EBC Insights: Careers in the Energy and Environmental Sectors
Spring 2014

Compiled by Carson P. Robers, EBC Intern
Edited by EBC Staff
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Introduction

As an undergraduate student you are constantly confronted with questions about your career goals. Yet, many of your peers at Boston University (including myself), who are interested in the environment, do not have a simple answer to the inquiries of friends, family, and professionals. The plethora of opportunities in the energy and environmental sectors can be as daunting as it is exciting. By no means do we need to decide on a specific career during our time as undergraduates, but we ought to explore some of the possibilities, so that we can maximize our studies and internship opportunities.

Upon beginning my internship with the Environmental Business Council (EBC) of New England, I was encouraged to formulate my own long-term project. I soon realized that I was in a position to connect the remarkable talent and expertise of EBC members, who have shaped and continue to shape the environmental community in New England, with students and aspiring environmental professionals. After sixteen interviews and countless other interactions, I am closer to answering the question of what I want to do professionally. The insights found in the proceeding sections seek to guide personal discovery and serve as a basis for further exploration of careers in the energy and environmental sectors. I hope you find the advice expressed herein as powerful as I found I have found it to be.

I am deeply thankful for the participation of EBC members, who took time out of their busy schedules (and even their lunch breaks!), and the invaluable guidance of the EBC staff, especially Ann Gisinger.

Sincerely,

Carson P. Robers
EBC Intern September 2013 – May 2014
Email: crobers@bu.edu

Please Note: Any views or opinions expressed herein are solely those of the participants and do not necessarily reflect the views of their employers.
Featured Interviews

Laurent C. Levy, Ph.D., P.E.
Senior Project Manager, Gradient

Harlan M. Doliner
Counsel, Head of Maritime Group - Verrill Dana, LLP

Patrick Sheehan
Senior Principal, GZA GeoEnvironmental, Inc.
An Interview With …

Laurent C. Levy, Ph.D., P.E.
Senior Project Manager, Gradient

Dr. Levy has over ten years of experience working with industrial clients, attorneys, and regulators. His areas of practice include environmental due diligence, site acquisition and divestiture, subsurface environmental investigations, vapor intrusion and air quality assessment, chlorinated solvent characterization, and site remediation. Before joining Gradient, Dr. Levy completed numerous assignments in the United States, France, and Spain, including environmental site assessments, risk assessments, and second opinion reviews, as well as the pilot testing, design, and construction oversight of remediation systems. (Full Bio)

Entry Level Positions

Dr. Levy contrasted an entry level job at Gradient with those at other environmental consulting firms. In his experience, Gradient tends to rely on field data collected by other entities whereas entry level positions at a number of environmental consulting firms often entail field data collection, including geological logging and monitoring, well installation observation, as well as soil and groundwater sampling. A starting position at Dr. Levy’s firm would demand a mix of document review, research, data analysis, and technical writing. Internships are an excellent way of determining what an entry level job will require at a specific firm and they allow the intern to gain practical skills to excel in the professional world.

Undergraduate Preparation

Laurent recommended several areas of coursework, including groundwater hydrology, fate and transport of contaminants, statistics and probability, remediation, and general environmental engineering. He said, “a lot of the fundamentals come from coursework”, but he stressed that reality will always be more complex. In the real world, “two plus two is not always equal to four.”

Developing strong communication skills and research experiences, such as a thesis, can help an aspiring professional bridge the gap between the classroom and reality. Written and oral communications are often overlooked by those thinking of working in the technical field, yet they are some of the most important attributes for success. Whether it is a report or an email, Dr. Levy has found that communications skills matter.

Doctorate Degrees

Dr. Levy, who holds a Ph.D. in a field dominated by master’s and bachelor’s degrees, wanted to highlight the option of pursuing a doctoral degree, but with a caveat. A Ph.D. can be particularly valuable, especially for positions that require strong research, analytical, or modeling skills. However, Dr. Levy found that in some instances it may make finding a job more difficult. A one-year advanced degree, such as a master’s in engineering, may suffice and could be very valuable.

