

Clemson Horticulture Student Essays



Internship Experience at Austin Outdoors

By Ben McElrath

I am a Horticulture major at Clemson University, and will be a junior this coming year. At Clemson it is mandatory that Horticulture students complete an internship dealing with the career that they wish to pursue upon completion of their degree. The internship must also be at a site where we have not worked before. Since my tenth grade year in high school I worked at a professional landscape company called Carolina Beautiful, so I had a good bit of experience with landscape maintenance and installation. Being that Carolina Beautiful is the only job I have ever had until this internship, I was a little nervous about being employed with a different company. I searched for landscape companies and came upon Austin Outdoors, which seemed like the best choice for me. I applied to the Savannah branch and was accepted.

The agreement for my internship was that I would experience safety meetings, customer relations, maintenance, enhancement, installation, irrigation, fertilization/chemical applications, bidding/pricing, and business development. As you can see there were a lot of components that went along with this particular internship. Overall I am very pleased with my experience because with only twelve weeks, and a long list of things for me to do, I was able to partake in the majority of the jobs listed in the agreement.

I have repeatedly made connections with things we do here at Austin Outdoors to lessons I learned in the classroom. The most important connection I have made would definitely

be deep planting, which I learned about in HORT 101. When working with the plant crew and planting the big Live Oaks each worker knows to look out for and prevent deep planting. When planting the trees the holes are dug, and when the tree is planted the root flare is always exposed. Another connection that repeatedly showed up would be watering practices, which also was touched on in HORT 101. Watering deeply but infrequently is a huge practice up here especially in residential plantations such as Sun City, and The Haven. Another connection that I made since we started laying our own sod would be rolling the grass after it's laid. This was something I learned in my Introduction to Turfgrass Culture class. When laying sod it is important to roll it, and that is because by rolling it you decrease the area between the roots of the sod and the soil. This results in faster establishment.

My favorite person at work would definitely be Grant Hawkins, my supervisor. He is a terrific mentor, is extremely organized, and is dedicated to making this branch thrive. He knows how to keep a happy and relaxed atmosphere at the work place, which in my opinion is very important for a job like this. Also, he is a great business man who knows how to pick up jobs, and also knows how to keep customers happy. One thing I have learned from Grant is that communication is the key to success in a business like this. Keeping on good communication terms with customers and ensuring their happiness is how companies like these succeed. When describing the ideal person to work for a company

like this one, there are several traits that he/she should have in my opinion. First and foremost would be a willingness to work long days because even though the handbook says work hours are from 7am-4pm that is hardly ever the case. Another important trait would have to be bearing the heat. At the Savannah branch most of the places that we work at have little to no shade and it gets extremely hot. Also willingness to work and not stopping until the job is done is very important for earning respect here. This is true because most of the time you will be working with crews that don't stop until the job is finished, and they don't take too kindly to someone taking breaks and not keeping up with the pace. Lastly I would say that the person should be able to accept any task given to them without arguing.

Throughout my time here I have found my strengths and weaknesses. I would have to say that my strengths would be in the maintenance and installation part of the job. I say this because it's the two aspects of the job that I have the most experience in mainly due to my employment at Carolina Beautiful where I did it every day, and those tasks are second hand nature to me. Moreover, I also have my weaknesses, which would mainly be in irrigation. Knowing the exact place a sprinkler head needs to be and adjusting it so it sprays in the right places is still a little confusing for me. I will say though that I have improved a lot on irrigation since my last report, but it's still fairly new to me.

After completing my twelve week internship for Austin Outdoors in Savannah, GA I am very pleased with what I have achieved and learned. For the most part I was involved with every aspect there is to "landscaping" from start to finish. Coming from another landscaping company before my employment here made the stay even better because I had that much more to compare my experience to. Next summer I plan to go back to work with Carolina Beautiful and pass on some of my knowledge. Upon completion of my degree I will indeed look for a job with Austin Outdoors or any well-known landscaping company that offers me a job. Overall I couldn't be more pleased with the way this internship turned out for me.