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Alumni Insight: Considering the Value of the IAC Program

I completed my Masters Degree in Mechanical Engineering at the University of Massachusetts in 1986, almost 17 years ago. During my graduate studies, I had the wonderful opportunity to work at the University's Energy Analysis and Diagnostic Center (EADC) with Professor Larry Ambbs. For those of you who don't recognize the EADC acronym, this was the IAC's prior name, before productivity, waste minimization, and other items were added to the portfolio of services. In most ways, an EADC center was identical to the current IAC, but it had an exclusive focus on energy efficiency. IAC work experience is truly unlike that found in most other academic programs. Students get the opportunity to mix their education and research work into engineering fundamentals with real-world energy engineering and consulting experience. Rarely does an academic experience facilitate work at customer facilities, interaction with those customers, solicitation of information from vendors and other engineers, and development of technical business reports that describe your analytical and economic findings. That kind of exposure is invaluable, serving as focused experience for those who want to pursue a career in the energy field, or as basic professional work experience for those whose career paths move away from the energy discipline. Shortly after graduating with my Masters Degree, I took a position at a Massachusetts-based energy consulting firm, and was able to rapidly make progress, enhancing my engineering skills while also learning much about marketing, management, and business development. About 10 years ago, I decided to make some changes, and started my own consulting business: Energy & Resource Solutions (ERS). ERS has an interesting assortment of projects and has grown to a company of about 15 energy professionals. While many elements of my own current work are more business-focused and less technically oriented, I still find value from my IAC experience. But now, however, the experience has taken on some very different meanings and there are new values to me. I continue to work closely with Larry Ambbs (still the director at the University of Massachusetts IAC), with who ERS jointly pursues projects and has some active engagements. I also work with several of my fellow students from my own IAC days, who are still working in the energy field. Recently, I've been developing relationships with a number of current IAC directors, tracking their students' progress, and seeking those graduates whose IAC experiences enable them to readily move ahead of other prospective employees. ERS currently has five engineers that have come through the IAC program. The facility assessment experiences they have made them uniquely qualified to handle the challenging jobs in the energy field, and to quickly become highly productive professionals. As students approach graduation and start seeking employment,

it is critical to recognize the value of focusing on their professional IAC experience, including their experiences in their resumes and addressing them during interviews. One or two years of actual experience at an IAC will go a long way in increasing your competitiveness with other candidates, particularly if the work you are seeking is in the energy field. Be confident of what the IAC experience has given you, for whether you seek work as a consulting or design engineer, in the facility management field, or any other engineering work in an energy or unrelated discipline, the professional skills you start to develop at the IAC can help you open the doors to a more successful career. And don't hesitate to contact ERS. We are regularly looking for new talent as we expand our horizons. Contact: Gary Epstein E-mail: gepstein@ers-inc.com
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