Computer Skills

Given our world of ever evolving technology, Dr. Levy stressed an aptitude for computing. Becoming proficient in computer applications and having basic programming skills is an excellent resume builder. When naming a few of the programs he has encountered in his career, he mentioned GIS, CAD, MATLAB, and Microsoft Access. Dr. Levy stressed that a lot of analysis is done using Microsoft Excel.
Harlan M. Doliner
Counsel, Head of Maritime Group, Verrill Dana, LLP

Harlan Doliner has been on EBC’s Board of Directors since 1994. He serves as Counsel at Verrill Dana LLP, a Portland, Maine based law firm with offices in Boston, Stamford, Providence, and Washington, D.C. Mr. Doliner chairs the firm’s Maritime Group and also practices in the Environmental and Energy Groups. He has more than 35 years of experience in these areas of law, including over 15 years as a lead counsel in the matters dealing with the cleanup of Boston Harbor. In addition to his law practice, Harlan is an adjunct professor for the Law Schools at Boston College and at Roger Williams University, and serves as a marine safety and environmental protection officer in the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. (Full Bio)

Sustainability

According to Mr. Doliner, sustainability is not just about doing the right thing. That plays a part, but it is also a question of making the business case by finding and applying the appropriate metrics. For sustainable changes to be made they must be evaluated within the total business context. He walked me through the example of a firm that is looking into a non-toxic citrus-based chemical. The current chemical has worked well for decades and only costs four-cents a gallon, whereas the citrus-based chemical costs forty-cents. Justifying this tenfold increase is difficult. However, if you look at the total cost of this chemical transition, switching chemical inputs would reduce the need for permitting and legal fees while increasing the good will of the business. A citrus-based product would probably entail less overall liability, sick time, and worker’s compensation. Considering these additional benefits could lead a firm to switch their chemical input. This anecdote highlights the critical skill Mr. Doliner calls the ability to translate the benefits of sustainability into added value for the business.

Practicing Law

Mr. Doliner stressed that your goal as an environmental professional should not solely be getting customers into compliance or out of trouble, but to offer more sustainable alternatives and increase the client’s value. An environmental lawyer finds success in this sector by virtue of providing added benefit to customers. In his experience, all professional careers, including law, require responsiveness, empathy, and negotiation. Technical expertise is assumed. He encourages those who are interested in practicing environmental law to develop these skills and gain real world experience, because “when you become a lawyer, you’re playing with people’s and companies’ lives.”

An Ever-Evolving Field

Environmental practice is constantly changing and there are always new things to learn. Everything from regulation and technologies to the structure of the economy has changed during Harlan Doliner’s thirty-six year career. He believes you can only keep up professionally if you are constantly reinventing yourself. For example, Mr. Doliner recalled the dominance of Superfund cases in the 1980’s and the rapid development of other issues that preceeded CERCLA. Today, global climate change has brought a host of new problems in emergency response and land use law. To highlight some of these emerging considerations he used the recent and tragic example of Superstorm Sandy. If Sandy were to have hit at high tide many areas of Boston would have been underwater. Before Sandy, hurricanes were considered primarily wind
events. Boston’s building use requirements and emergency response systems reflected that sentiment. We now know hurricanes are water events as well as wind events and we need to adapt our infrastructure and planning.

**Law School**

When it comes to the question of law schools he encourages students to attend the best law school they can get into. There are some exceptions to this rule but having a law degree from a national institution will ultimately make you more marketable across more markets. Mr. Doliner believes seeking a broader legal education is better than targeting specific programs or professors during law school. He explained that in your first year students have little ability to pick electives. If enrolled in a smaller or specialized program, professors may be on sabbatical or courses may not be offered in consecutive years. By the time students have the luxury of picking courses, they are already concerned with the bar exam. On the other hand, finding internships and summer jobs to gain practical experience in a legal field of interest are a must, in his experience.

