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**Program:** *Oregon State University*

**Placement:** *The Congressional Hispanic Leadership Institute (CHLI)*

## Journal Entry – Week 1

**Monday**-----

Monday morning, Memorial Day. One day away from the start of the CHCI Training. Was I nervous? Yes, very much so. I never thought I would be where I am today, but life is always full of surprises. I understand that I usually get really nervous when I do new things but for some reason, I feel like I'm way over my head with the internship. "What was I thinking", "You have no reason to be doing this, you are a mechanical engineering major, even more so, you could be taking a spot from someone who really deserves it."

Imposter syndrome. The focal point of my year so far, hearing people always talk about it, people who are more open with their mental health, funny enough, I believe that these people are stronger than me for admitting it. Pride can be one of the most powerful feelings, a source of motivation, but at this very moment, I can feel it holding me back. Reflection. At times like these, remembering the reason why you decided to do something can be really uplifting. I am from Salem, Oregon. Now if you didn't know, Salem is the capital of Oregon, but I wouldn't fault you for not knowing that. If you were to visit Salem, the only thing that would be of any sign that it was the state capital was the capital building itself. Salem is a pretty big city, there are some amazing sites to see, historical buildings that you can visit, the same for many places around the country. I attended McKay High School, which is located in North East Salem. I really love my community, it is one of the most diverse if not the most diverse areas of the city, but McKay high school, and the McKay area as many of the locals like to call it, is one of the

most underprivileged areas of my city. The school is not the biggest, it wasn't the nicest, and we didn't perform the best academically compared to the other schools. Actually, before I attended McKay, it was nationally ranked as one of the most dangerous schools to attend.

Although the school is improving its image, that still didn't mean we had improved funding or support from the community. Now it isn't that the community dislikes McKay, it's quite the opposite. Many of the community members want to see the students succeed. It's just that it is a very underprivileged community with very few resources. On top of the limited resources, we actually had one of the largest enrollments in the state, larger than any of the other high schools in the city. The last time I checked, McKay ranked top five in the state.

Personally, I was very fortunate to have a family that prioritized education. I always knew that college was going to be on my path and from early on, I knew that I wanted to be a part of the STEM Field. It wasn't until High School that I knew Mechanical Engineering was my future.

Sadly, many of my peers weren't granted the same opportunity. Many of the students weren't able to take their education too seriously. I knew some students that for them, school was their only escape, and after the last bell rang, they would be on their way to their first shift. The school lacked many resources and outlets for students, especially in the STEM field. That is what motivated me to apply for this internship. I want to learn more about public service and personally expand my knowledge on how to serve my community better so one day I can go back and provide the resources that the students not only need but the resources that they deserve.

On another note, I can already tell that this week is going to be very brutal for me. I will be missing the majority of my classes for the CHCI orientation, and that is unsettling. Whenever you miss class, you put yourself at risk of missing important information. Especially if it is your last week of class, some teachers rush to fit the remaining lecture into the week and there is the added stress of missing an update on upcoming exams and finals. It's important that when you know that you will be missing class, that you let your teacher know in advance and prepare to work ahead so you don't fall behind.

## **Tuesday**-----

Tuesday morning, the first day of CHCI training. I woke up 3 hours before my first meeting. I had a strange feeling. I am not one to normally feel anxious, so when I woke up, I was very confused about what I was feeling. I decided then and there that there was no better time to wake up and take a hot shower. My eyelids were still a bit heavy, my body a bit limp but I managed to drag myself into the bathroom. I got in and just laid on the floor of the shower. To be fair, this is my normal routine, the warmth of the water splashing over me makes my transition from sleeping in my bed to being fully awake a bit easier. After my shower, I heated up some frozen waffles, prepared myself a cup of coffee, and ate a cup of Greek yogurt. That was my breakfast for the morning. I still had two hours left before the training began.

Thankfully, I easily found something to take up my time in the morning. Homework, and lots of it. I knew I was going to have a pretty busy schedule this week so I made sure to get ahead of my homework, especially for my engineering class. MatLab assignments take me a good amount of time to complete, although it isn't a terribly challenging class, it makes up for the amount of time spent working on homework and other assignments for the class. Tuesdays

also mean quiz day for physics. It was the last quiz of the term and I wanted to end off on a good note.

I can confidently say that online classes have taken a great toll on me. It might not be as physically demanding compared to in-person classes, but the mental strain was very much present. I think starting off the year, I was excited. A transition towards adulthood, I have dreamt of this since middle school. I would have my own apartment as a freshman, opting out to live in the dorms for Covid reasons.

