



STEM Student Profile



Drake Gonzales

Civil Engineering Major, transferring to CalPoly SLO

Future Plans:

- Transfer to CalPoly to continue studying civil engineering
- Pursue a career in public works

Advice for Students:

- Remember that it is normal to face setbacks like failing classes
- Know that at MESA, there are people who want to help



After serving in the Marines, Drake Gonzales wasn't sure if he'd return to a classroom again. Now, just a few years later, he's set to transfer to Cal Poly San Los Obispo with a Stanford internship under his belt.

Through the College of San Mateo's MESA program, he found a network of support to ground him through the difficult transition from the military. "It really helped to meet other students who were pursuing STEM, and being able to work with them really helped," Gonzales said.

The first-generation college student grew up in the San Diego area. Though he struggled in his classes, he excelled in his high school's junior ROTC program. Then he joined the Marines. "I just wanted to join just to get the experience, but also serve my country,"

Gonzales said.

He served for four years, including a tour in Iraq in 2019. After he was discharged, he moved to the Bay Area and looked for community colleges nearby. "I found CSM when I was doing my college searches, and it looked like the best option," Gonzales said. "(The MESA program) stood out to me."

"MESA definitely gave me a good place to interact and get to know other students who were also in STEM."

Though Gonzales had trouble with math in high school, he was fascinated by STEM and decided to

pursue civil engineering.

He's since taken advantage of nearly every opportunity at MESA, from tutoring and study groups to a student leadership retreat in Santa Cruz. There, he met MESA students from across the state for a weekend of team building and reflection on their shared journeys.

"MESA definitely gave me a good place to interact and get to know other students who were also in STEM," Gonzales said. "It's nice to know people who are in similar situations."

MESA also led Gonzales to a prestigious research internship at Stanford's Microfluidics Laboratory in 2023. Microfluidics, the science of manipulating fluids through microscopic channels, has applications in cell and molecular biology. Alongside a tight-knit

team, he ran cutting-edge experiments with liquids at the nanoscale.

"It was really cool to know what I was doing was part of new research," Gonzales said. "People always gave good feedback, and it was always a really cool environment to be around. It made us, the student interns, want to do better and be passionate."

After three years at CSM, Gonzales is set to continue his civil engineering studies at CalPoly. He hopes to pursue a career in public works. Anchored by MESA, his academic journey has proved to be deeply fulfilling, he said. His advice?

"Even if you have setbacks or fail classes, everyone's path can take turns. And that's normal," He said. "At MESA, there are people out there who want to help."