In citing the dismal ratio of law school graduates to openings at firms, he cautioned that the current market is unsustainable. Mr. Doliner wanted to warn prospective legal students that government agencies aren’t the place to hang your destiny either. A lot of state environmental funding comes from the federal government, making positions highly susceptible to the constraints of our current political process. As an adjunct professor and U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Assistant District Staff Officer, he recently supported one of his law student’s applications for Coast Guard legal, but there were only six openings nationwide that year and four the year before. The average age of law students has increased and it is okay (if not better) to gain real world experience before entering the legal arena.

**Undergraduate Studies**

In the words of Harlan, the best thing an undergraduate student can do is follow their academic interests and show excellence. Majoring in a science or another discipline is often better than following only a pre-law track. Take electives that prepare you for the real world. Doing this increases the possibility of finding a job. Even if you pursue law, having an additional expertise increases your marketability. If the economy takes a bad turn there will be more opportunities to find employment.

Harlan noted that the hard sciences probably offer better job prospects in the current economy. Majoring in something like environmental policy may be too open-ended for a consulting firm. If this is your concentration, Mr. Doliner would encourage you to begin your job search in a different place: legislatures, the executive branch, and NGO’s.
Patrick Sheehan  
Senior Principal, GZA GeoEnvironmental, Inc.

Finding a Position and Day-to-Day Demands

As with most fields there is no one basis of entrance. Mr. Sheehan and his colleagues seek well-rounded individuals from diverse backgrounds. The only common parameter among candidates is a collegiate degree; one must hold at least a B.S. in engineering or other respective science. In the example of his firm, more than half the staff have advanced degrees.

A staff level position at GZA Geo Environmental, Inc. would entail a mix of activities, from collecting data in the field to office work like performing data analysis. Mr. Sheehan said it is not uncommon to be working on six projects at one time. To be successful in this environment one has to be able to work with a wide variety of personalities, multi-task, effectively communicate, and have the sufficient scientific and technical background.

University Preparedness

Mr. Sheehan believes university programs are now much more tailored to specific fields, such as environmental engineering, and that students are better prepared to adapt to technology. Even twenty years ago this was not the case. The critical jump is applying the theory learned in the classroom to practical problems. Communication skills, the ability to concisely and effectively convey ideas to others, may be an even larger roadblock to professional success. Mr. Sheehan identified internship/co-op experiences and project-based learning as great opportunities to both develop strong communication skills and ease the transition from the classroom to the workplace.

Sustainability in Business

Knowledge of business issues allows one to appreciate the value of what they are doing in the environmental consulting field, for both society and their employer. In the words of Mr. Sheehan, “sustainability is a value proposition” and “aspiring professionals would benefit immensely from a business education of some capacity.” Ultimately, the private sector is for profit and sustainable endeavors must be economically viable if they are to provide real benefit. Mr. Sheehan believes there is a deep connection between private environmental practices and an environmentally conscious future.
Environmental Engineering
What does your job entail on a day-to-day basis?

“As Senior Vice President at Tighe & Bond, I am responsible for overseeing project management, reviewing project deliverables, and developing new business opportunities. For projects I oversee as a Principal-In-Charge, I utilize my engineering expertise and project experience to ensure the overall quality of deliverable is acceptable and confirm that our recommendations are viable and meet client expectations. I also manage compliance with the project budget and schedule. Furthermore, I play a key role in securing new business opportunities for the firm. This requires that I am up-to-date with regulatory policies, technological developments, and market drivers to be able to respond effectively to new market opportunities. I also regularly participate in professional development events to develop networking connections and to remain knowledgeable on technical, regulatory, and market developments.” - FJH

“Management of New England client service group representing approximately $100M business unit; functions include client audits, strategic marketing, support to senior project managers and client service managers.” - PDH

“My primary roles at Brown and Caldwell are (1) managing a national client account and (2) national level leadership for one of Brown and Caldwell’s practice areas. Therefore my day-to-day job involves evaluating strategy for new business opportunities and assessing support needs for practice-related projects. Since we are an environmental services company offering technical services, I also spend time on technical work. I have been in the business for >30 years so my job has changed quite a lot over the years. Each change has provided exciting new challenges and the opportunity to grow professionally.” - AK

