Student’s passion for math supported by LSAMP mentors

By Christine Rushton
Daily Evergreen Staff

Choosing a career path all came down to the math for a 20-year-old first generation college student at WSU.

Andres Mendoza came to the Pullman campus from Othello, bringing with him discipline derived from years spent achieving his black belt in karate. Mendoza had planned for an architecture degree, but his passion for math drove him toward engineering.

"It has been really tough for me, and sometimes I wonder, 'Maybe this is not for me,'" Mendoza said. "I may be able to have opportunities with anything, but math is what I feel I am good at, and I feel that I can apply my skills in engineering."

Struggling through a few engineering classes his freshman year, Mendoza said he didn't know if the major would work out. However, the Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (LSAMP) helped him discover all the resources WSU has to offer for underrepresented students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields.

"I didn't realize how many other minorities were in STEM degrees," Mendoza said. "When we got to share our experiences, I realized I wasn't the only one struggling through my degree."

Through retreats and mentoring, Mendoza met other students in STEM majors. He now sits on the LSAMP Student Advisory Board and helps others like him.

Overall, LSAMP has supported Mendoza, he said. He feels workshops for time management and resume building have helped him prepare not only for academics but the professional world beyond college, he said.

"What are we going to do after we graduate?" Mendoza said. "We have to have a good curriculum vitae and resume."

Now a junior double majoring in civil engineering and math, Mendoza is drawn to the analysis and design of infrastructure. An internship with a civil engineer at an irrigation district last summer inspired him to continue his research.

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Andres Mendoza participated in an LSAMP workshop with students from the UW and Portland State University.
Though alcohol remains the most frequently abused drug in the U.S., a newer substance is sounding the alarm with officials.

"Bath salts," a new family of synthetic drugs, can be purchased in stores because they are labeled as "not for human consumption." The drugs contain manmade chemicals known as substituted cathinones, which produce similar effects to amphetamines and cocaine.

Mark Ziegler, the clinical director at Palouse River Counseling for Chemical Dependency, has seen a rise in the popularity of bath salts on the Palouse through his work at the clinic. Eastern Washington and North Idaho have a much higher rate of bath salts abuse than other parts of the country, Ziegler said.

And the sale of the drug has become a baffling legal situation, he said.

"If I put heroin on the shelves in the grocery stores — because it makes your bath sparkly clean — and then put very clearly 'not for human consumption,' I could probably sell it, but the full intention of that is to be something ingested."

Cpl. Matt Kuhrt, a drug recognition expert for the WSU Police, said the warning label on bath salts creates a legal loophole that allows the products to stay on store shelves.

"If it is labeled 'not for human consumption,' it isn’t regulated by the Food and Drug Administration and does not abide by the FDA rules," Kuhrt said.

Officials haven’t prohibited the sale of bath salts, but they can ban specific chemical elements that make up the drug, he said. But dealers find ways to work against the regulations.

"The thing about synthetic drugs is the minute one element is tested and banned, someone else has already come up with a new element to take its place," Kuhrt said.

Bath salts have a stimulant effect that also comes with hallucinations, so they cause two different highs.

Users may experience violent outbreaks or unusual behaviors, and the euphoria that comes with a bath-salts high typically lasts between 20 and 24 hours.

The lack of research," Lambley said.

Sometimes, synthetic drugs are byproducts of the medicinal drugs developed in research labs. From time to time, these chemical formulas get into the wrong hands.

"Some of these substances are very addicting and cause huge problems," Lambley said.

As a drug recognition expert, Lambley has been a part of at least 240 drug investigations in the Pullman area. The police rarely find any solid answers in these cases, she said.

The only proof of drug abuse comes through blood work. But an officer may only administer a blood test if the subject volunteers, commits a crime involving multiple people or if the case is a DUI, she said.

Both Lambley and Kuhrt deal with drivers who are under the influence of alcohol, drugs or a combination of the two. These include possibly combinatory bath salts with other drugs.

"I think mixing drugs is more common than not," Lambley said. "Mixing bath salts with alcohol is just digging yourself a bigger hole."

The teens left the woman unconscious and locked in a room at the and classroom.

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summer inspired him to look for a research position at WSU this year, he said.

"I am looking at faculty members doing research into the rehabilitation of pavement," Mendoza said. "There are cracks in the road; how can we fix that? Also, the different types of pavement design; how can we make it stronger to resist the forces on the road?"

Initially, the design of buildings and structures drew his attention, but Mendoza realized he works better with numbers and analysis than with drawings. At that point, his interests turned from architecture to engineering.

"Whenever there is anything being built, it always catches my attention," Mendoza said.

"Even with the new residence hall being built and the stadium when it was built, I thought, 'I wish I had enough knowledge to be a part of that right now.'"

Mendoza said he wants to attend WSU for graduate school, but also will consider the University of San Diego. The job outlook for engineers is better in California with its bigger cities and higher frequency of earthquakes, he said.

Juan Trevino, a senior mechanical engineering student, said working with Mendoza on LSAMP’s Student Advisory Board has been motivating because Mendoza is always friendly and positive. They have been able to work together and relate, especially because they are fellow Latino’s pursing engineering degrees, Trevino said.

"I think one of the most memorable events for me and Andres would probably be the 2011 LSAMP retreat, when we worked together with a few other WSU students and staff to put on a dance exhibition for the talent show in the span of a couple hours," he said. "This is when I realized that not only was Andres a smart individual but a multitalented, well-rounded person as well as a jack-of-all-trades."

Yadira Paredes, the director of LSAMP, said the organization provides a great opportunity for students to interact with peers across the Pacific Northwest. It allows them to meet students that may have experienced similar challenges in the STEM career fields, Paredes said.

"(LSAMP) brings a sense of community, a sense of encouragement and a motivation to continue a career in these fields, especially from those kinds of minority groups," she said.

Paredes said she noticed Mendoza took a leadership role at the retreat WSU’s group hosted last year. Mendoza and Trevino took charge of hosting the final social event.

"He is able to incorporate his passion outside of academics into his everyday life," Paredes said. "One of the things I always tell (LSAMP students) is, because you are choosing this rigorous field, I think, like himself, he is already one step ahead of the others."