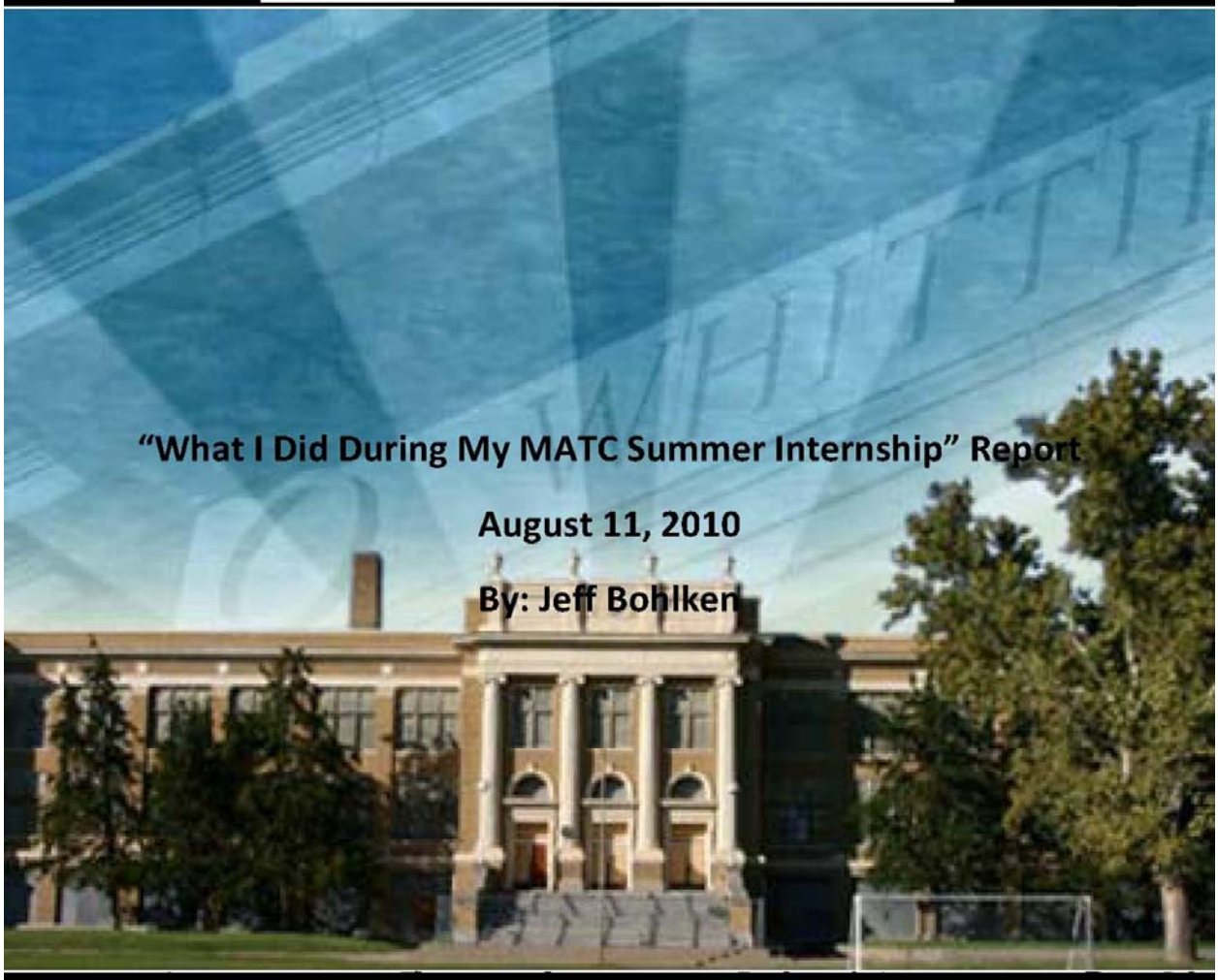
Midwest Roadside Safety Facility
University of Nebraska



