

Building Strong Foundations: How the Army Fellows Program opens doors for students and graduates

By Katherine Alegado and Samantha Boyle December 13, 2024



Army Fellows (from left) Emmet Ryan, mechanical engineer; Antonina Beal, contract specialist; and Samantha Boyle, public affairs specialist, showcase the diverse talents and dedication of the U.S. Army Fellows Program at the U.S. Army Corps of...

Pursuing career opportunities after college, three Army Fellows build strong foundations towards careers in the federal service at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Sacramento District.

The Army Fellows Program is part of the Army Civilian Careers initiative, offering more than 500 career paths to over 265,000 professionals in diverse roles, including real estate, information technology, engineering, marketing, and more — all without requiring military training.

The program provides Army Fellows with benefits similar to other Army Civilians, such as health plans, life insurance, retirement options, and flexible work arrangements that prioritize work-life balance.

Overall, the program represents a journey of self-discovery and professional growth.

Army Fellows Antonina Beal, a contract specialist; Emmet Ryan, a mechanical engineer; and Samantha Boyle, a public affairs specialist, are navigating the comprehensive fellowship, preparing them for permanent, full-time Army Civilian roles.

Reflecting on her motivations, Beal shared, "I was seeking an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to society and achieve substantial career growth at the same time." Her experience emphasizes the program's appeal to those looking to make a tangible impact while advancing professionally.

Ryan noted a challenge many students and recent graduates face when starting their careers. "My degree has so many applications, and it's overwhelming to come out of school and be expected to know exactly where to go or where to apply," he said. This sentiment is a testament to how the fellowship provides clarity and direction for those unsure of their next steps.

Similarly, Boyle spoke about her initial uncertainty. "I couldn't quite figure out where I wanted to be or how to figure out where I might belong," she admitted. Her journey illustrates how the program helps Army Fellows find their place and develop confidence in their chosen paths.

The program's impact extends beyond individual experiences. Michaela Novak, the USACE Sacramento District intern program coordinator, offers insight into why this program is so effective for students and recent graduates embarking on federal service careers.

"The Army Fellows Program is essential to the USACE Sacramento District's mission and success because it immerses students in various disciplines and experiences. This well-rounded exposure allows them to discover their strengths and identify where they can contribute most effectively," Novak says. "For instance, a Fellow might discover a hidden talent in structural engineering during a rotation, benefiting both their career and the organization as a whole."

Novak emphasized the importance of seeking opportunities and stepping out of comfort zones. "While it might feel intimidating to rotate through different sections when you're new, being proactive, asking for work and exploring various disciplines are essential to professional growth," she said.

The Army Fellows Program provides more than just skill-building; it offers invaluable insights into working within a mission-driven organization committed to innovation and community service. This experience prepares Fellows not only for immediate career success but also sets them up for long-term professional development.

For those aspiring to join the program, Novak advised students and graduates to participate in recruitment and college outreach events. “Connecting with USACE team members at these events is vital to building relationships and gaining insight into the program,” she said. “The hiring process can be challenging, so keeping candidates engaged and informed is crucial.”

The Army Fellows Program is more than just an internship; it’s an investment in one's future. Those interested in the program can learn more about the journeys of Beal, Ryan, and Boyle and what they aim to achieve after completing the program at spk.usace.army.mil/careers.

RELATED STORIES