

Sloan Career Cornerstone Center

Profiles of Engineering Students



Aravinda Paranagama

**Engineering Student
California State University Northridge
Northridge, CA**

Education in Progress:

Senior, BS Electrical Engineering, California State University, Northridge

Advice to Students:

"Be self-disciplined and committed."

Interview:

- ▶ **Q: When did you know you wanted to become an Engineer?**
- ▶ **Paranagama:** Ever since I was small, I liked taking things apart (not necessarily putting them back together afterward...!). I was very curious to figure out everything, not just the electronic stuff. It was actually during high school that I definitively decided that I'd do Electrical Engineering (EE), after a lot of research. Before that I did explore other career paths. One of them I really liked was becoming an Astrophysicist.

- ▶ **Q: What is your college experience like in terms of the amount of time you find you need to study each day?**
- ▶ **Paranagama:** Basically I feel that I do nothing but studying! The classes keep me very busy during the semester. Maybe it's because I work. I take a typical load of about 15 units a semester.

- ▶ **Q: Are you incorporating any work experiences while you are a student? (include both internships/co-ops and any other jobs you may be holding while in school)**
- ▶ **Paranagama:** Yes. I'm enrolled in the Honors Coop program, currently working at the Vitesse Semiconductor Corporation. I also worked as an English and Math tutor for several years, at CSUN as well as my previous community college.

- ▶ **Q: How did you prepare for your college experience?**
- ▶ **Paranagama:** I didn't really prepare much for college per se. I'm originally from Sri Lanka. Over there high school is intensive enough that we get the necessary preparation by default.

- ▶ Q: Did/do you have a mentor that has helped guide you thus far? (If so, describe the impact of this person on your education and career plans)
- ▶ Paranagama: No. I am my own mentor, which is pretty hard sometimes.
- ▶ Q: Is there a specialty area you have focused on in engineering? If so, what is it, and how did you decide on this specialty? Also, at what point in your college experience did you decide?
- ▶ Paranagama: Yes, I am planning to specialize in Communications, in Electrical Engineering. We are expected to pick a concentration in our third year of the degree. Well my interests are complicated... I seem to like everything... then again I'm a technophile and everything from cell phones to submarines to satellites fascinate me. So I picked communications, which more or less spans all that.
- ▶ Q: Is it hard to balance your engineering studies with other college activities (entertainment, travel, having fun)?
- ▶ Paranagama: Yes, very much. I lose touch with a lot of the usual things.
- ▶ Q: Do you find yourself studying more in a team situation or alone? Do you have a preference?
- ▶ Paranagama: Team situation. I do prefer the team situation. It's livelier.
- ▶ Q: What's the hardest thing you have found about your college experience working toward a degree in engineering?
- ▶ Paranagama: Financial side. Expenditures are a big issue, especially since I'm a victim of the 2004 tsunami. Plus, being an international student, financial aid and scholarships are almost non-existent for me, which leads to the only option of getting into debt.
- ▶ Q: What's the most rewarding aspect about working toward a degree in engineering?
- ▶ Paranagama: The knowledge and the experience gained. The more I learn, the more satisfied and complete I feel everyday.
- ▶ Q: Do you think you'll continue studying engineering, or do you think you'll switch to another area? Why?
- ▶ Paranagama: I think I'll continue to study engineering. Maybe after I get a master's I would like to do an MBA.
- ▶ Q: Do you have any idea what sort of industry or work you'd like to do when you graduate? If so, how did you find out about this industry or field?
- ▶ Paranagama: I'm very much fascinated by everything communications, so I'm planning to work in that industry. The company I work at now specializes in high performance semiconductors for network technologies, and I plan to work for the same company after graduation.
- ▶ Q: Do you think you'll want to pursue additional degrees after you complete the one you are working on? Why or why not?
- ▶ Paranagama: I'm thinking of doing an MBA, but not immediately after the current degree. May be after several years of working, I'd try to come back to school.

- ▶ Q: Did you think that school will prepare you for the way the work gets done in the real world?
- ▶ Paranagama: Um... school lays down the theoretical basis. It's work experience during school that really prepares you for the real world.

- ▶ Q: How many engineering schools did you apply to? How many accepted you?
- ▶ Paranagama: Two. Both of them.

- ▶ Q: Did you have a "first choice?" Were you accepted into your "first choice?"
- ▶ Paranagama: Well not really.

- ▶ Q: How did you decide which college/university to go to?
- ▶ Paranagama: Since I'm an international student, I chose schools which were close to where some of my relatives lived. And the cost was also a major factor.

- ▶ Q: What should high school students be doing to prepare themselves to take on the work that engineering students do?
- ▶ Paranagama: I think that the college workload is much more than the typical high school workload. I would suggest enrolling in some honors program or taking the AP exams. They will really prepare you, and may allow you skip several classes in college.