

BAE Systems Ship Repair Apprenticeship Profile: Sarah Canclini

For Sarah Canclini going into the BAE Systems Registered Apprenticeship program should have been like a sort of homecoming. She joined the Navy straight out of high school but her experience was limited to working on ships' decks. "I never went into the engine room the entire time I was a sailor!" she laughs. She had a series of jobs after she left the military but upon turning 25 she "felt like I hit that mark where I realized I hadn't really done anything in my life," says Sarah. "I needed to do something productive that could give me a long-term career."



Sarah first heard about BAE Systems' registered apprenticeship program eight years after graduating high school while she was working as a kitchen supervisor at Cinema Café. While she had seen a Northrop Grumman table at a career fair in high school, she never heard about shipyard work or apprenticeship programs until she was an adult. "My grandfather had worked for a shipyard and encouraged me to look into any type of apprenticeship. He said an apprenticeship program was a great way to learn a trade in any field and get a good, solid job." When she looked into it and learned about the financial incentives and career opportunities that the ship repair company offered she decided to apply. "The fact that BAE Systems would pay for me to go to college and give me a job that would pay decent wages sealed the deal!" she laughs.

During the four-year program all apprentices work in a shop on the BAE Systems shipyard to learn a specific trade. Sarah is the only female working in BAE's outside machine shop and applies what she's learning under her mentor to "do a lot of prefabrication work on ships - installing and removing stuff so that ships can be repaired, maintained, and improved." Sarah is most enthusiastic about the opportunity she has to learn a skill that will guarantee her a job both now and in the future. "It's great to work somewhere that doesn't hold your lack of direct experience against you - that's the whole point of the apprenticeship program. I'm taught great skills, get a great education, and get to work every day doing work that's really important."

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Sarah is confident about her future at BAE Systems Ship Repair. “There’s a lot of room for me to grow from where I am right now,” says Sarah. “Six months ago I started getting offers to move up to several different positions within the company.” As an aging workforce begins to retire apprentice graduates are often quickly promoted after completing their program. However for Sarah opportunities for advancement aren’t limited to the workplace. “When I finish the Tidewater Community College (TCC) coursework that BAE is paying for me to do I’ll get a Career Studies Certificate in maritime technologies and an A.A.S. (associates of applied sciences) degree. They’ve invested a lot of money for me to get my A.A.S. and I’ve got the opportunity to go on and do more in college if I want.”

Sarah encourages students to really seek out their own dreams. “Going straight into a four-year college after high school isn’t the right path for everyone. It might be the path your teachers or counselors or parents want but you might be made for something different and there’s a place for you in this industry.” She encourages students to “take as much math as you can because you’ll use it on the job every day. If you can get into some tech-ed classes in electrical, mechanical, welding – whatever - that will show the company that you’re serious about doing this type of work and that you take initiative, which they expect out of apprentices.”



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