

June 23, 2010

Blue Paper Badge

“You have to show your picture ID.”

Words I've heard more than eight times in the four days I've been here. I pull up to the guard and automatically flash my California Driver's License and the blue new hire paper badge, having readied my license in my cup holder since I left home. The guard glances twice to read my name and check my face before letting me through. I've gotten lost once on Tuesday so today I turn right, the path to the West Parking Lot embedded in my mind this time.

Work is different than what I thought. As an intern at JPL, I finally got to see what JPL was all about. It is not an uptight, strict rules, sophisticated machinery type of place – at least, not all of it is.

There is a college campus feel to the lab (it probably has to do with the fact that it is established by CalTech) and most people that I've met seem laid back when they are not focused on working on whatever project they are working on. The scientists are friendly and enjoy talking about their work. I learned more about lidars on my third day here than I had asked. I thoroughly enjoy listening to the explanations of how things up in space work and how those things in space send information back to us on Earth.

It can be intimidating at first. I am not the most social or personable person I know, however, the employees here are nice and patient enough to allow me to become comfortable around here. Although there are many people who are willing to help and teach you around the lab, I realized that I have to want to learn as well. As long there is never ending curiosity, there will be never ending answers it seems.

So here is my start at JPL. My very first real paid job – not volunteer work for once – and it is at *the* Jet Propulsion Laboratory that everyone who lives in the San Gabriel Valley knows about. It has only been a few days and it already feels like I have learned more than I would learn in high school in the same amount of time. I have feeling it will be an interesting and very educational experience. Hopefully by the next time I post my article, I won't have to show a picture ID with my paper blue badge – I'd have a real one.