“Since I am only a year in my job on a day to day basis varies based on the work available. If I am on a project, my workload is more consistent and usually entails design work (research, calculations, evaluation, etc.). Other days, where I am not on a project I will provide help to whoever needs it doing a wide variety of tasks (inputting data, back checking work, preparing reports). Also, when needed, I will go out into the field to collect data/perform work.” - SB

Please Note: Grammatical errors are those of the interviewees.
“On a day to day basis I have a few things to coordinate: Oversight of our developments is primarily where I review our work on environmentally distressed properties daily, consulting work for various customers regarding clean up of their properties, and work on new technologies and small business related tedious items.” - DP

Which skills are the most important to have acquired for your line of work?

“It is important to have critical thinking and problem solving skills to identify key obstacles to project development and determine the most advantageous solution for the client. Effective time management is also a key skill to be able to meet deadlines and maintain a positive relationship with the client. From a business development perspective, it is important to connect existing clients with other services the firm provides to acquire new job opportunities. Additionally, it is valuable to identify funding opportunities clients may be able to take advantage of or regulatory developments that may impact them. Communication skills are of the utmost importance across the board in every aspect of my job – and of these skills, listening is the most important.” – FJH

“Having good team work skills is very important in environmental engineering. Most projects include a wide variety of people, each contributing in a different way, all working off each other. In order to finish the project in an efficient manner it is important to be able to communicate well with others and help each other.” – SB

“One must have a sufficient background in civil and environmental engineering. But, being computer savvy, having the ability to adapt very quickly, and mobility are critical to finding a position and excelling at it. Acquiring a working knowledge of applicable environmental regulations is also important to a utility like NU”. – DW

“Brown and Caldwell is an environmental services company so technical capabilities in this field are critical. These range from design and studies by engineers to environmental evaluation such as groundwater assessment by scientists. The technical skills are the base – however, there are other skills that are important: organization, communication and interpersonal skills are critical. Everything we do involves a wide array of stakeholders including public groups, regulators and clients.” – AK

“In my line of work, technical information needs to be combined with marketing and politics (relations with regulators). Much of the success in a small company has to do with contacts in the business. Having experience in business, and particularly understanding the environmental business, allows me to spend my time on other efforts.” – DP

“One last thing: initiative. Brown and Caldwell is a national company with 45 offices across the country so we achieve much of our work using virtual teams. This requires initiative and self-starting capabilities to keep your piece of a project in motion.” – AK

“People skills to deal w/ clients, regulators and staff. Responsible for ensuring delivery of quality engineering service with profitable performance.” – PDH
What kind of coursework or experiences excite you about a prospective employee?

“Water-related issues are big wherever you go these days. This includes domestic wastewater and industrial wastewater treatment/reclamation, storm water management/treatment and water supply. The expectation is these solutions are delivered with energy efficiency and low life-cycle costs (the cost of operating systems over the long haul is more than the cost to build the systems).” – AK

“It is beneficial to have a well-rounded course experience that includes technical and business management courses. Additionally, it is attractive to have hands-on experience though internship experience, to demonstrate to an interested employer that you have interacted with clients, regulators, and peer professionals in a business setting.” – FJH

“Prior internships and group projects are probably the best experiences that makes a prospective employee stick out. Being skilled working in a group is a necessity for almost any field, as work is typically done in work groups. Having experience writing technical papers or getting papers published is also great. Being able to bring a great piece of writing to an interview to give an example of your writing ability can be very beneficial.” – MRP

“Awareness of working in a professional business and/or engineering environment. Co-op or internship experience is becoming a must to differentiate a successful candidate. Coursework to include technical writing, public speaking/presentations and engineering accredited by ABET.” – PDH

