Describe your overall duties/responsibilities as a Production Engineer:

Working in a chemical plant, my first responsibility is safety, for both myself and for my coworkers. I work on improving current processes, providing technical support to operators, and bringing new products into the plant and scaling them for commercialization. I use my knowledge I gained from Dr. Callam in Organic Chemistry just as much as I use my knowledge I gained from all my ChemE professors to provide technical manufacturing support on a number of different products ranging from pharmaceuticals to personal care products. Every day provides new challenges and opportunities to solve problems with my team.

Explain the skills/abilities that are required for being successful in your role:

A strong technical background in organic chemistry and chemical engineering is key to working in the pharmaceutical and fine chemicals industry, but it’s definitely not the only thing you need to succeed. Communication skills, emotional intelligence, and a positive, solutions-oriented attitude are critical, especially when things get hectic. You can be the smartest individual in the plant, but if you can’t communicate well, don’t have good people skills, or are always complaining, it won’t matter how intelligent you are. I’m a huge believer that having a good sense of humor, a selfless desire to help your team, and the confidence to be yourself, ask a million questions, and contribute to a team despite your young age are crucial to being successful and enjoying your work and the people around you.

What advice would you give to students who are considering majoring in Chemical Engineering?

Especially early on in college, it can be pretty demoralizing coming from high school where you’re used to getting straight A’s, and then you get absolutely ROCKED by that first or second calculus exam where you swear the professor never taught you how to do anything that was on that test. Relax; it happens!! Your success both in school and in the work place will depend a lot on your ability to relax, take a deep breath, and keep pushing forward and working hard, even when your mental resolve is tested. Work hard, get your GPA up early, and give yourself a cushion for junior/senior year where classes get harder--you also want to focus on finding internships and jobs (and having fun). Finding a work/play balance in college will help you maintain that work/play balance as an adult and will lead to a more enjoyable, successful life in all aspects.