

## Ryan Nelson



Ryan Nelson is a Boise State University student who works as an Engineering Technician for Reclamation's Resource and Technical Services Group. His hometown is Nampa, Idaho.

I was working for a civil engineer in private industry, a fantastic experience. However, a decrease in work hours and my desire to gain a more diverse experience in my field of civil engineering prompted me to seek a new internship. A year earlier I had noticed an internship with Reclamation just hours before the application was due. I frantically and unsuccessfully tried to polish off a resume and fill out all the required online materials. I missed the deadline.

A year later, when I saw not one but three openings for students at Reclamation, I was quick to apply. I received several notices saying that I was qualified for the positions. A week or two later I received two letters notifying me that I had not been picked for an interview for two of the positions. With much disappointment I then forgot about my application for the third position.

I was driving to school when, out of the blue, someone from Reclamation called and asked if I wanted to interview for the third position. Shocked I asked what position and company. I felt the interview went fairly well, but my wife says that interviewing is my weakest attribute as I had applied for a couple internships during my school career and did poorly in the interview process.

Enough time went by after the interview to make me think I had not gotten the job. I was surprised when I received a call from a Reclamation human resource officer and was offered the position. I accepted and was excited about the opportunity to work for Reclamation in Facility Operations and Maintenance.

My experience at Reclamation has been wonderful. I am currently in the Student Temporary Employment Program and hope to continue with Reclamation in the Student Career Experience Program--and eventually as a full-time employee and team member. I have learned tons and have had a lot of fun in the six plus months I have been here. Though I must say, it was a rocky start.

Before I started working for Reclamation, I worked as an intern, and I regularly commuted a few hours away to work a second job in construction. I am married and have two kids (I am starting to be the old guy in class). I always had to work right before a test or a large assignment was due. I was always more concerned about paying the next bill. Consequently, my GPA slipped during the

semester I was hired as a reclamation employee. I was in a downward spiral, failing a class here and there.

Fortunately, my Reclamation manager wanted to keep me on, and I was placed on a (if you don't pass action plan). All through the next semester I constantly kept worrying that I would not make the grades that were required. Thanks to great support and encouragement from my Reclamation manager, human resource officer, and wife, I was not only able to pass the semester, but I learned I had what it takes to pull out of the flaming downhill spiral that I had been in.

My Human Resource Officer at Reclamation taught me several skills I used to not only pass but to succeed. I plan to use these skills to bring my GPA back to where it used to be. I have only had one other employer and manager that has cared this much about my success, and that was when I was working at my grandparents' lumber yard and hardware store.

As part of operations and maintenance, I have had the wonderful opportunity to conduct physical and visual inspections of bridges. I have become acquainted with several other engineers from other area offices within Reclamation. I also get to interact with the irrigation district personnel, dam tenders, and the general public.

I have gone out on a few dam inspections, which have been both exciting and rewarding. During the inspections the Reclamation team teaches me about what we are doing and why we are inspecting the attributes of the dams or bridges. Having grown up in a small agricultural town in Idaho, receiving education about how the water and structures are managed has been a wonderful experience. Moreover, there is nothing like being 100 feet down in a concrete cylinder and knowing that you are in the middle of a dam that is holding back several thousand acre-feet of water.

I have also gained technical writing experience acting as the backup editorial assistant for our group. This has greatly improved my ability to write and edit reports and correspondence. Since working at reclamation, I quickly realized I have to watch how I explain my internship duties. For example, I told a friend that I read and edit dam reports. He mistakenly got the impression that I didn't enjoy reading reports. I went on to explain that they were inspection reports for the dams reclamation staff had inspected earlier in the year.

I will use the skills gained during my Reclamation internship during the rest of my school and professional careers. I have a few semesters left in school before I earn my Bachelors of Science Degree in Civil Engineering. I want to continue in the internship program and hope to eventually become a full-time Reclamation team member. Reclamation is a great and diverse place to work during school and a great place to spend a career after I earn my degree.