“Coursework in chemistry as well as management are the most related to this business. The most important is that someone be good at getting along with customers and regulators and be a problem solver.” – DP

The Armed Forces: A Career Pathway
A Conversation with Daniel Watton

Given his family tradition of serving in the U.S. Coast Guard it was no surprise that Mr. Watton immediately joined the U.S.C.G. as a Commissioned Officer after graduating with a B.S. and M.S. in 1978. With degrees leading him toward environmental compliance, he was assigned duties to enforce OPA, CWA, and CERCLA among other applicable laws, and to coordinate federal response actions to major environmental incidents. He travelled all over the country doing this type of work, addressing everything from ship and barge collisions to oil-well blowouts to facility explosions. There was not a minute of it that he did not enjoy. In Dan Watton’s current position at Northeast Utilities he oversees the remediation of hazardous sites in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut. He also serves as the coordinator of the NU Environmental Co-op Program. If it were not for his previous experience in the USCG, he does not believe he would have been offered this job and a career at a large utility company.

Although it can be an excellent opportunity, he recognizes that serving in the armed forces is not for everyone. If you are interested in the United States Coast Guard follow the hyperlink attached to the USCG seal above. Mr. Watton emphasizes that all four branches of the U.S. Armed Forces are important career pathways to keep in mind.
Is there anything you know now that would have been helpful to know when you were entering your field?

“The non-technical aspects of the business…Our business solutions require strong organization, the ability to communicate data and solutions to non-technical groups, and ability to achieve this in a team setting.” – AK

“There is writing, and a lot of it! After doing all the fun stuff (collecting data, evaluating, designing) you do need to convey your results in a report. Yes, it is all technical but I know that most people entering this field do it thinking no writing is involved. So just a little heads up on another important skill to have.” – SB

“The importance of listening to your clients and understanding their needs, the significance regulations have in driving the market, and the need to leverage professional development and networking opportunities to enhance your career and be a more successful environmental professional.” – FJH

“It would have been helpful to know how the government works, both state and federal, in order to be more efficient.” – DP

“An increased awareness of the business side – accounting, profit/loss statements, marketing and human resources.” – PDH

For more information about the participants’ companies follow the hyperlinks attached to the images below.
Environmental Law
When considering environmental law, it is important to remember the diverse career opportunities that it offers. We often think of litigation, but this is just one piece. Lawyers with a regulatory focus help clients stay in compliance and negotiate resolutions. This work may vary from simple permitting to complex renewable energy projects. Others ensure environmental due diligence as part of real estate and financial transactions. A new breed of corporate lawyers address things like green building issues and raising capital for sustainability projects. There are a plethora of opportunities at non-profits, private firms and in the public sector; far more than could be described in this paragraph. The following quotes, highlight some of the duties of a career in the private sector.

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“I would suggest that students make sure that they are truly interested in the law before spending the time and money to go through law school. The market is improving, but it is still difficult to find a job.” — KWS

“There is very little correlation between just academic performance and professional success. The vast majority of us will never attend an ivy league. If you choose to go to law school, pick something outside of the academic world and take a hard look at where the science and technology is going. Gain practical experiences in the field.” — TAM

“Only do it if that is what you really want to do; you have to be committed.” — SJ

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Resumes often blend together; focusing on practical experience is a way to distinguish yourself. Working in the field demonstrates your commitment, helps build your social network, and introduces you to the demands of a legal career. – TAM

“Don't pretend to have knowledge you don't have, ask the question, people like to teach and to be the expert.” – RAC

“The ability to read and interpret environmental laws and regulations is critical. In addition, the ability to negotiate resolutions between our clients and the regulators is an essential skill.” – KWS

Organizational dynamics are a critical skill to develop. Ninety percent of organizational dynamics is how to motivate people. – TAM

"These are not nine to five jobs, not if you want to get ahead. Put yourself in harm’s way and take risks. You must train yourself and take responsibility for your own career. Find what you're interested in and become an expert.” – RAC