- 1.) I wasn't forced to go to school.
- 2.) I would actually enjoy what I was learning.
- 3.) I would also have my first taste of freedom.

When the time came, I realized it tasted disgusting.

Money was flying out of my pocket, although I was saving a lot of money by not living in the dorms, the initial cost didn't reflect that. First off, I didn't know that application fees were a thing, then when I got approved, I had to pay a down payment which was my first and last month of rent. I was starting to rethink my decisions.

Note to self: Make sure you have enough money saved if you are considering moving into an apartment.

Educationally, my first term went very well. I wasn't falling behind in work, but at the same time, college was really the only thing that I focused on. Second term came along and I decided I wanted to take on more classes and fill up my schedule. I started to do research and I joined SHPE, the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers. I started to sign up for different virtual events for the term, without first checking if I would have had time to attend them. I overwhelmed myself. I took on more than I can chew and it bit me in the butt. I would be lying if

I said I wasn't scared. I would stay up some nights and lay on my bed wondering if I would be fine. It was more than feeling overwhelmed, I was getting tired of the routine, maybe that's the reason I filled up my schedule. Zoom fatigue.

After orientation: I am in the presence of future leaders. These students are so well-spoken, it seems like they always have the right thing to say. Geographically, we are a diverse cohort, I don't think there was more than 1 student at each college. I was the only student from Oregon State University or Oregon for that matter. I felt proud to represent my school and state, but I still can't believe that I have this opportunity. Compared to the other students, I felt underwhelming.

Marco A. Davis, the President, and CEO of CHCI, or how I like to refer to him now, my new idol. Was I joking? Maybe a bit, but in all seriousness, I respect Mr. Davis. I hear it all the time, you enter college with the notion that your life will go in one direction, but when you leave, you are going in another direction. It's a scary thought to have if I am being frank. "Do I not know who I am or what I want", "How will I know that I found what I want to do" The way Mr. Davis spoke of his past was comforting to hear. It makes me hopeful of my own future, that there are greater things in life yet to come that I wouldn't even think is possible for me.

### **Wednesday**-----

My morning was similar to the day beforehand. An update on my physics quiz, I am happy with how I did on the quiz. The day was a bit stressful but for me to come out of the test feeling good made my night. Now, I had to look towards finals week.

After Orientation: It was a packed day. We had a speaker come in from the Pew Research Center present about the key demographic facts about the Latino population in the United States,

then we went over the program expectations for a CHCI intern, and we ended off the day with a show and tell that let the cohort get to know each other a little bit more.

Every day, I become prouder to be a part of such an amazing community. The interns are such amazing people and so welcoming, it's like they all knew each other beforehand. The objects that the interns shared were very personal and I felt like this activity brought our cohort closer together.

The presentation by Jens Manuel Krogstad from the Pew Research Center was very interesting. It went over the statistics of the growth of the Hispanic population throughout the country and some detailed statistics on the Hispanic population as a whole from educational attainment to Hispanic identity and its changing definition. I was really excited for this presentation, it was the first time I had ever met someone from the Pew Research Center, it felt like we were important. "Wow, the Pew Research Center came to speak to us, what an honor". This showed me the strength of CHCI and the connections that they have and it made me feel empowered to know that this person was now someone that I could reach out to.

CHCI is based in the East Coast which means that they are three hours ahead of the West Coast. This meant that for me, orientation ended at 3 PM. I was able to attend some of my classes after orientation, but I found it hard to concentrate in class. I was distracted. I was worn out. I was stressed. At this moment, I was kicking myself in the head for not planning out the end of the term. I had a list of homework assignments, a research project to work on, and preparing for upcoming exams. "Where do I start?" I spent the rest of the day working on homework.

**Thursday**-----

Today was very informative for interns working on the Hill. We had the Congressional Management Foundation give An Insider View of Capitol Hill and we had a workshop on writing for Capitol Hill. Although there wasn't a lot for me to relate to because I will be interning for CHLI, it actually piqued my interest to one day intern on the Hill. There was also so much that I learned that could transfer to any other job or internship. One piece of advice that stood out to me was prioritizing all tasks. What I mean by this is to take every task as if it was the most important task. Having this mentality assures that every task you take on is set to a high standard, and it shows the employer that you are committed to the company and assures that you are assigned better tasks or projects in the future.

The writing workshop was a very unique experience. The type of writing that is done on the Hill isn't something that I am totally used to. The writing was brief, concise, but it also had to be dense with background information and new information that would be useful to a congressman or women that doesn't have time to do all the research themselves.

