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[Home](#) > Industrial Engineering Student's Disney Dreams Come True at Disneyland Internship

INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING STUDENT'S DISNEY DREAMS COME TRUE AT DISNEYLAND INTERNSHIP

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By:

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"All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them."

-- *Walt Disney*

When industrial engineering undergrad Britney Shum was a child, nothing cheered her up quite like Pluto, the impossibly affable and loyal canine companion to Disney's Mickey Mouse.

The same holds true today. After a particularly stressful day at her internship last fall, Shum liked to walk the 500-or-so-feet from her office to the bustling heart of Mickey's Toontown, where her favorite childhood cartoon character stood in the flesh, happy as ever to put a smile on her face.

Shum is now back in Houston after completing her internship with The Walt Disney Company in Anaheim, California, where she worked with the Industrial Engineering Department's Project Development Team inside of the Disneyland theme park, just steps away from the magical world she was helping to bring to life.

And there, in the land of Pluto and Mickey, Shum says she not only found her passion for industrial engineering, but also the career of her dreams.

"The flower that blooms in adversity is the most rare and beautiful of all." ? The Emperor, ?Mulan?

For Shum, the Disney dream was a long time coming.

Growing up, Shum always dreamed of going to Disney World. When she graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a bachelor's degree in business in 2011, Shum's parents surprised her and her then-18-year-old brother with a trip to Disney World in Orlando, Florida.

"It was the best time of my entire life," Shum said. "So many adults are running around as if they're children."

Disney has such a positive impact on so many people, no matter how old or young they are.?

From that moment on, Shum said her mind was made up: ?I knew this was my dream. I wanted to work for Disney.?

At that time, Shum had never heard of industrial engineering. She was also unsatisfied with the current direction of her career.

Then, while surfing the Internet, she did something so many of us do multiple times a day ? she accidentally clicked a link on a website she didn't mean to click on. It was an innocuous mistake that would change her life forever.

Shum had stumbled upon the website of the industrial engineering department at UH by accident, but once she arrived there, she never really left. She applied to the undergraduate program and enrolled at UH in 2015.

When she arrived at UH, Shum says her dreams for the future began to multiply.

"Even miracles take a little time." ? Fairy Godmother, ?Cinderella?

Prior to her internship with Disney, Shum had already gained professional experience in both energy and healthcare through prestigious internships with Cameron and MD Anderson. Despite her wide range of technical experience, Shum said nothing prepared her for her internship at Disney quite like the industrial engineering courses at UH.

?Industrial engineering at Disney is very specific to Disney. The projects I worked on were very unconventional, so nothing I could have learned through textbooks could have prepared me,? Shum said. ?I was prepared for the position because the industrial engineering department taught me analytical thinking skills.?

While at Disney, Shum would often recall something that Gino Lim, Chairman of the industrial engineering department, said in his linear optimization course: ?It's one thing to know the right answer, but it's another thing to know what it means.?

?Dr. Lim taught us that you have to understand the technical side and translate that to non-engineers, and that takes a lot of creativity,? Shum explained.

At a place like Disney, where, according to their website, ?Imagineers bring art and science together to turn fantasy into reality and dreams into magic,? creativity is a commodity in high demand.

For instance, Shum recalls working with a senior industrial engineer on a project involving ?Cars Land,? a land inside of the theme park which, as the name implies, is devoted entirely to the Disney-Pixar movie franchise ?Cars.?

There was only one problem: Shum had never seen any of the ?Cars? movies. Despite all of the industrial engineering experience she brought to the table, Shum had a full plate of homework to get through if she wanted to succeed at her new internship: Watch ?Cars? and ?Cars 2? as closely and as soon as possible.

Beyond just enjoying the movies ? which she did, thoroughly ? Shum said the experience made her an all-around better engineer. ?No detail is overlooked with Disney. You have to understand the Disney storylines to be able to understand the characters we're bringing to life,? Shum said.

These are the invaluable engineering lessons that Shum says she's brought back to Houston with her: No detail is too small to overlook and always, always engineer with the end-user in mind.

The experience connected-the-dots for Shum, lighting a fire inside of her that brought new focus and clarity to her career. "I saw this is where my passion is," she said.

"In every job that must be done, there is an element of fun." ? Mary Poppins, ?Mary Poppins?

Back at UH to tackle the final year of her bachelor's degree, Shum says she has a new appreciation for the industrial engineering field and her future in it.

"At its core, industrial engineering is about connecting the technical side of things with the people side of things," Shum said. "You have to present information to someone who doesn't care about your spreadsheet or your graph, so you have to tell them a story in a creative way that they would care about."

Shum said she felt compelled to share her newly found passion for her field with other students. A member of the UH chapter of the Institute of Industrial and Systems Engineers (IISE), Shum launched a mentorship program within the organization to help new industrial engineering students choose classes, find study groups and get advice on professors and activities.

"I'm so excited about what I'm doing now, but it scares me that I sort of stumbled on it by accident," Shum said. "I wanted to find a way to inform other students about what the industrial engineering field can offer much earlier than I found out about it."

"Venture outside your comfort zone. The rewards are worth it." ? Rapunzel, ?Tangled?

After deciding on a career change and arriving at the UH industrial engineering department, things didn't get easier for Shum right away.

"Your first year as an engineering student is tough. Finding a mentor who's farther along in the program and can give you advice is crucial," she said.

Shum and other chapter officers paired seven first-year students with upperclassmen mentors through the IISE mentorship program, now in its second year. They also launched a welcome orientation for all first-year industrial engineering students.

"We're a small department, so I really wanted to leverage that smallness to be more like a family ? to know everyone else's name and help each other out," Shum said. It's just the type of dream for the future that you'd expect from a Disney enthusiast.

In a fantasy future, Shum says she'd be working full-time as an industrial engineer with Disney. It's extremely competitive ? there are usually only a few openings for hundreds of well-qualified candidates ? but she's not willing to give up on the Disney dream quite yet.

For now, Shum is looking forward to next summer, when she'll be interning with Disney once again, this time at the Disney World theme park in Orlando, Florida. It seems in Shum's case, Cinderella's advice was right: "If you keep on believing, the dream that you wish will come true."