

[Interviewer] So, if you want to go ahead and introduce yourself...

[Barbara] My name is Barbara. I'm a senior majoring in MS&E, and my concentration within MS&E is organizations, technology and policy.

[Interviewer] Can you tell me a little bit about your background? Like where did you grow up?

[Barbara] Sure. I was born and raised in Honduras. Honduras is a very small and underdeveloped country in Central America, but I love it. I basically grew up in the middle of nowhere; I had to wake up to go to school at four in the morning every day, but that definitely taught me a lot in terms of resilience and dedication. And now I'm interested in pursuing a career in international development and that definitely stemmed from growing up in Honduras.

[Interviewer] And so the next question is, how did you become interested in engineering?

[Barbara] I have always had a passion for problem solving, and at first I thought it was mostly numbers and math. So I thought of pursuing a career, a major in math. But I quickly realized that it wasn't only the math part of that I was passionate about, but also problem solving in terms of people and organizations, and definitely MS&E gave me a platform to do all of this. And that's why I decided to pursue MS&E.

[Interviewer] Can you tell us a little bit about your area of concentration? What do you work on or what have you worked on, and how did you get interested in it?

[Barbara] Sure. My area of concentration is organizations, technology and policy. I am particularly interested in international development, and I feel like I'm constantly able to tie my concentration to this interest. For example, the policy classes I have taken were pretty useful when I studied abroad at Oxford. Because I focused my tutorial on comparative international education policy. Also, for example, like this year I wrote my honors thesis on the impact of preschool education on students' achievement scores in different countries in Central America. And definitely MS&E and my concentration were pretty useful to that, in terms of coding and data analysis, but also what the implications to policy are of that. So at the end of the day, I'm interested in sustainable development and I feel like OTP has allowed me to navigate that realm.

[Interviewer] So were you actively communicating with people from those countries as well? Or how did you gather data?

[Barbara] Sure. I worked with an advisor in the school of education. His name is Martin Carnoy and we work with this UNESCO data set. So it had surveys for I think like around 64,000 people. But definitely, my background in MS&E was super helpful because I had to learn how to code in a different language to process the data. And reaching out to people who have taught me in the past in MS&E on how to approach the method and the results section was pretty useful.

[Interviewer] That's awesome. Were you able to share any of your recommendations with people that could use the results?

[Barbara] Yeah. Actually I interviewed when I was kind of trying to decide what to write on, I interviewed one of the ex-presidents of Honduras and my main question was, what do you think I should focus on that would have an impact or a bigger impact in terms of where I am now at life. And he

told me education was like the main thing. So that's why I originally pursued it. And he has a nonprofit that focuses on preschool education. So I'm hoping to share my research with him to be able to guide the practices that happen within that NGO. And I feel like because preschool education is so big, there's so many policy talks around it in Honduras. And Honduras is a smaller country so I think I would be able to share my research with people who actually have a say on those decisions.

[Interviewer] That's great. That's awesome. So the next question is, what are your career plans after Stanford and how did you decide on them?

[Barbara] So I am planning to pursue a career in international development. To be more specific, I want to help fight poverty through sustainable solutions and potentially go back to Honduras one day. And once I have the expertise and the knowledge to be able to create something that's impactful in Honduras. But as of now, of course, I don't know what that might be in the future.

[Interviewer] And then, what most excites you about your future?

[Barbara] I guess I have been in school for the past, I don't know, over 15 years and I'm used to this going to class and turning in a piece, that of type of lifestyle. So I'm excited to not be doing that anymore and actually experience the real world and everything that comes with it. Hopefully after coronavirus is over, I'll be able to travel and do stuff like that. But eventually I do want to go to grad school and I'm pretty pumped about that. And I feel like in a couple of years I will have more so of a focus and I'll know what I want to do in terms of grad school. So I'm also excited to figure that out.

[Interviewer] So I guess what's your plan for once you graduate? Are you going to be starting work with somebody or are you just still...

[Barbara] Well, I'm still trying to decide because I have to figure out a lot of immigration things.

[Interviewer] Gotcha.

[Barbara] That part is not up to me, but it will be in the realm of international development.

[Interviewer] Okay. So the next question is, what advice do you have for future students and how can they make the best use of their time in MS&E and at Stanford?

[Barbara] I think I have a lot of advice, but I guess the biggest one is to take or seize all opportunities that come their way. I feel like Stanford is really good at opening their doors to you if you have a passion or an interest that you are, that you want to pursue. And so I would recommend people to just do it. So for example, for me, I love to travel and I've been able to go to so many different countries and continents with Stanford and that's something that has really helped me grow. So I would recommend for people to do that.

More specifically within MS&E, I would say that sometimes it's hard to get to know faculty one on one, because lectures are big and you just take that class and don't take a class with that professor again. But I would recommend if you have, I guess, if the research that professor is doing resonates with you, I would totally recommend for students who reach out to them and have a conversation because that can spark other interests in you or like you may realize that's not actually what you like. And I think you can really grow from reaching out to like faculty members. And that's something that I didn't do until a couple years into Stanford. So I would recommend people to do that.

And I guess lastly, I would advise people to live in the present. I feel like at Stanford it's very easy to focus on like, what am I going to do next? And like recruiting. And that is very important, but given the current situation, and I'm a senior this year. And I guess winter quarter, I was super focused in school and now I don't get a spring quarter and I know that's the case for a lot of people, but just to keep that in mind.

[Interviewer] That's good advice. I think that, definitely being present in the moment is important. So the next question is, what will you miss most about Stanford? And I guess the Bay Area, if you're leaving?

[Barbara] I guess this is pretty cliché, but the people for sure. In Honduras, I wasn't exposed to people from different backgrounds. We don't really get people from other countries coming in that often. And coming here, I have learned so much about people from different countries and different states and backgrounds and experiences. And that has been a huge part of my growth here. So I will miss having those conversations and seeing people that I love every day and having mentors and advisors that I can constantly reach out to. So yeah, that's going to be the biggest. And the campus, it's so beautiful. I'll miss that.