The Future of Environmental Law
A Conversation with Thomas Mackie

After Mr. Mackie remarked that “it is very hard to predict the future,” he outlined where he thought environmental law would be going in contrast to the issues that have taken primacy in the past. In citing the decreasing incidence of large industrial polluters, he predicted a continued decline in macro issues like Superfund. Mentioning such pollution reminded Mr. Mackie of travelling through New York City during his youth and feeling his eyes burn from the air pollution. Fortunately, the dedicated work of individuals like Mr. Mackie himself have allowed us to move forward in this area. Water issues, nanomaterials, international environmental issues, and low concentration but persistent exposure to toxins and carcinogens “is probably where environmental law is heading.”

Mr. Mackie also foresees that climate change will revolutionize the business opportunities in this sector. Many firms are trying to figure out how to monetize climate change and solve the plethora of unfortunate realities that humans will face in the coming decades. In the next twenty years, maybe after six or seven super storms, there may even be a carbon marketplace, which would open a whole new field for environmental law.

Another important question that Mr. Mackie addressed was what these probable trends mean for the models that currently drive private practice. Fundamentally, “one has to ask, who is the client and how does this translate into opportunities.” If there is continued transition to the issues Mr. Mackie highlighted, it will demand a greater focus on individuals instead of large corporations. A changing clientele makes management more difficult and it is important to note that models have not been fully developed to handle individual households and small businesses.
Is there anything you know now that would have been helpful to know when you were entering your field?

Thomas Mackie wishes he had a better understanding of how the business world operates. Although, it did not affect his career he would have been better equipped when he was first entering his field.

“It takes a long time to grasp the field of environmental law because of the overlapping and sometime inconsistent local, state and federal regulatory schemes.” –KWS

After Seth Jaffe, currently a partner, acknowledged the great opportunities he has had at Foley Hoag LLP he pointed out the many positions at NGOs and in the public sector. He wanted to caution those who are only looking into private practice from unfairly discounting these opportunities.

“One could not foresee, in the 1970s, how relatively quickly environmental considerations would be integrated into daily business dealings. Tax considerations are built right into endeavors; soon were environmental ones.” -HMD

For more information about the participants' practices follow the hyperlinks attached to the images below.
Other Perspectives
From the Industry
Other Perspectives From the Industry

Michael R. Pezzullo
Transportation Engineer, CDM Smith
Molly Bales
Project Development Manager, Harvest Power
Peter H. Anderson
Principal, Geosyntec Consultants, Inc.
Leo P. Roy
Principal, Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc.

A Conversation With Peter H. Anderson

Peter H. Anderson is a Principal with Geosyntec Consultants, a leading environmental and geotechnical engineering and consulting firm. Peter has more than 30 years of environmental and management consulting experience. He leads Geosyntec’s national Air and Climate Change Practice and is responsible for providing technical leadership, directing projects and developing staff, particularly in the areas of regulatory analysis, permitting, compliance assessment, pollution control technology applications, and risk management. He has worked with clients throughout North America helping them develop and implement environmental programs that achieve compliance, conserve resources, and realize corporate stewardship goals. (Full Bio)

Private clients need help across their operations, from building new plants to licensing to technical analyses (including greenhouse gas emissions). In terms of carbon it is about finding the best technology to minimize emissions at the lowest cost. Achieving greater levels of sustainability in a positive manner can be difficult for firms with scarce resources. Even reporting to federal and local authorities can require the services of a consulting firm like Geosyntec. To meet the diverse demands of his clients, Mr. Anderson relies on the basic research of novel techniques and environmental quality or data collected by other entities (including the clients themselves).

Essential Skills

Mr. Anderson emphasized computer modeling as a medium of understanding the migration of air and water pollutants. Expansive relational databases are a precursor to performing these analyses. Thus, having the management skills to handle such large quantities of data is a very marketable attribute. Being able to use existing software as well as having the mathematical ability to construct new models is also essential to his practice at Geosyntec Consultants, Inc.

