

Good morning, my name is Maria Serratos. I am a civil engineering student at Mississippi State University. Looking back at why I decided to pursue Civil Engineering, the people of Mississippi- specifically Jackson- come to mind. As an outsider, I have been shown plenty of times why Mississippi is considered the Hospitality State. But, as I drive through Ellis Av., Woodrow Wilson, and State Street, I wonder how long these ^{communities} ~~communities~~ need to endure infrastructural neglect before something changes. It was then when I realized that I needed to pursue a major that would allow me to help the community that so kindly took me in. As I work to finish my last years of college, my drive for service has only increased, yet the reality of being a woman in the work force is starting to sink in.

As many other college students, I have had the need to work part time jobs to help pay my expenses. During the four years that I worked as a bookkeeper at a retail store, I faced the harsh reality of pay disparities. Though male and female bookkeepers performed the same tasks and held the same work title, the guys tended to be paid significantly more than the rest of us female bookkeepers. I never felt comfortable asking my supervisor the reason behind this pay gap, but my male coworkers would suggest that the cause of these differences laid in the fact that they were faster, more responsible, and overall, more reliable.

Despite this pay issue, I genuinely enjoyed working with the public which often were the ones that kept me motivated to continue to stay focus on the end goal- graduation. Though sometimes I can't help but wonder if it is going to be any better once I become an engineer. The stigma of being a woman in a male dominated field is something that more than likely I will have to endure for most of my career life. How can I take on this opportunity to bring diversity and growth to a workplace, if the practice of pay disparities will linger reluctantly anywhere in which I decide to work in Mississippi? What if I have no choice but to give into this pay gap? Fortunately, I have been blessed to stay loan free throughout my time in college, yet I feel for my fellow sisters that do have student loans. I fear for them entering a workforce that pay their male equivalent a higher salary while the two parties continue to pay their student loans. I fear for them having to fight to make ends meet after fighting so long for a degree that promised an opportunity for a better life.