"What I Did During My MATC Summer Internship" Report

August 11, 2010

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"What do you want to be when you grow up?" It is a question undoubtedly heard by every American child at some point in the time, and a question we continually ask ourselves way past the point of becoming a "grown up". I have been no exception to this, and of course my responses in those early years of my life were just like those of most: a professional athlete, a firefighter, and a superhero. However, it was during my 7th grade year that these ideas took the backseat to a new dream: I wanted to build things. Now, I wasn't talking about birdhouses and model cars, no, my dreams were much bigger than that, I wanted to build skyscrapers and dams. And so it began my quest to learn how things were made and how they worked, a quest that eventually lead me to this summer and into the MATC Internship Program.

My internship this summer was with the Midwest Roadside Safety Facility (MwRSF), doing research in the field of highway safety and full-scale accident testing. When I arrived the first day I had no idea what to expect and, more so, I had no idea what I was doing, and I think it is for these two reasons that my internship this summer has been so rewarding. Throughout my internship I have been exposed to the vast world referred to as Roadside Safety, and although my project has a specialized focus I have absorbed a wide range of information in my time here with MwRSF. It is this ability to absorb information that makes internships such an invaluable part of the learning experience, because you can have information pounded into your head in the classroom but until you see this information put to use in a real world setting it really has no true meaning. By saying this I don't mean to sound as if professors and classes are useless, instead I am trying to say that internship programs such as MATC are the homes built on the foundations laid by these professors in the classrooms.

My research project was divided into three parts, and each part had its own special task and each part helped me learn something different. The first part of my research project was to clean up an existing database, so that the information could be used with ease and reliability, not only for my own project but for many others in the future. It was during this step that I realized what I believe is the key to being successful, not only as an engineer but as a member of society. It is better to finish second if you would have had to cut corners to finish first. Meaning that, while deadlines and getting things done in a timely manner is important, doing things correctly is the real key to success. This is not an attempt to criticize the previous work done by others on the database, nor is it a claim that the work I have done this summer was perfect - it is just a valuable life lesson I learned through hours of correcting and editing.

The second part of my research project was to compile the information into meaningful groups and charts. This is where I built on my problem solving and rational thinking skills. As most college students, especially those in the college of engineering, I had already known the importance of these skills. However, it did come to my realization that the best way to improve yourself in these areas is not so much through practice and repetition, but through listening to the ideas of others around you. This is another example of the importance of internships, as they allow you to be surrounded with a wide variety of experienced professionals, all of whom can be learned from if the effort and willingness to learn is there.

Then there is the final part of my project, to analyze the compiled data and create a final written report of my findings. This was where most of my learning about roadside safety actually occurred. I learned different terms and naming conventions, what

information was critical to understanding an accident, and what information would be useful when developing replicable full-scale testing conditions. It was during these final weeks that my knowledge of roadside safety expanded enormously, and my desire to learn more knowledge expanded exponentially. As well, this part of my project taught me another valuable life lesson. Asking a question is more so a sign of intelligence and desire to learn than one of ignorance and stupidity. It is through the ability to ask questions that an internship provides it greatest opportunity, and it is through listening to the following answers that an intern can learn the most valuable information they can take with them.

My quest to becoming “What I want to be when I grow up” is far from completed, and at times it seems like those dreams of being a professional athlete, firefighter, and superhero do some backseat driving. However, my summer internship through the MATC Program provided a great opportunity, one that provided an incredible experience and knowledge that will remain valuable no matter what path I choose to travel in life. It was hard to put what I learned and gained from this opportunity this summer into words, and it is even harder to express my gratitude to all of the people who helped me along my way this summer. So, to keep thing simple I would like so say thank you to the MATC Internship Program and MwRSF. It is through organizations such as these two that students, like myself are able to develop into the great engineers and minds of tomorrow.