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My overall work experience at Simpson, Gumpertz & Heger was very positive. From my first day of work I could tell that my supervisor and co-workers had my best interest in mind. Not only did they try to expose me to projects that were of great significance to the company, but they explained all my tasks very well and encouraged me to ask questions. I can say with confidence that my time with SGH was valuable to myself personally as well as my career.

Most of the time, I worked under the structural engineering division on the design team. My tasks usually entailed using AutoCAD to alter drawings as the projects progressed. Very often, I was kept working on the same project for an extended period of time, even if the task was not drafting. As a result, I learned a good deal about the way that a project is carried out from the start. One of the first major jobs I worked on was Aga Khan University in Karachi, Pakistan. I assisted in the drafting of the schematic design. As one of my first assignments, it was fascinating for me not only to observe design in its beginning stages but to see how an international project was handled. In addition to drafting, I did some arranging of documents as well as other organizational tasks to aid the engineers. Occasionally, I was taken into the field to assist with inspections and to observe civil engineering first hand. While some tasks were menial, I can honestly say that I gained something from almost every job I was given.

Much of what I needed to know for my co-op was taught to me by one specific supervisor as was necessary; there was no formal training session. I reported to this supervisor daily who would either assign me work or send me to specific people who he
knew had work for me. My learning process was ongoing and my knowledge of working in the civil engineering field grew a little each day. I did realize, however, that very little of what I needed to know for the job was taught to me in school because there is so much that can only be learned through experience. As a result, co-op helped me to figure out what I want to do with my future. While I was interested by all the work I did, I discovered how technical it was and realized that I was more interested in the architectural design of a building than the very structural aspects.

One of the greatest obstacles I had to overcome was adjusting to a very different situation in terms of social life and my daily schedule. My work day began much earlier than classes for school and went later with a break only for lunch. It was difficult for me to get used to being in the same place for 9 hours each day instead of having the opportunity to walk around campus from class to class. Socially, it was a challenge to adjust to not living with students my age and having them as an emotional support and outlet. I chose to live with a family friend who is a couple in their 50s. While I got along with them well and enjoyed their company, I did miss spending time with people my age. If I could go back and chose a different living situation, I would have opted to live with younger roommates. Fortunately, there were 9 other co-ops in my office and I did form friendships with them which often made work enjoyable.

Ultimately, I do not regret my decision at all to participate in co-op and I’m very grateful that I had the opportunity to work for Simpson, Gumpertz & Heger. I met many great people who taught me numerous things about civil engineering and myself. I don’t have much base of comparison, but I feel that this company is making great strides in its
field and doing many beneficial things for its employees as well. I look forward to working with SGH again next summer.
I spent the first term of my co-op in the Waltham, MA office of Simpson, Gumpertz & Heger but this summer I switched to New York City. I was able to live at home and commute to work by train which I found a lot easier than my drive to work in Waltham. Overall, I found the switch to be a good move not only because I love New York City and was able to live at home, but that the ability to view the company from a different perspective was invaluable. The difference in projects due to the demands of each city also broadened my knowledge of civil engineering work.

The New York office is about an eighth of the size of Waltham, therefore structural engineering and building technology are the only two divisions. Just as in Waltham, my assignments were all in structural engineering. I worked regularly with Nathaniel Smith who performs mostly investigational work. Many of my tasks involved going on site visits with him, documenting the condition of the building under investigation, and helping to compile a written report accompanied by photos. Several of the projects I worked on addressed settlement of one structure due to adjacent construction, something I learned is very common in New York City where buildings are old and very close together.

Another project that Nathaniel is very involved in is a portion of the slurry wall re-support at the World Trade Center Memorial Museum. SGH is currently in the construction administration phase of the project and he brought me to the site a few times to observe for himself and explain to me what was going on. I learned a lot about tieback supported concrete walls and the complexity of a project the size of this one.
Aside from being a civil engineer, as a New Yorker it was fascinating for me to be able to see the construction at the World Trade Center up close. I did some work on a few projects for other engineers in the office as well but since I have not taken my full course of structural engineering classes yet, it was more of a challenge to get me involved in many of the design projects. I was given the chance to do a few simple calculations, however, and it was valuable for me to see how my classes applied to real world.

Working here this summer definitely helped me grow as an engineer and my knowledge of the field has expanded even more since my first co-op term. The tasks I was given here were very different from my first term and I felt that I had more freedom to make decisions on my own for a few projects. The few open-ended assignments I was given forced me to challenge myself and I’m glad that I had that opportunity to learn what I was capable of. One task that myself and another co-op took on ourselves was to prepare and present a lunch talk about the co-op program at SGH and the students themselves. I learned a great deal working with a fellow co-worker about how co-ops and interns contribute to the company and the different projects we’re given to work on. The number of visits to the field was greater here than in Waltham and that added even more to my learning experience.

Overall, I had a great co-op this summer in the New York office. I am very pleased with my decision to work in a different city and think that I learned more by doing so than I would have if I stayed in Waltham. The combined experience of both co-op work terms has confirmed for me that structural engineering is a career path that I could pursue. I would highly recommend other students to look into a co-op or internship with Simpson, Gumpertz & Heger.