

Business Intelligence Analyst at Eastland Food Corp., Xiolong Miao, Fills Us In on His Responsibilities



MEMP Alumnus
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By Pranav Deshpande



While unwinding at home on a pleasant Wednesday evening in Maryland after

another busy day at the Eastland Food Corporation, Xiaolong's phone rings. He's pretty sure what to expect – a call from the MEM program, from which he recently graduated.

"Hi, Xiaolong. Pranav here. Thank you for talking to me."

"My pleasure. How can I help you today?"

"As I mentioned in my email, we are conducting the informational interviewing initiative to give current MEMers a better idea of what it means to be a professional. Would you mind elaborating on some of your responsibilities at Eastland Food Corporation?"

"Not at all. I work as a business intelligence analyst at Eastland Food Corporation. My role consists of two parts. The first part is more technical in nature, where I perform a lot of data analysis and information management for the organization. I use a lot of SQL and ERP software such as Crystal Report and Solomon to generate reports that inform the organization's strategy and decision making. The second part consists of working with different departments such as sales, marketing, and operations. The organization as a whole is making a big push towards becoming data-driven and I work on implementing this strategy in different departments. For example, I recently worked on helping the operations team make their food delivery schedule more efficient. Conventional supermarkets and specialty supermarkets such as Asian and Hispanic stores accept new consignments on different days of the week. These stores are usually located close to each other, which leads to delivery trucks visiting these locations more than once a week. We worked on developing a solution that would make this delivery schedule less redundant."

"This sounds like something a lot of our readers would be interested in. Could you describe a typical day in your shoes?"

"I usually reach the office by 8:30 AM and I spend around 2 hours until 10:30 AM looking at data related to the project I am currently working on. As a new employee, I also spend a significant amount of time with my manager learning about the organization and its processes, its goals, and my role, among other things. I usually do this for around 2 hours in the morning and for another 2 hours in the afternoon. I use the remainder of my time to again analyze data and work on preparing reports."

"Thanks. What skills do you think are most valued in your line of work?"

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“Because of the dual nature of my role, it requires a good understanding of both technology and business. It is important to have an understanding of supply chain management and operations. You must also be comfortable with tools such as SQL and data analysis techniques. I would advise students to also focus on developing their communication skills. In my experience, the team-based projects you work on in your MEM courses is a great setting to develop these skills. It is also important to know how to listen carefully and pay attention, especially when you first join an organization. Being confident and having a sense of humour is also a big plus.”

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“Now moving on to one of our readers’ favorite questions: how have you leveraged what you learned as an MEM throughout your career and in your current job and what advice would you give to students interested in this line of work?”

“The MEM program has provided me with a great background for this job. I find myself using what I have learned as an MEMer quite often. It has vastly improved my analytical skills. Students should utilize their time at Duke to really put some thought into figuring out what they want to do in the future. The best way to do this is to talk to professors, attend info sessions, and not hesitate in getting in touch with your alumni, as they will be more than happy to help you out. As for entering my line of work, I feel that it is important to stay in touch with your technical skills while you are an MEM student. Finally, for any analytics position, you need to know how to use popular data analytics tools and be familiar with the concepts of data analysis.”

“What is the work culture like at Eastland Food?”

“The culture here is quite different from most other companies. There are a lot of Asian employees here and it is reflected in the culture, which is also predominantly Asian. It also really feels like a family to me. Everyone here is happy to help you out. It is a mid-size company that is growing very fast in tandem with the Asian food business which itself is a growing market with lots of opportunities.”

“Culture is really important and it’s great that you enjoy the culture at your company. Moving on to my last question for you today – where do you see yourself 5 years from now?”

“I joined Eastland Food primarily because it was a mid-size company where it would be easier for me to learn about the operations and strategic planning of the entire company. I want to utilize my time here to improve my understanding of business and operations and my technical skills before moving on to a more high-tech company. In 5 years, I see myself as a mid-level manager in the U.S. at a bigger company.”

“Thank you so much, Xiaolong. I’m sure a lot of our readers will find this discussion useful.”

“Glad I could help, Pranav. Feel free to contact me if you need anything else.” ■
