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Computer Science Major Kick-Starts her Career with Co-Op Experience

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Monica Mahon, a rising senior from Mays Landing, NJ (Atlantic County), is one of the lucky kind of students who knew what she wanted to study before even coming to college. "I took a computer science class in high school and had a really great teacher that introduced me to it. It was something I really liked and could see myself doing," she says, in regards to her Rowan career in the computer science major.

During her first computer science course on campus, Monica learned the ins and outs of the industry, as well as coding and communication skills that she would use later on. Her first professor in the field, Professor Chia Chien, "has been a huge help throughout my college experience. She really encouraged me and opened my eyes to great opportunities." Professor Chien even introduced her to her current resume-builder, as a co-op worker for the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation (ASRC). Through the AFMS (ASRC Federal Mission Solutions) program with the Rowan computer science department, students can partake in a real-life work environment and contribute to meaningful projects that improve their skills. "The program allows students to immerse themselves in a real job, full time, with the option to take classes part time, at night or online," Monica explains. "You partner with industry companies and really learn how they function and how your knowledge can contribute."

In the program's second year, Monica is already making a major positive impact. She works with a software development company through the Department of Defense, to maintain ongoing company projects, and develop software solutions for the Navy. And while this may sound overwhelming for a college student, she explains that the ASRC pairs each new student employee with a mentor that is experienced and willing to guide their mentee through the experience, and help troubleshoot any challenge that may arise.

"Being quickly introduced to this opportunity and having work assigned to me right away, I learned how to work closely with other employees. They didn't treat me like an intern," Monica says. "Learning the workflow of an office environment and seeing the whole process in my specific field – from writing to testing to identifying software issues and engineering solutions, and building the final product – it's helpful to be part of it and really see how it all works."

Monica receives advice from her classmates on a Comp Sci project.

Monica's on-campus experience has helped her tremendously when it comes to being knowledgeable and prepared for this important role. "Rowan's computer science program prepares you to work full-time. I felt like I could handle the job going into it, because we learned how to use different operating systems and programming skills right off the bat. Working efficiently in a team is something that is really emphasized here." As a learning assistant within the department, she works alongside her professors, addressing student questions during class and tackling any issues they may need help with. She notes that having to communicate concepts to students has translated directly to her AFMS experience, where she must communicate her ideas to colleagues.

Monica makes a friend outside of Robinson Hall!

"For me, choosing computer science as a major was a risk," Monica says, "I was intimidated at first to enroll knowing that I would feel like a minority as a woman in the STEM industry, but I found a bunch of great friends that really support me and make me feel part of the community. Being a woman in STEM here has felt empowering, instead of limiting."

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