Dara M Perl  
Major: Civil Engineering  
Employer: Skanska USA Building  
Term 1 (Fall 2009)  

netid: dmp229

A. Co-op Work Assignment

Working as an intern for Skanska USA Building means being introduced to all aspects of the construction management industry. In the beginning of my coop work term I was introduced to construction management mainly by learning the project. Learning a project involves looking at plans, specifications and walking the site. All of these aspects help to build an idea of how the project works as a whole. My ability to learn the project was also influenced by the willingness of all groups on the project to teach me "how they see it." As a whole the project team is part of the greater Skanska USA Building team which I learned about by taking part in Skanska University classes, by attending Skanska events, and talking to people who are also part of the Skanska team.

Working at the CUNY Advanced Science Research Center I worked with supers making field reports, project engineers reviewing and distributing plans and working on bids with the procurement team. The people at Skanska USA Building were welcoming and enjoyed teaching me about what they were working on, and about the industry. Training was provided through Skanska 101; a week-long series of courses meant to teach every incoming employee about the way things are done at Skanska USA. The classes range from Code of Conduct to Project Closeout and cover many important topics. It was also an opportunity to meet people who work for Skanska but on another job or in the main office.
Though I did not have an assigned mentor, I had many people who helped me with everyday questions and who helped me with many of my questions about the industry. The representative from Human Resources often checked in to make sure that everything was going well and that I had settled into the job. My supervisor also checked to make sure that the work I was receiving from other areas of the job was appropriate and challenging. There were also people willing to help me with personal passions (e.g., LEED and green building). The diversity of people at a single jobsite makes it difficult to even begin to choose a mentor, but instead gave me an opportunity to have many mentors for all of the things I was interested in.

B. Assessment of Learning and Development

Though I felt at sometimes that my schooling was a little far from what I was actually doing on this job, I feel that I can see that my job at Skanska USA Building will help me when I come back to Cornell. I saw first-hand how steel and concrete are actually used in a building and began to learn that many of the things I had learned at Cornell actually did help me to have an inherent understanding of the building that was going up in front of me.

I also learned about what it is to be a professional engineer in the construction management industry. Sometimes that means working with the engineers of a project and other times it means disagreeing with them. I also learned that being a professional and having a professional attitude are the most important skills you can have when you enter a work environment.
The position I am working in at Skanska USA Building has guided me in my academic endeavors. I have learned that I want to go into the construction management industry and that I need to take more management classes than I have taken in the past in order to achieve that goal. I also learned that I need to be more comfortable asking for help and that I have a large base of knowledge on which to rely. This has lead me to be more confident at work and in general.

C. Life outside of Co-op

For finding housing in the New York area, I would suggest calling local universities. I was very lucky to have the ability to live at home. Another option would be living in an outer borough, or living with friends who are going to school in the area. New York’s mass transportation is great and a car is actually very cumbersome in the city. For social activities there are tons of things going on. I was personally involved with the US Green Building Council and Emerging Green Builders as well as volunteer work near my home. There are also some great museums, shows, and art galleries. Though my employer did not offer opportunities for any of these things there were plenty of my coworkers who were involved and helped to get me involved in many of the same things.

D. Evaluation

The best features of this job were that I was doing something I truly enjoyed with people who were friendly and fun to be around.

12/23/09
Co-op Term 2 Job Summary

Name: Dara M. Perl
NetID: dmp229
Major: Civil and Environmental Engineering
Employer: Skanska USA Building Inc. (United Nations Capital Master Plan Project)
Term: Summer 2010 (Term 2)

A. Co-op Work Assignment

At Skanska I have worked on two projects. During this term I was a member of the architectural sub-team of the basement team on the United Nations CMP project which is run by the New York office of Skanska USA Building. Having previously worked for Skanska USA Building, I know that working on-site at a project is the only way to truly learn a project and how all aspects function. The architectural sub-team worked specifically to organize the construction of a ConEdison vault, a swing space for some of the supervisors at the UN, as well as aid in the completion of the Tech Center which began before I arrived for my summer term. I have also helped with the cost control team to aid in the swift processing and approval of change orders, allowance requests, and requests for approval.

In order to be a productive member of this team I was given a safety, as well as general orientation during my first week. The safety orientation was a way of helping me readjust to being on a construction site, as well as to help me learn about the specific safety risks working at the UN site. I was also given the opportunity to take site tours of some of the other Skanska projects around New York, specifically the World Trade Center, Brooklyn Bridge and Brooklyn Bridge Park, Cat/Del Water Treatment Plant and Bowery Bay. The days of site tours were an opportunity to give the interns from Skanska USA Building, Skanska USA Civil, and Skanska Koch a bit more information on Skanska, Construction Management and to allow us to learn about each division of the company.

Though I was not assigned a mentor, I gravitated towards one of the project engineers and she helped me navigate all of the challenges I faced when learning a new project.
B. Assessment of Learning and Development

Though construction management was not my original career path at Cornell, it has become something I am very interested in pursuing in the future. I have had the opportunity to see steel constructed and erected as well as concrete poured and placed in the most advanced and “top of the line” ways. I learned a lot about the culture of being a Construction Manager and how that is different from the culture of being a typical professional engineer in a design office. I think that working on this project, rather than returning to the project which I had worked on previously gave me great insight into what my professional career could become and how different each job in this industry is. I believe on this job I did not have as much time to adjust and take responsibility after learning the job. On this job I learned that making mistakes is okay, because we are all constantly learning the job and that learning from mistakes is an institutionalized part of the job, even having lessons learned “sit-downs” before starting a new project. If I were to go through the same experience I would have taken initiative sooner and been more sure of my abilities in all aspects of the job.

C. Life Outside of Co-op

For finding housing in Manhattan I would suggest looking into the Universities in the city. Also, living with family or friends is one of the best ways to find housing for such a short period of time. As for transportation the only way to travel is mass transit. The subway, bus and train are the best ways to get around NYC all times of year. Social activities are definitely prevalent in Manhattan and I would definitely check out the free in NYC summer events calendar because there are amazing, interesting events on there including concerts, movies, museum and gallery openings, etc. I was actually able to take part in a softball team with some of my co-workers and it gave me an opportunity to meet people not working on my specific project.

D. Evaluation

The best features of this job are the people and the daily eventfulness of working on site. I have learned at both of my jobs through Skanska that the people I work with really make the job amazing. I truly enjoyed what I do, but the people that Skanska
has hired, across the board, are amazingly interesting, nice, and welcoming which makes a job that much more enjoyable. The worst feature of this job was the lack of sunlight. Working in a basement in the summer is extremely difficult but having the opportunity to go on site walks does make it a little better.