I gained a new sense of appreciation for congressional staff. What they do is crucial to the success of their congressional members and the work environment is very fast-paced and very challenging to navigate. They are constantly being pulled in every direction but they are still held at a high standard and must perform at a high level if they want to keep their job. It also shows that members of congress have to be very smart and open to networking to find the right staff that would be of benefit to them. Our final task of the day was goal setting. "What did I want to accomplish in my time as an intern? What do I want to get out of it?". Reflection. I think to understand what I want to get out of my time as an intern, I have to remember why I wanted to be an intern.

I am a really shy person. I often have a hard time connecting with people and it has really shown up during virtual classes. If I didn't have to speak out, I probably wouldn't. Personally, not being on campus really exposed me to my flaws and fears. Being a shy person and being virtual, I started to become lonely, I started to overstay my time in my head. I started to overthink everything, which led me to become really stressed, and it really took a toll on me mentally and it started affecting my work. I wanted to get out of my head, I needed to. The internship was definitely outside of my comfort zone, but I knew I couldn't stay shut off. I wanted to take the opportunity to improve my communication skills and gain leadership skills. Coming back to my goal, I wanted to become more confident.

I always had an interest in public service. I come from an underprivileged household, but my parents always taught me to try to help as much as I can to those who need it. I learned early on that even if I was underprivileged, I still had a beautiful opportunity, I was born in the United States. I have the opportunity to become educated, I have the opportunity to become the person I want to be, and I am really appreciative of my parents and their sacrifices. With this opportunity, I believe that I have the obligation to give back to my community, but coming from an underprivileged community, I really didn't know how to do it. I am blessed to have the opportunity to participate in this internship and I think if used correctly, it can be a starting point to activism and public service. My goal is to become a better leader and become a voice in my community.

**Friday**-----

Today was an amazing day for networking. Some members of the Congressional Hispanic Staff Association spoke to the Cohort on what it takes to thrive on the Hill. My appreciation for the congressional staff is only getting stronger, but most importantly my

appreciation for the pioneers that are pushing the boundaries for the Latino community. Capitol Hill is already a very difficult place to break into, but hearing the stories of the congressional staff was very motivating, and I felt proud to be a Latino.

The congressional staff also had amazing advice on networking in a professional setting. For me, one of the most important things that I heard when meeting new people is to take initiative. If you are not actively trying to meet new people, you won't meet new people, and on the Hill, connections are very important if you want to thrive for a very long time.

Another thing that really stood out to me is the importance of writing. Most importantly, being able to write professionally and being straight to the point in your writing. I have gotten so used to writing essays and being very descriptive and getting so hung up on choosing the best word, that it has become a fault for me. People on the Hill or people in the corporate world don't care about your creativity with words, they don't have time to. They want information straight to the point that is easy to understand on the first read.

Following the presentation by the Congressional Staff, CHCI staff gave a presentation on networking. Before college, networking was a foreign concept to me. I wasn't really prepared to network in high school and when it came to networking for me in real life, I felt very stiff and awkward. So, I really appreciate CHCI for the work that they do for preparing their interns. The CHCI staff is very knowledgeable. They have years of experience working in D.C. and years of practice perfecting their networking skills. So, when I had an opportunity to learn from a very skilled group, I took advantage of it and took pages of notes.

The most important thing that I took away from this presentation was the where and when portion of the presentation. At times it gets really easy to fall into a routine and forget the tools and resources that one has available. Sometimes, these resources might be the most obvious

choice. Being a part of CHCI, we have access to their extensive alumni network, which is such a blessing to have, so taking advantage of this resource is definitely an obvious choice, but many tend to forget about it. Alumni networks definitely are powerful resources, and we have access to many that we aren't even aware of. colleges and universities have alumni networks, some high schools have alumni networks, and even some churches host events for networking. That brings up another area for networking, social gatherings. The amount of people that one can meet by just being open at a party is massive. I think being able to push yourself outside of your comfort zone and being aware of the resources that are available are definitely key to networking.

The last activity of the week, applying the information we learned about networking at a networking event. CHCI invited some of their staff and alumni to participate in a Virtual Networking event. I met some amazing people. The most memorable person that I met that day was Chicago state representative, Edgar Gonzales. He was very interesting, and he had amazing energy. The way he spoke was so relatable, and he explained things very well. We were in breakout rooms so my room took turns asking him questions. Surprisingly, Mr. Gonzales took the time to get to know us. He is definitely someone that I am going to continue to reach out to; he is very inspirational.

The orientation ended but I still had work to do. My goal is to end the school year on a positive note. I was a bit behind, but I took the rest of the day and weekend to finish assignments and prepare for finals week. I am feeling motivated, and I took advantage of this feeling to get as much work done as I could.