In mid-May 2014 I began a summer internship as a FRAC Manager in Training at Thomas Petroleum headquarters in Victoria, Texas. I went into the job not knowing what to expect but was optimistic about the opportunity to learn. I was able to spend time working multiple positions to get a big picture understanding of the Thomas Petroleum Frac Department. The purpose of this report is to give an executive summary of my activities, connect my previous education to the internship, and explain how it changed my future career outlook.

The first few days at Thomas flew by fast with lots of training to prepare me to go into the field. By the end of week one I was headed to site as a Frac Helper. This position is an entry level field position at Thomas Petroleum, a full service fuel supplier. I got to build up my experience during my time as a Frac Helper in areas such as practical safety and teamwork. I spent time pulling heavy hoses full of diesel fuel through puddles of chemicals and mud as I weaved in and out of massive Frac pumps. I will never forget the smell of a Frac site and seeing how quickly the chemicals dissolved bugs when they landed as well as the soles of our boots. Within 5 minutes I learned that it was not something I wanted to do for the rest of my life. The work was hot and dangerous. I was able to categorize most Frac helpers into one of three categories: those who did not care about their jobs; helpers who wanted to work their way up in the company; and others who were trying to get on their feet and use Thomas Petro as a stepping stone into a position with another petroleum company. The least efficient of these were the helpers who did not care. This was a different crowd than I was used to hanging out with. Respect seemed to be lacking among this group (with a few exceptions of course). Some of the Frac helpers did not want to be given directions and had problems when consulted by authority figures. On the other side, positive minded helpers were much more efficient workers.

As I continued to work under the title of Frac helper I was able to spend more time shadowing the drivers. The driver position is next up the ladder in the Frac department field, they all have
a commercial driver’s license. Drivers are paid more than helpers as they are more valuable employees. Drivers are responsible for all the paperwork during their shift as well as keeping up with equipment maintenance. After a few hours of shadowing, I picked up on how to fill out most of the paperwork. Learning all the functions of the bobtail trucks takes more time to become comfortable. As I got to know more of the drivers I noticed that many of them were very tired by the end of the shift. Some of the job sites are over 90 miles from headquarters. Thomas has a company policy that prevents helpers from driving company vehicles. As a result, drivers are being forced to drive home on a lack of sleep. This puts the entire crew at risk. Towards the end of my internship, Thomas was putting a training class in place that would certify helpers to drive, helping reduce the problem of tired driving. Lack of sleep was a regular issue and it lowered overall awareness. Tired crews that I worked with often made safety mistakes that could have been easily avoided. Mistakes included running over fire extinguishers and cones, overfilling fuel compartments, incorrect use of spotters and substandard paperwork. When mistakes were made, a number of helpers and drivers tended to blame poor management and lack of sufficient equipment. The few leaders among pack took more responsibility for mistakes. One driver gave memorable advice on how he approaches leadership, “Praise in public, discipline in private.” That idea got stuck in my head all summer and I continue to think about it when I am put into a situation where discipline is needed. Some drivers and helpers did not like me when they found out that I was an intern from Texas A&M. It was interesting to see how they acted towards me once they found out that I would only be working with them for a short time. Many workers were not very respectful until they saw that I was pulling fuel hoses and working just as hard as they were. This did not bother me much because I knew I would be moving on soon. Working in the field was a good experience and it helped me understand what really goes on at the front lines of Thomas Petroleum.

After my time in the field I was instructed to follow Luke, a dispatcher. Luke taught me some key management points. He showed me how to run a functioning schedule, place fuel orders, audit
trucks/equipment, and more. The dispatch position was extremely busy and the phone never quit ringing. Jobs were always coming up and employees calling in sick/late (sometimes at 2am). There was usually changing variables that would throw us a curveball with not much time to recover. This position challenged me to focus on details while trying to take in massive amounts of information at the same time. After a few weeks of learning the lingo I had a pretty good feel for the position and became more comfortable, although the work rarely slowed down.

While working as a dispatcher I was able to spend some time learning from Dez, a dispatcher / office assistant that knows how to do just about everything in the Frac office. Dez focused on most of the paperwork: making new bills, revising old bills, keeping track of fuel inventory, and more. She was able to do all that while still dispatching calls and staying on track with everyone else. I have no idea how she was patient enough to work with me as the paperwork was very complicated for me to pick up without any previous training.

