



Profiles of Electrical Engineers and Computer Scientists



Rebecca Brannon

**Senior Member of Technical Staff
Sandia National Laboratories
Albuquerque, NM**

Education:

B.S. - Mechanical Engineering, University of New Mexico
M.S. - Mechanical Engineering, University of Wisconsin, Madison
Ph.D. - Mechanical Engineering, University of Wisconsin, Madison

Job Description:

Senior Member of the technical staff, developing mathematical models that describe the behavior of materials under extremely harsh loading conditions.

Advice to Students:

"Excel and talk to those who can help you."

Video Transcript 1:

"I think that the universal experience of women in engineering is that there is an extended proving period. When you come into a new department, there is, at least from my opinion, there is a time where you have to excel and produce more spectacular results at a faster rate than your male counterparts. But, once you do that, you're on an equal par. So it's only an initial thing. And I found the same thing was true in graduate school and undergraduate as well, that once you demonstrated that you were capable, then you get all the respect of any other person. There was no gender difference. So it's only an initial thing."

Interview:

The career of Rebecca Brannon of Sandia National Laboratories has been blessed with mentors. Although she believes that it is more difficult for women engineers to earn the acceptance and respect of their colleagues than for men, mentors can help through difficult times. She suggests that undergraduates actively seek out a mentor. For example, they could go and speak to a "professor on a regular basis about more things than just the homework. Make people notice you because that's how you get a mentor."

In her own case, Brannon might never have become an engineer had it not been for her first mentor. Coming from an artistic family, none of the members recognized her scientific bent. In fact, she adds, "I didn't see it myself and I subscribed to Scientific American and Omni when I

was in high school." What led her to apply to engineering school was the advice of a friend who "understood what engineering was" and "recognized her potential" after seeing her standardized test scores.

And mentors continued to point the way for her. When she was feeling frustrated by the engineering program as a student, it was one of her professors who suggested that she do a coop. "And that's exactly what I did. I did a coop at Los Alamos National Laboratories in fact, two coops there. And while I was there, I learned so much about what it meant to be an engineer and got very excited about it."

And mentors continued to make a difference for Brannon. One of her supervisors at Los Alamos advised her to go to graduate school. "I went to graduate school because he let me know just how important higher level education was if I wanted to continue with what I was doing." After she scored well on the qualifiers, one of Brannon's graduate school professors recommended her to the recruiter for Sandia National Laboratories, and the recruiter, in turn, helped her get a position there. "So excel," Brannon advises, and talk to those who can help you.

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