

STEM SPOTLIGHT

Brett Dunagan, PE

Project Engineer
Smith, Seckman, Reid

Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering
University of Memphis



Q How did you select your college major?

A I have always been a very curious person. When I was a kid, I was always asking questions and taking things apart to find out how they worked. Science was always my strongest subject in school. I also love being outdoors. Civil engineering seemed like a good marriage of all these preferences. Majoring in civil engineering gave me insight into the how and why of the developed world that we live in.

Q What was the biggest influence in your selection of major/ career?

A I chose civil engineering because it was interesting and had the promise of steady work. People will always need civil engineers to maintain and improve the infrastructure and our quality of living. Civil engineering is also the broadest of the engineering disciplines. A civil engineering graduate can work with rivers, bridges, structures, highways, airports, environmental issues, water treatment, and construction projects. A degree that gave me all of these career options was very appealing to me.

Q If you could go back to high school and select any elective course to take that would have better prepared you for college, what would it be?

A I chose to not take physics in high school, against the advice of a few teachers. I regret that decision because physics was one of those courses that changes the way you see everything around you. The principles you learn in physics also cross over to mathematics and engineering courses, so I was at a disadvantage until I took physics my sophomore year in college.



Q What is your favorite aspect of your job?

A SSR is a great company to work for because there are many different roles they will allow you to take on. I have the opportunity to work on roadway construction projects, transportation design, site design, drainage studies, and water and sewer projects. I am always learning new facets of civil engineering.

Q How do you/your company make a positive impact on society/our community?

A We do hydraulic analysis and design to help prevent and alleviate localized flooding in the region. We provide construction engineering services to ensure our roads and interstates are built properly. We also design many of the facilities, utilities, and roads in this area.

Q What is the most interesting thing you have been able to do in your career?

A I worked on four of the five phases of the Beale Street Landing Project. Everything is unique about that project. The site is located on the bank of the Mississippi River. The building has a grass roof and is uniquely shaped so that looking north or south it appears to be a hill; looking west you can see the river through the glass walls. The park has sloped terraces and “islands” for viewing the river. The floating dock (that you access via a helical ramp) provides boat access through over 50’ of change in river level.

Q What makes you get up each morning excited about your profession?

A Our world is full of challenging issues that can be solved through engineering. There is always something new to learn or a different approach to these challenges.



Q How does your career incorporate STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math)?

A I use engineering principles to solve design and construction issues pertaining to infrastructure.

Q What advice would you like to share with K-12 students who are considering your profession?

A Study hard and pay attention in class so that you make the best grades that you can. Earning a college scholarship can save you or your family tens of thousands of dollars at the very minimum. Do the same when you are in college. The best jobs out there are very competitive and one of the criteria by which candidates are evaluated is GPA (your in-major GPA is most important).

The second piece of advice I would give is to choose a field of study and career that you are passionate about or greatly interested in. Many people choose careers for the wrong reasons and do not get satisfaction out of their work. The happiest people I know make money doing what they love. You want to wake up every day excited about going into work.