

FH intern experiences a real-world 'classroom'

Rachel Chiavaras, FH

Alma Contreras started working at Hanford as a work-study student while attending Columbia Basin College in 1998. Now a Hanford academic-year intern, Contreras is with the Landlord Project and working on the last year of her undergraduate degree at Washington State University Tri-Cities.

Contreras is one of 11 academic-year interns working with Fluor Hanford. She started her internship in 1998 as an accounting student, but the experience with the Landlord Project has given her some career insight as well as on-the-job training. "When I started, I thought I would major in accounting," Contreras said. "But after I got to do more in the Landlord Project, I started to see a bigger world than just accounting, and I decided to broaden my major to study general business with a minor in management and psychology."

One of the most important benefits of her internship, according to Contreras, is the opportunity it gives her to apply classroom experience to the workplace and see it in action. "Very often, students learn theories and concepts at school, but it's hard to appreciate the knowledge until we have the ability to apply those concepts in a real day-to-day working environment," she said. "This internship has allowed me to do just that and has allowed me to see the value of my education."

Working in the Landlord Project, which manages all the major maintenance and upgrade projects for the site's infrastructure, Contreras has gained experience by assisting in a variety of projects. She was involved in the purchase of the new fire trucks for the site, researching the costs involved and making sure the purchases stayed within budget.

She also developed and now maintains the Work Breakdown Structure. She maintains charge codes for current-year execution and out-year planning, and assists in Project Priority List meetings with customers, the Department of Energy Richland Operations Office and Fluor Hanford.

Contreras and the other 10 academic-year interns in the program work part-time while attending school full-time. They are expected to maintain a full school schedule and keep a minimum 2.5 grade-point average. Contreras works part-time during the academic year and full-time during the summer.

A criterion when applying for an internship is that the student must be enrolled in a major that supports the work assignment. Managers who request an intern must have the workscope and budget approved. A student's performance is a very important factor for remaining in the program. The intern's performance must measure up to the expected company work ethic and have his or her mentor's approval at or above an acceptable level.

Contreras's experience an example of how the "pipeline concept" works. The mentoring organization provides the intern with meaningful learning experiences and real responsibility that increases with the student's college advancement, thus producing a well-mentored candidate for full-time employment.

Academic-year interns work 15 to 19 hours per week. Summer-hire students work assignments of 10 to 12 weeks full-time. Managers interested in requesting interns for the current academic year or next summer can view the Education Outreach Web site at www.rl.gov/communication/outreach/index.html, or contact Theresa Quezada, Fluor Hanford Education Outreach coordinator, at 373-0513. ♦



Academic-year intern Alma Contreras, right, works with her mentor and manager Jo Ann Crigler in the Landlord Project. The landlord function was transferred to Fluor Hanford recently when the workscope of former subcontractor DynCorp Tri-Cities Services was absorbed into Fluor.