Blue and Gold Certified, what do they have to do to get certified? What steps that they had to take?

Sydney Tsai:

Yeah, so on our website at esc.berkeley.edu, all they have to do is fill out our Google form and it's basically a bunch of questions about what kind of processes that applicants have to go through in order to join the club. And then after the form they have to go through a Blue and Gold Training, which I believe Hitesh can go more into detail about since he was EVP the last two years, I believe. And he's worked a lot with Blue and Gold. So, once clubs do get approved, they get a lot of different resources including some facilities from our facilities' director. So, we provide some rooms as well as storage for clubs. We also provide funding for Blue and Gold Certified Clubs.

Hitesh Kamisetty:

Yeah.

Laura Vogt:

Oh, go ahead.

Hitesh Kamisetty:

Go ahead.

Laura Vogt:

I was going to say, what is the benefit of being Blue and Gold Certified for the students that want to be in clubs? Why do they want that to join a club that is Blue and Gold?

Hitesh Kamisetty:

So, I think the main reason someone should look towards joining a Blue and Gold Organization is for three core values that they share, first equity inclusion to make sure that all members feel equally respected as well as are still able to have a great time. And I think you can also see students from different sort of backgrounds to broaden your horizon if you maybe weren't exposed to students maybe from different parts of the country, maybe from different sort of financial backgrounds and kind of give you an opportunity to mingle with the students outside your comfort zone.

I think the second part is creating safe environments. So, safety, integrity, we take very seriously to make sure that clubs are being safe both socially, but more importantly also in terms of any activities that they might do. And we provide trainings to that effect, whether that be financial treasurer trainings, whether that be SVSH prevention trainings and stuff of that nature.

And lastly, we want to make sure that student organizations are transparent with both the members that they have as well as towards the outside committee that they're trying to recruit. And we have certain guidelines about how they can recruit students, what they can look at, what sort of information that they can have in order to create the most safe and welcoming environments possible.

Laura Vogt:

Excellent, thank you. I know that I've heard colloquially in the past of students having a really hard time just to find an organization to be part of or that to prepare to apply to be an organization was harder than applying to get a job. And so I know that you're definitely trying to make it so that it's not that high stakes of a thing to do to be part of these organizations.

Sydney Tsai:

Yeah, definitely. A lot of clubs on campus, especially technical and maybe even business clubs, they require multiple rounds of interviews. They do social rounds and they even do technical rounds, which is kind of insane to think about when we're all in college. We're trying to get that experience through these clubs. But these clubs require experience just to get in.

Laura Vogt:

What other ways is it good to investigate the organizations and find out more?

Sydney Tsai:

Yeah, so for us, we do plan on tabling on Sproul during the first couple of weeks of when the new semester starts. And so we'll definitely have a list of all the Blue and Gold Certified Clubs on our table. Students could always come approach us and ask questions about ESC as well as the Blue and Gold Clubs that do fall under the organization.

Hitesh Kamisetty:

And we also have our great website, esc.berkeley.edu that you guys can check out. Should have most of our information up to date. And we definitely update it every time we try to recruit new members. So, expect there to be some updates in the next maybe month or so.

Laura Vogt:

Can you tell me a little bit more about some of the resources that you offer to students?

Hitesh Kamisetty:

Yeah, I think Sydney kind of touched on it a bit earlier in our conversation, but some of the resources we offer are funding. So, the way it works is ASC delegates the funds for the College of Engineering organizations to us and we assign those accordingly. So, we expect all engineering student organizations to go through us. We also offer a lot of spaces so they can actually store any material that they have or they would want to store. And we offer meeting spaces. So, these are the primary sort of resources that we offer, but additionally, we also offer additional trainings. We offer constant contact with ESS in order just to facilitate any sort of conversation that need to happen and we can actually navigate needs that these student organizations might have with a larger college of engineering because as we serve as the engineering student government as well. So, it kind of helps in various different aspects.

