A Problem Solver, and a Bridge, at Microsoft

Sophie Zhang '17 is nine months into her first post-college job. Here's what she's learned so far.

Interview by Kristine Thompson

What does your job involve?

I serve as a bridge between a few different groups, including our front-line customer support staff and our engineering group. Engineering might know how to develop a product, but not know about customer experience. Our customer support staff understand customer issues. I help engineers understand the customer, and I help the support organization identify issues in support processes and policies.

How did your education prepare you?

My engineering degree taught me problem-solving skills. I learned to tackle a lot of problems on my own. When I'm troubleshooting for customers, it's different every time. I have to use whatever resources I have to solve them and I can draw on what I learned in college.

Soft skills help, too. I really honed these as a Meridian and an RA for Hoeing 2 during my senior year. At that time, my "clients" were students and families, and first-year students in the residence. Those jobs helped me be more empathic and more patient, which is very useful when dealing with customers.

How did you find the job?

I literally applied online. Two months later, I was invited for a phone interview. Then I was flown to an on-site interview in Dallas. I mock-interviewed with David Cota-Buckhout [at the Gwen M. Greene Career for Career Education and Connections]. We practiced together and he provided advice on how to improve. Altogether, I had four in-person interviews. I was offered the job before I graduated and was hired into the MACH program, which stands for Microsoft Academy for College Hires.

What were your first days like?

The first two months on the job were like going to college again. There were 200 of us in MACH's services area. We trained together and we really bonded.

What do you like most about your job?

I love the mobility of the job. I get to hop around a bunch of projects and practice different strengths. I love talking to customers. I knew I didn't want to code every day so this is a perfect fit for me. Also, I learn so much being a part of MACH, and I've made a lot of
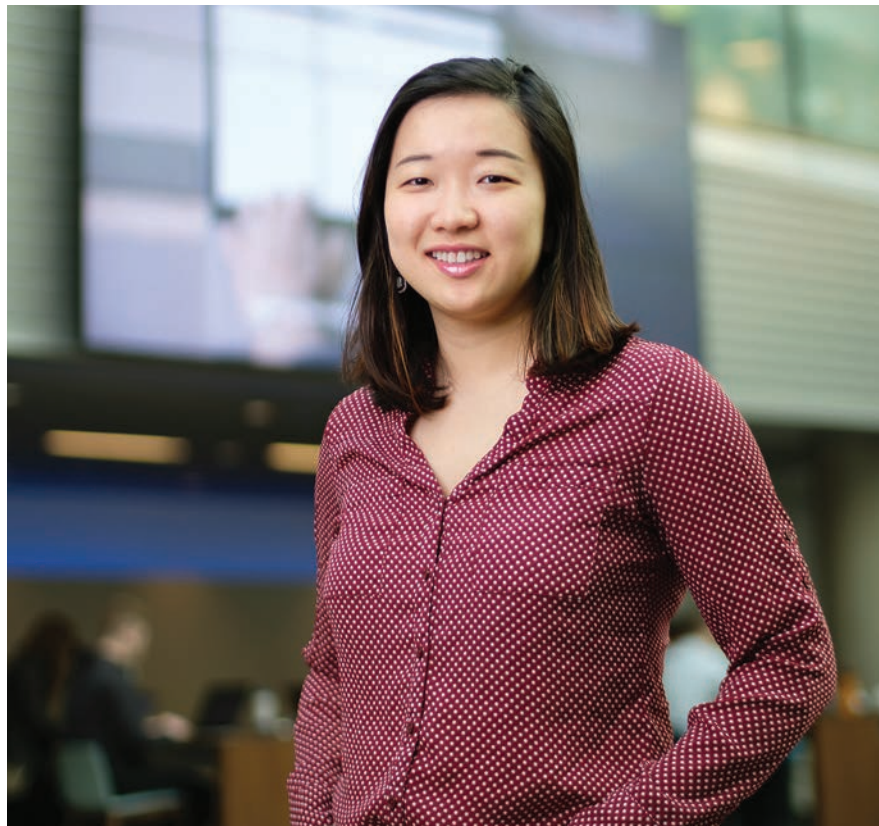
NEW JOB, NEW CITY: Less than a year into her first post-college job, Zhang, who came to Rochester from Chongqing, China, has found her footing at Microsoft, and in her new hometown of Seattle.

FIRST JOBS

Alumni share stories about their first post-Rochester jobs.

Sophie Zhang '17

Major: Electrical and computer engineering
First job: Support engineer, Microsoft Corp. Started in July 2017 in Issaquah, Washington

friends in the program. That made it easier to move to a new city.

What's most challenging?

Dealing with a lot of ambiguities is really the hardest part of my job. There's no GPA here. You have to deliver what you promise when sometimes what you are working on isn't very well defined. Also, where my career is heading is entirely in my hands. That's hard to practice at college. The path is much clearer there. You're moving toward your degree.

What do you do when you aren't at work?

Seattle is a lot of fun. It's an outdoorsy city, so I go hiking a lot. Skiing, too. I keep meeting different people, including a few from the University who now work at Amazon, some actuarial firms, and other places around the city. I met them at a self-organized happy hour event in downtown Seattle. Being an alum gives me a built-in community wherever I go. ®

What was your first job after earning your Rochester degree? We'd like to hear from you, whether you are in that first job now, or would like to share recollections in hindsight. How did your education prepare you, whether directly or in the most unexpected ways? Write to us at rochrev@rochester.edu with "First Jobs" in the subject line. Please include your title at your first post-Rochester job, your employer, and a brief synopsis of what you do—or did—there.