Betty Lee
bjl45 · Operations Research & Engineering
Estée Lauder Companies · Fall 2007

As an Industrial Engineering co-op at Estée Lauder my primary tasks were to set operating standards, conduct production floor reviews, and route products to lines. Operating standards indicate the optimal way for a certain product to run on a specific line. Writing an operating standard means determining the assembly steps, how many crew members should be working on each step, and how fast the line should be running. These standards are written daily for the products that are running on the production floor that day and that do not have existing standards. Carrying out floor reviews involves going down to the production floor with a copy of the operating standards to observe how the line is crewed—how many crew members are working on each assembly step—and the speed at which the line is running. These observations are compared against the operating standards and any discrepancy is discussed with the supervisors or mechanics. They will then either make the necessary changes (rearrange the crew or speed up the line) or provide a legitimate reason for why the line is not running optimally. All of these observations are documented in a floor review database. Routings essentially assign products to specific lines. The co-op’s duty is to set preliminary routings and then finalize them. Inputting this data requires you to become familiar with one of several computer programs used at Estée Lauder.

Along with these daily assignments, I received short projects from one of the Industrial Engineers in the department as well as from my supervisor. Most of the projects that you work on require knowledge of Microsoft Access, particularly with queries, so I was relieved that I had had some exposure to the program in OR&IE 312. I also felt that departmental staff changes during my work term left me with a great deal of independence. Although initially I was unsure
of what to do with the extra time that I had on my hands, I soon decided that to make the most of my time with the company I should take initiative by seeking potential projects for myself. I developed and maintained a list of ideas that might improve the efficiency of production; although upon further research I ended up rejecting many of these ideas myself, I do not regret the effort I put into them. I was able to grasp the nature of communication in the workplace. Furthermore, I benefited from seeing the different backgrounds from which my co-workers came. It helped me achieve a clearer sense of career direction and where I want to be after I graduate. At the same time, however, as several of the past co-ops have mentioned, I would like to have had more assigned work to do. The company should take greater advantage of the educational background of the co-op students and the time that they have on their hands.

For housing my supervisor gave me the contact information of a former EL employee who rents out the basement of her home to co-op students. The basement is like a small apartment and the rent is not pricey compared to other housing options. As the supervisor mentioned in the interview, you need to have a car to get to work. I enjoyed my time outside of work and was able to pursue some of my hobbies. I took dance classes once or twice a week, took up an unpaid internship for a few hours a week, went shopping frequently, and did some leisure reading. I also drove to visit friends in the area and at Cornell several times.

The most valuable aspect of my co-op experience was gaining an understanding and familiarity with the professional work environment. I am much better prepared for entering the workplace, particularly at an entry-level position. In particular, I feel that the fall co-op work term is beneficial to your professional development since there are fewer interns than in the summer so you feel more part of the organization. Lastly, I want to add that it is helpful to constantly keep in mind the significance of the work you are doing. The daily tasks can get
tedious, but if you realize that they are actually quite vital to the department and company, they will seem less so. For instance, operating standards provide a crucial benchmark for performance evaluation and the data collected from floor reviews can be used to analyze how products and the lines are running. Also, the more time you spend on the production floor the more familiar you will become with operations and current projects. After all, all of the work that is being conducted in the office is based on how the floor is operating. Finally, initiating projects on your own will help you learn a great deal about the company while developing your professional skills, not to mention it will allow you to make the most of your co-op.