

## Samantha Hernandez

While her grade school friends drew flowers and puppies in grade school, Samantha Hernandez drew houses and floor plans. Once the Hanover Park resident attended Hoffman Estates High School, she was lucky to take engineering courses with teachers who guided gifted students in the right direction. And once she graduated from high school, she was lucky to have EB 211 in providing invaluable support to first generation college students.

“I really appreciated my mentor, Jen Walsh. She was the person I could go to for advice, who helped me with my resume and cover letter. She was the person I relied on,” Samantha said. “And I appreciated feeling accountable to her. Not only did I have to be accountable to my family but to an entire organization and to my mentor. That really kept me motivated.”

Motivated enough to receive a degree in civil engineering from the Illinois Institute of Technology, while supported by a litany of scholarships and loans.

“I would not have been able to obtain my diploma without EB 211, but it was also a financial sacrifice for my family and myself, as well. It was challenging to save money to make that payment plan (for loans), so every month was a struggle,” explained Samantha, who commuted to IIT for four years.

Today, this mature young woman understands those struggles and sacrifices have provided her with lessons that exceed ordinary textbooks and will continue to influence her in her career.

“As a first-generation college student, I am starting my career as an individual who is equipped with a very valuable education from IIT,” Samantha noted. “My confidence in myself and my technical skills have developed through my struggles and triumphs during my undergraduate years. An important lesson I’ve learned is to never underestimate myself.”