

MID – AMERICA TRANSPORTATION CENTER SUMMER INTERNSHIP REPORT



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City of Lincoln

My name is Luísa Braga, and I worked as an intern for the City of Lincoln this summer, but before I talk about my experience there I want to explain how I ended up participating with the Mid-America Transportation Center.

I was an exchange student from Brazil; I was part of the Brazilian Scientific Mobility Program, a merit-based scholarship for students of excellence in Brazil. By now you might think that I am one of those geniuses that has tons of trophies and medals from math competitions on shelves, and that everyone is trying to get me to work for them because of the title “student of excellence.” Well, that is not how it works. The scholarship has a misleading name; it was created to give students the opportunity to go to different countries and learn about new technologies to bring back to Brazil and improve the country’s development. So let’s get the facts straight, I am an average to good student, who has never worked before (in Brazil you only start working in college, and usually during your second year), and was looking for an internship for this summer. I went to career fairs, all dressed up, and handed out my great resume, which, if I had to pay for the experience, it would have been for free. Needless to say, my phone did not ring at all. Only for telemarketers; they call me daily. As the weeks passed, I started to get very anxious about my summer, because as mentioned before, I am part of a program, and on this program you either find a summer internship/research, or you go back to Brazil for good. I didn’t want to go back to Brazil. I went and called everywhere from the Career Fair, and zilch. No one wanted an exchange student with zero experience that is only spending the summer here and then leaving. I was about to give up when one friend came to me and was like, “Hey you should try that MATC thing”. But since I am very lucky, I had missed the

deadline for a day or so. A couple of weeks later, I ran into a friend who had been accepted for the program and I told him about the deadline thing and congratulated him anyways. He said, "You should have emailed them, they are very nice, and would have totally understood. Too bad it is too late now." I did so anyways, and Laviania emailed me back saying come meet me at my office. I went and she was like, "So you'll probably be working with the City of Lincoln and...." And all I could say was like, "So, am I in?" And she said with the best Laviania smile, "Of course, the more girls the better." So one thing that I am extremely grateful for is that MATC believed in me when no one else did, and that is something that I will take with me forever.

The City of Lincoln assigned me two projects initially, the Van Dorn Rehabilitation Project, and the Penny Bridge site. Later, I was assigned the Gallery Alley Improvement Project. On each one of them, I worked as an Observer/Inspector for the City and for other, more experienced, Inspectors on the field. An Observer is someone who will make sure that everything is going according to what the engineers designed, that the contractors are doing what they were supposed to be doing, and the way they are supposed to be doing it (following the SPECS book, or any other protocol that they have to follow). This includes measuring, taking notes, writing reports, taking samples to be tested at the lab, and so on and so forth. When working on these projects, I was lucky enough to attend a couple of meetings, PreCon ones, and many weekly meetings where I had the opportunity to see firsthand the interaction between the contractor and contractee, how they had to work with any problems that showed up and still stick to what was designed, and in a few projects, how they had to work with the public. For example, when they had a street open while

working. Things that I learned this summer besides everything engineering wise that I would have never learned from the books, is how to talk to people, how to interact with the public and with the workers. And most importantly, how every single person can teach you something, and that if you let them, they will do so. From the guy with a vibrator working on the concrete, to the top engineer from the firm, they will teach you something.

This internship has taught me so many things, and has helped me appreciate and to become more aware of my surroundings, of how many people are involved in everything around you, from the light blinking at the crossing walk to the interstate you drive to go to work. Another thing that really got to me was how proud I was to walk on a sidewalk I helped build, or to drive at Van Dorn when it was ready, and especially when people come to you and thank you for everything you have done for their street. I think the feeling of being helpful, to make someone's life easier, and the satisfaction that you get right after you're done is something that without a doubt motivates me to keep on being a civil engineer.