Undergraduate Studies and Finding a Job

For those with a policy background there may be more plentiful opportunities within government and non-profit organizations. The for-profit environmental sector is still expanding but has become more mature. Mr. Anderson would encourage those with the aptitude and interest to pursue more technical tracks.

Leo Pierre Roy’s Tweetable Moments

Recorded at the October 29, 2013 Board Member Spotlight Series—a program hosted by the EBC Young Environmental Professionals Committee

"Be curious read a lot, outside of your subject area. When people are narrowly focused in their field, they miss things"

"Keep track of your contacts and stay in touch with them, your colleagues now will end up senior level associates"

"Keep your options open and be curious"

"I've had a lot of failures in my life but you learn from it. If you're not failing, you're not trying hard enough"
What does your job entail on a day-to-day basis?

My job entails working on a wide variety of transportation projects, with supervision and guidance from the Project Manager and other staff members in my work group. Day to day activities vary greatly between technical work (utilizing AutoCAD, GIS, and a number of other computer programs), technical and report writing, and field work. A kick-off meeting occurs for every new project, as well as progress meetings as needed. Whenever I need guidance, I consult with my Project Manager to make sure I’m on the right track.

What skills are the most important to have acquired in your line of work?

AutoCAD skills are very important to have, especially in any design related field. It’s a needed skill for all transportation engineers in my office, and some of the environmental engineers. GIS skills are also great to have regardless of profession. They can aid greatly in the presentation of information and making documents look visually appealing to clients. Other than technical skills, it is very important to have good communication and organizational skills. Communication includes verbal communication with clients and staff members, as well as written communication skills. With regard to organization, it is often the organization of project information that makes the project successful. While all the work and analysis for a project might be correct, it is the presentation of this information to the client that is the most important. Often, clients have little knowledge of the engineering behind the project and the goal is to present as much material as possible in a way anyone can understand.

Is there anything you know now that would have been helpful to know when you were entering your field?

I interned at the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) for 3 years before starting at CDM Smith in June 2013. Working in the public sector is very different than working for a private company. In the public sector, clients are not billed for your time working on projects. In the private sector, your job entails billing the client for whatever work has been completed on each project. Particularly for an employee starting off in the private sector, it would be great for a prospective employee to have prior experience, or to at least understand the basics of staying within the scope of a project, staying within budget, managing time, and understanding profit/loss as it applies to private companies. Regardless of prior experience, an employee should ask as many questions as they need to, especially in the first couple of weeks and months, to gain an understanding of the business side of working for a private company. Knowing and keeping track of billable time and working to stay within budgets right away will greatly help an employee with career advancement, as they will become a profitable asset to the company.

What kind of coursework or experiences excites you about a prospective employee?

Prior internships and group projects are probably the best experiences that help a prospective employee to stick out. Being skilled working in a group is a necessity for almost any field, as work is typically done in groups. In addition to possessing strong technical skills, having experience writing technical papers or reports, or having a paper published, is another great way for a prospective employee to stick out. Being able to bring a great piece of writing to an interview can be particularly beneficial.
As a Project Development Manager with Harvest Power, a company that specializes in diverting discarded organic waste, Molly Bales works on feedstock procurement. She works with “restaurants, grocery stores, colleges, food manufacturers, and other generators of food waste to receive their organic waste” at Harvest Power’s facilities. This typically involves inside and outside sales work as well as implementation tasks that include touring customer facilities and training staff. Some of the most important skills to have for Ms. Bales line of work are “sales, organizational skills, and logistics.” Two things that would have been helpful to know when she was entering this field are the value of hiring a consultant for Customer Relationship Management (CRM) implementation and the value of engineering. By the time they had hired a consultant for their CRM process, Harvest Power “had started using the system and had to do a lot of rework as a result.” Ms. Bales wishes she had done some coursework in engineering so that she had a better understanding of how the industrial technology components that Harvest Power utilizes work. When considering prospective employees, Ms. Bales gets excited about candidates that have a mix of verbal and math skills, excellent writing skills, and graphic design skills.