Sydney Tsai:

Yeah and then so for students who aren't necessarily in any Blue and Gold Clubs or in ESC, we also hold some other events including, like I said before E week. We've partnered with ESS before to do some t-shirt giveaways. We've held study sessions in Bechtel Engineering Center, which is where we had our facilities and people can just get together, hang out, we hold multiple types of events. You just have to check out our Instagram at Berkeley ESC.

Laura Vogt:

Excellent and can you each share with me one of your favorite memories of working with ESC?

Sydney Tsai:

I would say definitely the community that the club has fostered. So, I remember it was last semester when we all got together for movie night. So, we were in what was the big auditorium where we have GMs?

Hitesh Kamisetty:

Sibley.

Sydney Tsai:

Oh yeah. So, we were in Sibley and so we put on Puss and Boots on the big projector screen. We had snacks and everything. It was so fun. And we even planned playing Mario Kart on the big projector, having a game night and everything.

Hitesh Kamisetty:

Yeah, I think for me it would probably a bit earlier on in when I joined [inaudible] why I stayed with the ESC because even during the COVID semesters where we were all virtual and I was actually back home in Georgia, right? So I was completely separated from everything going on at Berkeley. So, we were able to have weekly virtual game nights and that was a really cool way to be able to interact with students at Berkeley as well as foster more connections that would

guide me throughout my years at Berkeley and kind of why I stayed and wanted to give back to the organization as president, as one of the co-presidents. Yeah.

Laura Vogt:

That's awesome. I'm really glad that you were able to find a way to connect when nobody was actually meeting each other.

Hitesh Kamisetty:

Yeah, I think it was a really cool thing that we were able to do. I think we continue to do, albeit we kind of do more in person now, granted that everyone is in person, but I think it was a cool kind of experience to transition with.

Laura Vogt:

And just on a personal level, how do you handle your time management with the number of organizations that you get involved in and your studies and anything else that you're doing?

Sydney Tsai:

Yeah, go for it.

Hitesh Kamisetty:

Yeah, so I think the main thing is the wonderful team that we have with us. I think every year we were, I think at least through my past few years in ESC, we were always able to have a wonderful team that was able, so we were actually able to delegate our tasks out and different sort of committees or response for different sort of actions. For example, I think the treasurers were really helpful in dealing with the financial aspects, whereas EVP dealt with more the policies and the presidents were more communicating with the external stakeholders. So, kind of our role right now.

So, it was really cool to be able, so, I think first of all, our wonderful team, and second of all, I think it's a tip for all incoming freshmen as well, Google Calendar will be your friend kind of scheduling everything you want out. And I think the biggest thing is not just when you have stuff to do, but when you want time to yourself as well. Whether it to be relax or to work, have that scheduled in. It works for some people, it doesn't work for others, but I think that was a great sort of tool for me.

Sydney Tsai:

Yeah, adding on what Hitesh said, definitely, definitely my calendar is the number one app that I use all the time on my phone. But one other thing is I always make sure to schedule my classes so I'm not too overwhelmed with the courses that I'm taking. So, Berkeley Time is a really, really great website that I always use every semester when I'm scheduling my classes. And then I make sure that alongside what classes I'm taking, I try not to overwhelm myself with too many clubs as well.

I would say do your research when you are looking into what clubs to apply for and how much time commitment you have to set aside for that club. And also make sure to take some mental health days. This might not be the best advice, but it's okay if you skip one class or two classes

throughout the semester. It's totally fine. Make sure that you do take care of yourself though, because Berkeley is a hard school and everyone is amazing there, but people do get burned out for sure.

Laura Vogt:

Is there any resource that you learned about that you want to make sure students are using as they come in?

Sydney Tsai:

For me, definitely Berkeley Time, but I also check Reddit a lot actually about what students think about what kind of classes that they've taken before, how the professors are, stuff like that.

Hitesh Kamisetty:

I would probably say, I think first of all I do want to stress School Calendar. I think at least for me that's been super helpful. But I think other than that, I would probably say the people around you, right? So, even if you don't really know someone, especially if you're a freshman, people are really willing to talk, right? And some people might even have either siblings or other friends that have already kind of been through the first few years at Berkeley that they can give you some feedback or some advice about what class to take, what not to take. I mean most people here avoid the Monday 8:00 ams, but I think Berkeley also has some three hour once a week classes and I tell you to avoid those, if you can. So, stuff of that nature. So, trying to get some general suggestions and I think as we're here, student organizations also I think serve a great resource for students to be able to actually find out more information.

