An Intern's Story: A Way to Evaluate Human Performance [1]

Submitted on 10 September 2010 - 7:34pm

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Calificación:

By: Jorge Herrera, University of Puerto Rico Researcher News [2]. When I was asked for the first time why I decided to apply for an internship at NASA, my answer seemed to be very cliché and academically predictable. I incorporated keywords like exploration, engineering, vision and learning experience into my answer, hoping my words would not fall short of my high expectations. Having the opportunity to work both at NASA-Ames in California (summer 2009) and NASA-LaRC in Virginia (January-August 2010) have not proven my initial ideas wrong. I feel that during the last couple of months I have been working in one of the most nurturing and inspiring environments for scientists and engineers who like to stretch their knowledge and capabilities. As part of being a Undergraduate Student Research Program (USRP) intern at Langley, I had the opportunity to attend interesting lectures related to the future plans for human exploration on Mars, space radiation and alternative methods for spacecraft propulsion, next-generation air vehicles and future transportation, recent developments in material science and engineering, new approaches for entry and landing technologies for spacecrafts and many others. I also took advantage of an opportunity to hear astronauts like Barbara Morgan and Leland Melvin, who shared their experiences. They encouraged us to not limit ourselves. In addition, I visited research facilities at NASA-LaRC and NASA-Goddard while learning about the different projects that were taking place there. Mentors Kara Latorella and Yamira Santiago-Espada allowed me to be as innovative as I could in the project that was assigned to me. I was in charge

of the design and development of an online user community/knowledge base for NASA's Multi-Attribute Task Battery (MATB-II), a workload measurement/multi-task assessment tool developed for evaluating human performance. My job was to propose, design and develop a knowledge management format that could provide for a rich user experience, user participation, dynamic content, collective intelligence and documentation sharing. It was envisioned that the same users of the community could contribute to this knowledge base as they interact with it. The main objective of the application was to facilitate the exchange of ideas and collaboration, as well as enable feedback among developers, researchers and other scientists who use MATB. After two months of research and five months of design and development, we ended up with a product that includes an online collaborative user community. This tool provides for active participation from researchers, developers and MATB-related experts and also provides a spot where valuable information can be shared, informally documented and published. Goals were accomplished at the expected time in this contribution to one of the many projects under the NASA's Integrated Intelligent Flight Deck Project (IIFD). Other NASA contractors quoted my project for five times the cost of my stipend for both spring and summer. I have learned that we must have love and passion for what we do to be successful. These elements can motivate us to spend a little more time working on a task and can keep us going when things are not working as we planned. I've been able to see opportunities NASA has for Hispanic college students and better understand how NASA research projects are funded and how NASA managers promote their projects. I've also had a chance to network. One my toughest challenges as a USRP intern has been being away from my girlfriend in Puerto Rico. I have used most of my paycheck for airplane tickets for our occasional meetings, but I think it has been totally worth it. I have learned that it will be difficult to find another place with the working environment that I have found in both of the NASA centers where I have worked. I now feel that I can truly say that NASA is a place where limitations can be conquered with imagination, research, exploration, science, engineering and vision. Also it is a place where going to work each day and dealing with state of the art technology offers a priceless learning experience. I think this experience will give me the opportunity to inspire and encourage kids and other young people like me to aim higher. I can tell them that it is important not to settle for anything less than achieving your full aspirations.

Links
[1] https://www.cienciapr.org/en/external-news/interns-story-way-evaluate-human-performance [2] http://www.nasa.gov/centers/langley/news/researchernews/rn_internherrera.html