VILLANOVA IMMERSION PROGRAM LANDS GRADUATE STUDENT DREAM JOB IN SILICON VALLEY

by Meg Amis

In 2014, graduate student Chad Yantorno entered Villanova’s Master’s program in Cybersecurity with a specific goal in mind—to work in Silicon Valley. He looked for opportunities to network with alumni and faculty in order to turn his dream into a reality. When he discovered the “Villanova in the Valley” (VinV) program, Yantorno jumped at the opportunity. Created by Villanova’s Innovation, Creativity, and Entrepreneurship (ICE) Institute, this unique program exposes students from all disciplines to the unique ecosystem of Silicon Valley. Those selected to participate—Yantorno among them—take a week-long trip to learn about the inner workings of Facebook, Google and other leaders in high-tech industry.

In January, 2016, Yantorno joined 14 other University students for the Silicon Valley trip. Over the course of five days, the group spent time visiting more than a dozen companies, meeting their executives and learning about the risk-taking culture of the Valley. A dinner reception was held with local Villanova alumni and guests, which provided the students with additional networking opportunities. When it came time to visit ForeScout, the company arranged for Yantorno to have his final interview, and he was offered a position as an IT security engineer. He gladly accepted and joined the growing company in February 2016.

Yantorno credits Villanova with helping him land his dream job. When asked what advice he would give to others pursuing their career goals, he emphasizes: “I am proof that if you set a goal, you can achieve it. At Villanova, there are so many avenues available to you. Go out and network; make connections; and talk to as many people as you can. Look for any opportunity, and go after it.”

Yantorno is settling into his new position, while continuing his master’s degree through the College’s E-Learning program. He looks forward to participating in the VinV program in the future, but this time, from the employer side.

GRADUATE ENGINEERING STUDENT SEEKS SUSTAINABLE WATER SOLUTION FOR GHANA

by Meg Amis

Ava Calvano ’15 CE always knew she wanted to continue her education and fulfill her passion for helping other countries overcome social, economic and environmental challenges. In fall 2015, she enrolled in Villanova’s Sustainable Engineering master’s program and expressed her interest in finding an international project for her thesis. Program Director Bill Lorenz put Calvano in touch with Jordan Ermilio ’98 ME, ’06 MSWREE, director of the Villanova Engineering Service Learning program, who thought she would be a great asset to a long-term project in Ghana. There, the College has partnered with Wells for Relief (WFR), a nonprofit organization whose mission is providing safe drinking water throughout the world.

Since 2014, Villanova engineers have partnered with WFR in the Lower Volta region of Ghana, where they are mapping and monitoring hand pumps for functionality, reliability and quality. Since their first visit, the team has mapped more than 400 wells in hundreds of villages to provide access to clean water through the use of hand pumps. The greater issue, however, is ensuring that the pumps are a long-term, sustainable solution.

Calvano explains one of the challenges: “Historically, water has been viewed as a free and shared resource in Ghana, with no single person or group financially responsible for ensuring its continued flow. WFR formed water sanitation committees at the beginning of this project, but they were ineffective as it isn’t common practice to pay or collect money to access clean water. Given this cultural mindset, when a pump breaks down or becomes polluted, it is simply abandoned and people go back to drinking unsafe water.”

Clearly this is an obstacle to using hand pumps as a long-term solution, so WFR set out to learn more from the community. Calvano joined the team for a visit to Ghana in October 2015, for which there were three objectives. First, obtain the GPS coordinates for all the existing pump locations to create a map of installations. Second, conduct interviews with community members to understand how the pumps were working to date. Third, present a workshop for water sanitation committee members.

In the workshop, which was largely led by Ghanaian officials, strategies were shared to help communities become more self-sufficient in maintaining the hand pumps. Attendees also were educated on skills such as opening bank accounts, maintaining the water supply, and dealing with conflict in the community. Calvano notes the importance of having the community leaders take ownership of these initiatives, “Outsiders being too involved can negatively impact the long-term sustainability of the project, because it builds reliance.”

Calvano returned to Ghana over spring break 2016, leading a group of three undergraduates with alumni Benjamin Lawrence ’13 CE. Over the course of five days, the group collectively visited 130 communities, meeting with local residents, determining the best sites for drawing water and building piping networks, and collecting data that would help WRS understand the types of pumps needed depending upon their locations. Calvano reflects on meeting with so many people in such a short time: “When you only visit one part of a country, you make assumptions about the whole country’s culture, but by visiting so many communities and talking to the people, you learn there is just as much diversity in Ghana as there is in the United States.”

Calvano is collecting as much information as she can about Ghana, as her master’s thesis will be on the social, political, economic and geographic factors affecting the sustainability of the country’s clean water supply. She plans to return to the country for five weeks this summer and take part in the fall and spring service learning trips in coming years. Calvano hopes spending more time there will help her gain a deeper understanding of the leverage points that allow certain villages to succeed and cause others to struggle in accessing and sustaining clean water.