



Gaer Sandager (B.S. 2013)

When most of us look at a building or other structure, we can appreciate its beauty or style. However, when CTU alum Gaer Sandager views it, he thinks about how that structure was created.

Gaer is a project manager with Safway Services, LLC, and he recently managed a highly visible project at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, CO. Located a short distance from the iconic Academy Chapel is the Academy's new Center for Character and Leadership Development, which is in the final stages of construction.

Atop the Center, on what is called the Honor Court level, stands a 105 ft. skylight tower. This impressive tower points toward Polaris, commonly called the North Star, which has for centuries been a guiding light for travelers. In his role as project manager, Gaer was responsible for managing the construction and de-construction of the scaffolding that enabled designers and builders to create this unique skylight, which will be a permanent focal point at the Academy.

Gaer has worked in the construction industry for more than 12 years, and when he decided to return to college, he wanted to make sure the program he chose would positively impact his career and build on his experience and knowledge of construction. Earning a CTU degree in project management was a perfect fit. With degree in hand, he became an even more valuable part of the project team.

When asked what his biggest challenges were on the skylight project, Gaer explained a common problem for project managers – balancing resources. He had to look for engineering talent beyond his familiar engineering team because many of them were already assigned to a project with even greater visibility, namely, the restoration of the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C.

One of the aspects of project management Gaer most enjoys is improving process efficiency. He likes to visualize the future and anticipate what the project risks will be, and then determine how to eliminate or mitigate those risks. The ability to understand the big picture and separate the project into smaller steps is a critical skill for project managers.

A key to Gaer's success: Don't micro-manage the project. He recommends spending about 80 percent of the time planning the project, making sure all bases are covered, and anticipating those things that could go wrong. He adds, "Something usually goes wrong on a project, even if it is something small, so I always have a Plan B. The one time you don't effectively plan, that's when something will go wrong."

When asked how earning his CTU degree has contributed to his success as a project manager, Gaer replied, "The B.S. in Project Management program at CTU is great! It has been a tremendous help. The curriculum, particularly the in-depth understanding of Microsoft Project I gained at CTU, has helped me in every project I work on."

What is Gaer's advice for others who might be considering project management as a career? "It really helps to know the industry, so educate yourself and have a background in the area you want to project manage," said Gaer. He adds, "And stick with it! It took a long time for me to graduate, but I am really glad I did. Even if you take one class at a time – just don't quit."

To learn more about the Center for Character and Leadership Development at the U.S. Air Force Academy, and view photos of the Center, visit <https://www.usafa.edu/character/>.

"There is a feeling of confidence and satisfaction when encountering real world challenges that trigger the skills you've spent so much time and effort learning. To not only be able to apply these skills, but experience the value of these skills in a work setting has been very rewarding."

Gaer Sandager, Project Manager