

International Student Spotlight Interview



NAME: Oriana Prato Gonzalez

YEAR AT K-STATE: Junior

MAJOR: Industrial Engineering

HOME COUNTRY: Venezuela

What was it like coming to K-State?

It was a little bit hard. Thinking about leaving your family and coming here alone is kind of difficult, and it *is* difficult being here without them, but I decided to come here because I think that it would really help me in my country to have a degree from a university here in the U.S. Also, I can really improve my English while I'm here. So, I was looking for universities and this one came up. It has a really great engineering program and also it's a lot less expensive than the others! And I also like it because Manhattan is a small town, so I don't have as many distractions as I might in other places.

What has your experience been like so far?

It's been really, really great—better than I thought it would be, actually! The one thing that I don't like is the weather—it's just so different from my country. But a thing that I like are that the people here are really nice—like, they approach you if they think you have a problem and they try to help you, and I don't know, everyone here is just *so* nice. And I like that Manhattan is really small. I don't have a car—I just have a bike—but I can go wherever I want in no time because everything is so close.

What were some of the big differences when you first arrived?

One difference is that here I feel that the professors here really want to help you. In Venezuela, professors are kind of distant with the students. Here, I feel like you can go talk to the professor and they really want you to learn and, you know, be successful. Socially, I feel like in the

classroom in Venezuela, people are maybe more...warm? I don't know—you go into the classroom and even if people don't know you, they try to get to know you, they talk to you, they make conversation. Here, it seems like students are more distant with each other in the classroom. I mean, sometimes I'm like that, too, just because I don't know how to approach people. It can be weird. But in Venezuela, it's just easier to do that. The weather is also very different. In Venezuela, we have the same weather all year long. Here, the weather changes so quickly! One day you're really, really hot, and the next day you're really, really cold, and you don't know what to wear, and it's just crazy.

Was there anything that was especially surprising?

I did not expect the university to be so big! The universities are smaller in Venezuela. My university was, like, three buildings and that was it. Here, almost the whole town is the university! Also, it was surprising that Manhattan is so involved with the university and the activities and sporting events. And everything is purple—I think that was the most surprising for me when I came, to see all the purple everywhere. It was impressive.

Is classroom culture a lot different here?

Here, I feel like they give you a lot of homework. You're really working on a lot of things in your courses every week. In Venezuela, we usually have an exam and that's really it. You just study whenever you want. But here, you have quizzes, homework, and everything else. And in Venezuela, the students aren't really involved during class. The professors just lecture and don't really ask questions. And also, in Venezuela, the classes are really, really small—like, 20 students. Here, I have some large classes in huge auditoriums. When I had my first class in an auditorium, I was like, “Wow! There are so many people in here!” I think that makes the class a little less personal, but it's not bad. It's just different from my experience in Venezuela.

What do you like about being a student at K-State?

I like that here I can feel the purple pride. In my country, there's nothing like that for connecting with our university; it's just where we go to school. When people ask where you go to university, you just say, “Oh, I go to (wherever)” and that's it. But I feel like here, because of the team sports and because all of the Manhattan community is involved with the university, you really feel that purple pride. I really like that because I want to feel like that with my university in Venezuela, and I feel like you can find that here.

What do you do for fun in Manhattan?

I like to go to the restaurants in Aggieville; I think that's a really fun part of Manhattan. I also like to go to the theatre at McCain and at Chapman Theater in Nichols Hall. At first, I thought

that because Manhattan is such a small town that there would be nothing to do, but I really feel that if you try to go to events like Coffee Hour [at the International Student Center] and to plays and concerts on campus, you can definitely have fun doing that.

If you could have known one thing before moving here, what would it be?

Ummm...that the weather was going to be really cold!

Do you have any advice for incoming international students?

I think I'd tell them to study a lot. Also, try to make friends and get involved in on-campus activities so you don't feel alone.

What would you like others to know about being an international student at K-State?

We work hard! Everything is in English, which is not our native language, so sometimes it's difficult for us to get involved or to talk with people because of that language barrier. And I want them to know that we are really approachable and that we would like to make friends. Many of us are outgoing people and we just want to be friends!

Would you mind sharing a phrase from your native language and what it means?

"Camaron que se duerme se lo lleva la corriente." It literally means "the shrimp that sleeps is swept away by the current." So it's kind of like if you're not paying attention to what you're doing and you're not taking action, you'll miss out. Kind of like "you snooze, you lose."