

Meshach Ojo's Transformative Internship with Pankow Builders

For many students, an internship is a bridge between academic learning and professional practice. For Meshach Ojo, the ACI Foundation's 2025-2026 Charles Pankow Foundation Student Fellowship recipient, a summer internship with Pankow Builders provided an opportunity to gain hands-on experience at the Ginsburg Center for Quantum Precision Measurement project at the California Institute of Technology (Caltech) in Pasadena, CA, USA. This experience allowed Ojo to translate theoretical knowledge into practical application, blending a structural design background with the realities of a large-scale construction site.

The internship with Pankow Builders was a key feature of Ojo's fellowship. "I was mainly involved with the Ginsburg Center for Quantum Precision Measurement project at Caltech," Ojo explained. "My work included concrete pre-pour checklists, quantity tracking, reviewing drawings, and supporting communication between the office and the field." This role also involved assisting with hazard assessments and site documentation, providing a comprehensive view of the project's life cycle. A key takeaway was the coordination required for every decision, a lesson learned in office meetings and on the jobsite.

Mentorship was a cornerstone of the internship. The supportive environment was immediately apparent. "My supervisor and teammates were approachable and always willing to explain things, no matter how small," Ojo shared. "That balance of guidance and independence helped me learn quickly and grow more confident in my role."

"As someone with a structural design background, the most rewarding part was seeing how drawings come to life," Ojo added. The experience highlighted that designs that appear simple on paper can present complex challenges at the site. This new perspective fostered a more thoughtful approach to the interplay between design and construction.

The internship was not without obstacles. Coming into the role with 2 years of professional experience as a structural design engineer in Nigeria, Ojo was faced with a different workflow. "The biggest challenge was adjusting to the fast pace and the scale of drawings," he reflected. "The drawings were much more voluminous, and it took time to learn how to navigate them efficiently."

This challenging environment fostered significant skill development. Daily interactions with foremen and project engineers sharpened his communication skills, while hands-on work improved his ability to interpret and apply construction drawings. Beyond the technical aspects, Ojo developed a deeper understanding of safety protocols and hazard prevention.



Meshach Ojo at his Pankow Builders internship

"I knew I would learn technical skills, but I also came away with growth in communication, adaptability, and problem solving," Ojo stated. The experience offered a broader perspective on the collaborative and detail-oriented nature of construction management.

"Pankow creates a supportive environment where interns are trained and also trusted with meaningful responsibilities," Ojo affirmed. "It is a great place to learn, to ask questions, and to gain exposure to both the technical and human side of construction." This journey highlights how immersive, real-world experience can shape the next generation of industry professionals.

Ojo plans to leverage the skills and insights gained from both his internship and his research on electrochemical acceleration methods to help solve critical challenges in the construction industry, such as addressing the widespread issue of crumbling concrete foundations. By combining hands-on experience with innovative research, he is eager to make a lasting, positive impact on the built environment.

Through scholarships and fellowships, the ACI Foundation has helped over 400 students worldwide with educational costs and brought them to ACI Concrete Conventions, where they connect with industry leaders and become actively involved in ACI technical committees. These experiences not only support academic growth but also set the stage for meaningful contributions to the field. The student program boasts an industry retention rate of over 90% with nearly 70% of awardees continuing their engagement with ACI.

For more information about the ACI Foundation Fellowships and Scholarships, visit www.acifoundation.org/scholarships.