

STEM SPOTLIGHT

Jamie Nabakowski

Senior Civil Engineer
US Army Corps of Engineers, Memphis District

Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering
University of Memphis



Q How did you select your college major?

A My desire to combine the things I was good at with the things I enjoyed led me to civil engineering. I was good at math and enjoyed working around construction and being outdoors.

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

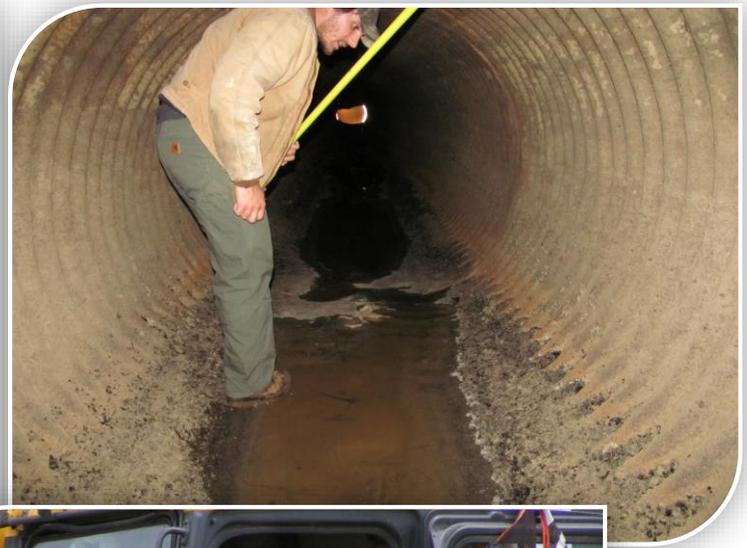
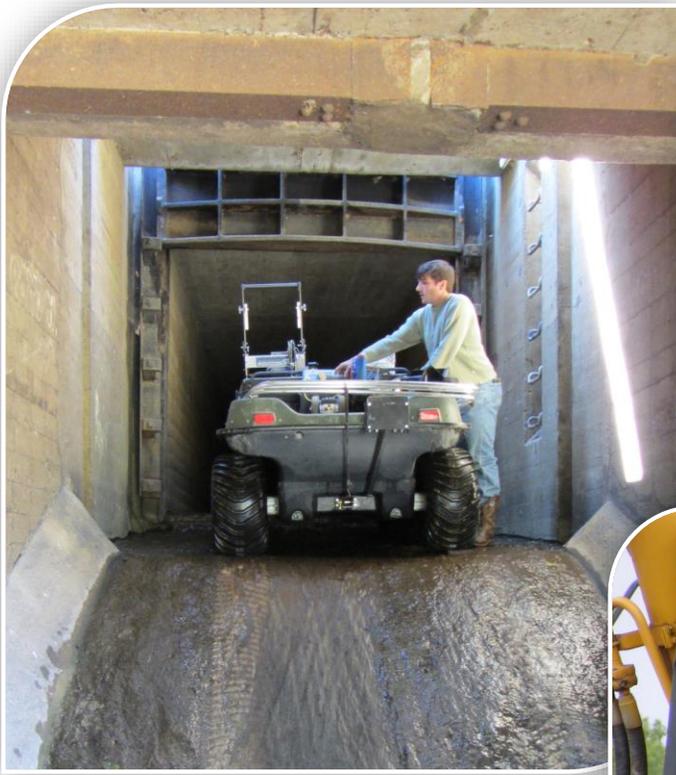
A During my secondary school education I excelled in math classes. So as I approached the end of my senior year in high school I began looking into the types of majors that would allow me to utilize my mathematical/rational approach to problem solving. Additionally, I was raised around residential construction and worked several summers during high school and college for my father's construction company. I grew to enjoy the type of work associated with construction, especially the freedom of being outdoors as opposed to being in an office on a computer all day. After researching majors at UofM, I found that civil engineering combined mathematical problem solving with the "boots on the ground" approach I had grown to enjoy.

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 realize now that my high school education provided me with an excellent foundation for my studies in the Herff College civil program. So, I don't think I would do anything differently. That being said, for those interested in engineering careers, I will emphasize the importance of math and physics and recommend taking any/all AP math classes and any/all AP physics classes that are available. Also, don't overlook writing and communication classes. Not only do engineers have to solve problems, but they also have to communicate solutions clearly to people of all different backgrounds. So, being able to write and communicate clearly is essential.

Q What is your favorite aspect of your job?

A I enjoy most the opportunities I have to prepare plans and specifications and then work alongside field personnel to get the project built. I also enjoy performing investigative inspections on existing projects to determine their current condition and repair needs.



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

A USACE is an organization that responds to the engineering needs of the nation. Every project I work on in the Memphis District COE is related to flood risk reduction, water distribution, environmental restoration and/or river navigation. These missions afford the opportunity to constantly improve the productivity of agricultural lands and the navigability of major rivers, as well as improve the sustainability of water distribution practices and current flood risk reduction measures.

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

A Earlier in my career I was very interested in inspections and identifying issues with completed, in-use flood risk reduction measures. As my career has evolved, I've grown interested in rectifying some of the issues I spent the early part of my career identifying. I particularly enjoy flood risk reduction projects that incorporate environmentally sustainable design aspects such as the Lower Cache River Restoration Project. Honestly though, I've been interested in almost every project I've been a part of because every project has new challenges and opportunities to learn something new about engineering and construction.

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

A Anything worth doing is worth doing right and there isn't much in life worth doing that comes easy. So, whatever you decide, commit yourself to it and never offer anything other than your best. An engineering degree requires massive commitment and fortitude and often presents obstacles that are easier to overcome with a support group of fellow students. So, never underestimate the value of a helping hand and offer assistance to others when you can. Begin your careers with a humble attitude, never assuming you know more than the next person. Ask lots of questions, pay attention to more the experienced engineers, and never quit learning.