

Internship Provides TCEQ With Highly Qualified Employees

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By Marty Otero, TCEQ External Relations



(Left to right) Yessenia Jaramillo, Jennifer Kirby, and Erika Crespo, three past Mickey Leland interns who are now working at the TCEQ to protect our state's air, water, and land resources.

Creating permits and maps, and conducting site inspections, are three ways former interns now work with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to protect our state's environment. [Mickey Leland Environmental Internship Program](#) interns learn how the TCEQ operates to protect our most precious natural resources: our land, air, and water.

From Geology Grad Student to Permit Professional



Erika Crespo reviewing an application for a proposed olefin (unsaturated hydrocarbons) production plant.

Today Erika Crespo works as an environmental permit specialist at the TCEQ. She responds to questions from organizations and consultants concerning pending permit applications for industrial wastewater. Currently she is reviewing an application for a proposed olefin (unsaturated hydrocarbons) production plant. If the application is approved, the proposed plant will be authorized to discharge utility wastewater, equipment cleaning wastewater, and treated domestic wastewater.

An average workday for Crespo consists of things like responding to questions related to permits, attending consultation meetings with the regulated community, and completing technical reviews on permit applications. Why is this important?

“This is important because the permit writer is responsible for acquiring, maintaining, and updating the information that is included in each permit based on regulations, program responsibilities, and technical criteria.” says Crespo.



Mickey
LELAND
Environmental
Internship Program

Crespo, who did her internship at W&M Environmental Group, Inc. in 2012 was a graduate student at the University of Texas at Arlington, studying Geology and Geochemistry when she applied for the MLEIP. She wanted to gain professional experience in the environmental science field, so when one of her professors told her about the MLEIP she didn't hesitate to apply.

"MLEIP offered me a unique experience, where I was able to learn about the type of work that is done in both the private and public sector. I am very grateful for the opportunity I was given." says Crespo.

For Crespo, her participation in the program tremendously helped her with her career decisions. During her internship, she attended seminars and professional meetings and participated in two phases of an environmental site assessment. Environmental site assessments evaluate the environmental condition of a piece of property, and they are usually performed during the buying or selling process. Investors and lending institutions use them to understand the environmental risk associated with their potential investment.

"The experience I gained was one of a kind, and I am very glad that I followed my heart," she comments confidently.

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GIS Analyst Gets Specialized Experience



Jennifer Kirby working on maps for items considered at the regular meeting of the commissioners.

Jennifer Kirby is a geographic information systems analyst at the TCEQ. She uses the same GIS software that she learned how to use when she was an intern with the MLEIP.

Kirby creates maps for items considered at the regular meeting of the commissioners, maintains the agency's geodatabase (database that stores spatial data, like latitude and longitude coordinates) and creates web applications to provide TCEQ staff and the public with access to TCEQ geographic information. The web applications she helps build are geographic data viewers. The viewer takes the GIS data and displays it in a user-friendly interface, making TCEQ geographic data easily accessible to the public. The viewers get about 3,000 hits a month.

“Our team just finished a project for creating a new web application that assists TCEQ staff with answering legislative requests and planning investigations. I was the manager for this project, and for other GIS-related projects we have done since I was hired.”

Kirby’s supervisor, Elayne Barber, says “Jennifer interned with our division in the reporting section. She did such an exceptional job during her internship that ultimately her GIS experience, her internship work, and her character made her the most qualified candidate for the position she now holds.”

Kirby was an intern during the summer of 2016, during her senior year. Kirby heard about the internship opportunity from her college advisor, who would often send students emails related to jobs and internships. In her junior year, Kirby found the TCEQ website, researched it and decided that this was the place she wanted to work. Then in her senior year, it was a done deal after a five-minute conversation with Juanita Baldwin, coordinator of the internship program. Kirby was convinced and applied for the internship.

“I learned that TCEQ values their interns.” said Kirby.

Even though her background was in GIS, she was placed as an enterprise reporting intern in the Information Resources Division at the TCEQ. She managed a small project where she had the task of updating 200 reports to make sure they met accessibility standards. Additionally, she performed on-call duties for her team, she assisted staff with computer and information resource problems and got to do a couple of map requests with the GIS team.

Kirby believes that her internship experience and the technical skills she learned at the TCEQ helped her secure an open position with the same team that she interned with in the MLEIP.

“This internship program does a great job of preparing interns, teaching them how to conduct themselves in a professional manner and work in an office environment,” she states proudly.

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Intern Becomes Environmental Investigator



Yessenia Jaramillo conducts a complaint investigation to evaluate used-oil management.

Yessenia Jaramillo, who works as an environmental investigator with the TCEQ's regional office in Austin, conducts scheduled investigations at waste facilities, such as recycling facilities, landfills, manufacturing facilities, and gas stations. Also, she conducts complaint investigations, such as those of alleged illegal dump sites. An average workday for her includes following-up with organizations that are regulated by the TCEQ to make sure that they are adhering to the rules and regulations after inspections. She also provides guidance to the public and to the regulated community.

Jaramillo, who did her internship the summer of 2011 at the regional office in Austin, comments that, "during my internship, I participated in investigations and became familiar with Texas environmental rules and regulations, specifically waste rules." She feels that because of that knowledge she was prepared and qualified for her current job.

According to her supervisor, Chad Ahlgren, "Yessenia was able to get a lot of experience as an intern. She does good work, and certainly, she is using in her day-to-day work what she learned during her internship."

Jaramillo became aware of the MLEIP during a career fair held at Huston-Tillotson University. There she met Baldwin, who cheerfully informed her of the programs at the TCEQ, and who encouraged her to apply for the internship program.

"I realized that no one was as eager as Ms. Baldwin to have an intern at their workplace, so I was easily convinced and applied that night," says Jaramillo.

During her internship, Jaramillo shadowed environmental investigators to inspect waste facilities. That summer, she also became familiar with peer-reviewed investigation reports, and of course, with the internal office filing system.

"I was given the opportunity, as an intern, to share my interpretation of the rules and provide input on them. I would consider myself lucky in that the job that I currently have was thanks to a successful internship in the same office. The experiences you gain become tools you can use to make yourself more marketable in other jobs."

As for the most memorable experience for each one of these women, well, Crespo says it was that, "the MLEIP taught me about the real world...seriously."

Kirby adds that "she really enjoyed the intern team-building events and the conference." She enjoyed meeting other interns and hearing from the program sponsors and TCEQ executive management.

Jaramillo wraps it all up by saying, "the most important thing I learned that summer was that not knowing anything is okay, and that keeping an open mind for trying something new will open so many doors for you." She leaves us with these words, "I've realized that we all took a chance, and it turned out to be more than we ever expected."

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All photos TCEQ.