Working in the office was fast paced at every position. I was able to attend lunch with the Frac office and other management on a regular basis. That was a cool experience where I learned a lot more about what goes on higher up in the company. A few weeks into the internship our manager, Stacy Wagner, had a baby girl. At this point Heath Vesely stepped in to run the Frac department. Heath came in at a hectic time but did a great job of keeping things moving. This was a unique chance for me to learn from two different managers. Under Stacy and Heath I learned how important customer relationships are. As full service fuel providers, we were often blamed for any malfunction on site. I learned the importance on remaining calm in these situations and that taking extra safety precautions to cover liability is worth the time and money. The petroleum market is booming right now and because demand is up, prices for everything in the industry are high. Stacy told me that pricing is rarely an issue, Thomas has built up their customer service reputation and that is what attracts customers. The best way to check on customer service on site was through the Frac field supervisor.
My last week at Thomas was spent on the road with Frank Rojas, a Frac Field Supervisor. Frank taught me more about safety than anyone else in the company. We went from site to site checking on Thomas crews, auditing their equipment and performance. This was my favorite position in the company. We were able to stay busy on site without having to get into all the paperwork like in the office. There is actually time to catch your breath during the day while driving. I enjoyed being the point of contact that connected office staff to field staff.

After holding each of these unique positions I was able to pick information from each that tied into my preplanned objectives. The Helper/Driver position gave me perspective on crew management at the most basic level as well as a firsthand look at the chemicals and equipment used for Frac. Dispatching was the next level of management and also got me more familiar with excel. In order to be fully prepared for this in the future, I would benefit from more excel courses. While learning from managers I saw how to handle outsourcing. For example, Thomas uses a tank moving company, Allgayer, to transport equipment between jobs. Although Thomas is a large company, outsourcing jobs like this reduced stress on the office. Shadowing the managers gave me insight on upper level management, analyzing costs, improving efficiency, and keeping assets secure. Even after analyzing costs, sometimes we were forced to take jobs that we did not make money on because upper management insisted on it. I learned that being a patient manager is tough. Finding the line between pushing employees to do their best and pushing them too far can be difficult. Asset security is key. It is hard to make money if the company is always having to buy new equipment. Human capital is a very valuable asset. High employee turnover slows down efficiency and can result in loss of customer service quickly. As I learned more from the Frac managers, I realized that there were numerous levels of leadership above our department. Occasionally departments within the company would forget that we were all working towards the same goal. Tension can build up quickly between coworkers quickly. It is
important to step back and remind everyone that every department within Thomas should be on the same team. Every position is important from Frac helper all the way up to CEO.

The internship program at Thomas Petroleum was kind of like jumping straight into the deep end. The company is very fast paced and the Frac office was running short on staff. Instead of receiving formal training, I was challenged to learn a lot on the fly with a bit of guidance to make sure I did not totally mess up. It would be tough to properly train an intern for each position in just twelve weeks. Future interns for Thomas Petroleum should be ready to hit the ground running. Interns should be ready to work almost every position within their department. Making sure to stay up to date on a daily basis is key to be successful. Know where all your assets are, which trucks are on each site, what crews are on the schedule and when fuel orders are scheduled for each site. You need to enjoy working with other people and talking to dozens of coworkers each day. Once you get the hang of it, most things come habitually.

This experience made me realize how important it is to be proficient in excel. I will look to learn more about excel before my time is up at Texas A&M. However, I do not think office assistant jobs are for me. I really enjoyed being out on the road as a supervisor. Yes, the supervisor is constantly travelling but atleast you have some time to think to yourself without being nailed with more paperwork or dispatch calls. Before working at Thomas I was all for Frac techniques but I did not have experience around Frac sites and I had no idea how powerful the chemicals were. After on site experience, I have become uneasy about these techniques. I am wonder how long it will be until those chemicals get into our water supply (if it hasn’t happened already). This experience also showed me how much time is dedicated towards a “full-time” job. I have worked multiple positions requiring 40+ hour weeks but it seemed to never stop when working for Thomas. I would really like to have more time to enjoy family and friends. It does not matter how big your pay check is if you never have time to spend it. Overall, this
was a great internship for me. I got a feel for some possible career paths and eliminated a few others.

Thomas Petroleum is a hardworking company and I believe they will continue to grow.