Sydney Tsai:

Yeah, definitely. I would like to add onto that actually. So, I think talking to your peers, whether you're in class, so when you are sitting down in lecture halls, just talk to the people around you, create group chats, join the class discords. Those are really helpful when you're kind of like, "Oh, what homework is due tomorrow?" You can just ask the group chat, ask the discord. But those are really helpful resources.

Laura Vogt:

Is there anything we haven't talked about with ESC or student orgs that you want to add?

Hitesh Kamisetty:

I think the one thing I would add, and this is maybe tangential to the whole conversation that we're having right now, but I think it's super important for incoming freshmen to think about is as Sydney said, and as I was saying earlier, try to talk to as many people as you can, particularly in those large lecture classes. I think one kind of weird thing that happens that not many people talk but I noticed is, your friends that you meet in the first few weeks of your college career aren't necessarily the friends you end up staying with for the rest of the four years. There's a lot of temporary friendships and stuff and they're not necessarily a bad thing, right? It's kind of everyone navigating the kind of college and the entire university opportunity. And I think Berkeley is very different from a lot of state schools in the fact that first of all, California is a huge

state, so it's not like there's some, I mean there are, right, but there's not a ton of people necessarily from the same high schools.

There are some that stand out, but on the broad scheme of things and there's a lot of out of state and international students as well. So, I think it's really cool to just meet with other people until you find your community and don't necessarily shy away from that, I would say. And that could also happen with student orgs as well. So, you kind join some that you don't necessarily vibe with. It's perfectly okay to find some that are, find a group of people that you really want to hang out with. So, I think that's also where can Blue and Gold can help as well, as well as ESC providing different sort of communities that are welcoming to different sort of backgrounds. Yeah.

Laura Vogt:

Did you have an experience shopping around for student orgs or did you do a lot of going to the meetings and meeting them? Or did you do a lot more research online or?

Hitesh Kamisetty:

I think for me it kind of just came down to going to a lot of info sessions. I think ESC was one of the few I didn't, because ESC works differently in that aspect, whether we want everyone to be in and you can kind of test the committee out, go switch committees or if you want to drop this also perfectly okay. Although we do encourage you to stay, but for most clubs going to info sessions, talking with some of the members, I think nothing really beats that. Even what you read online, those are just experiences from other people, but what you actually feel from the members themselves, I think that's the most important part of student orgs. It's not what was five years ago, it's who the members are now and what kind of community that they've kind of fostered and created because those are some of the stuff that you can see online, like older sort of comments versus you actually going to the [inaudible] meeting them. Yeah.

Sydney Tsai:

So for me-

Laura Vogt:

And Sydney, what did you want to add? Sorry.

Sydney Tsai:

Oh yeah, no worries. So, for me, most of the clubs that I'm in, I found through Sproul tabling. So, while I was walking to class, I would just collect the flyers that people were handing out and then I read them, made a list of the ones that I did want to join and that I was interested in. And then like Hitesh said, I went to the info sessions.

Laura Vogt:

And was there anything that you wanted to add about ESC or student orgs that we hadn't talked about yet?

Sydney Tsai:

I would say jumping off of what Hitesh said about advice, if I can go into that topic a little more, just taking every opportunity that you can while you're at college, because there really isn't any other time in life where you're one house away from your best friends and you can just knock on their door, go eat dinner together, lay on the grass on the glade at night watching the stars. This is the perfect time for you to make new memories, try out new, try taking risks and everything. So, just take everything, take every opportunity that is given to you would be my biggest piece of advice.

Laura Vogt:

Oh, I like that. Well, thank you both so much for joining me today.

Sydney Tsai:

Yeah, of course. Thank you again.

Hitesh Kamisetty:

Thank you very much.

Laura Vogt:

And thank you to everyone for listening this week. I'll be back next week with more resources available to you as a virtual engineering student.