

David Thatcher ('00) remembers Engineering Clinic

David Thatcher was born in Philadelphia, PA. He grew up in Edgewater Park, NJ. His father drove trucks and worked on loading docks. His mother worked in schools to have the same hours as the kids. David has two younger sisters. Both are teachers. David was the first in his family to go to college.

David graduated with his Rowan Civil and Environmental Engineering degree in 2000, part of the first graduating class. Two weeks later he started at Vollmer Associates in Mount Laurel, a 500+ person company. He bounced around working in structures, roadways, environmental, land development, and marketing. Eventually, he focused on transportation. He became a licensed Professional Engineer¹ in 2004. Over the next few years, he worked at offices in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. A couple of years later, Vollmer was acquired by Stantec.

In 2007 David started remotely helping the Stantec Calgary, Canada office. Sixteen years ago, he moved to Calgary for what was supposed to be a one-year assignment. He is still there. First, he led an engineering group, then he took on regional responsibilities and now he is a Vice President and a Roadway Sector Leader where his responsibilities have included overseeing Stantec's planning and design teams in both Canada and the US. He's stayed in Canada because it has given him the opportunity to work on a lifetime of interesting projects in the decade and a half he's been there. He gets to both plan and build big projects, including major transit and roadway infrastructure projects as well as major development projects including a 1000-acre industrial park and new 10,000 plus unit communities.

David has been married for 24 years. He has three boys. The first is starting college next year. He loves living near the Rocky Mountains in Calgary. He gets to play golf in the mountains. And the family loves to travel. The next big trip will be to Japan.

I chose Rowan because of the unique opportunity to be part of a brand-new college of Engineering. The four-year full tuition scholarship awarded to everyone in the first class was also important. Accreditation² was a concern. I had classmates in high school whose parents would not let them consider Rowan because new engineering programs must start without accreditation. But I saw it as an opportunity, and I was right.

I chose engineering because I enjoyed math and science. I chose Civil and Environmental Engineering because I was always interested in building things. That interest has kept me in Calgary, where I get to work on big engineering projects and critical infrastructure.

I remember the Engineering Clinics³ being a ton of work, but we learned so much. I use what I learned in those classes every day. How to work on teams. How to communicate technical information. We took apart a coffee maker in an early Clinic, figured out how it worked, and



identified possible improvements. We had to make coffee to test it. I drank too much. It was years before I enjoyed coffee in the same way.

The thing I most appreciate about my time at Rowan is the faculty. They really cared about us students. That included faculty in Civil and Environmental Engineering, the other engineering majors, the college leadership, and faculty across campus. Dean Tracey (now retired) and Associate Dean Chin (now Vice Dean at Rowan) and all the engineering faculty were committed to creating something special. We had so many opportunities. I got to participate in the process to select new professors as the program added professors over the first 4 years. [Editor's note: The faculty size was increased intentionally as we added the second class, the third, and finally reached a steady-state of four classes.]

My parents moved to Glassboro a while back, so I get to walk around campus occasionally. It is nice to see the new engineering building. I am happy I made the choice to go to Rowan. It set my life and career on a great trajectory. Not only engineering, but the entire university.

Based on an Interview with Jess W. Everett on 2024-3-7.

1. The Professional Engineer license (PE) is a “standard recognized by employers and their clients, by governments and by the public as an assurance of dedication, skill and quality...Only PEs can sign and seal engineering drawings...To become a Licensed Professional Engineer, you must do four things: graduate from an accredited engineering program, pass the Fundamentals of Engineering (FE) exam, work with a professional engineer for four years, and pass the Principles and Practice of Engineering exam.”

2. The Rowan engineering programs could not obtain accreditation until the first class graduated. All four initial majors were successfully accredited at the earliest possible date! David got his accredited engineering degree.

3. Engineering Clinic is a hallmark of Rowan University. Students take a Clinic class each semester, eight total. Many are interdisciplinary. All are hands-on. First-year Clinics focus on engineering's place in society and fundamental engineering skills. Sophomore Clinics merge communication coursework with an engineering design experience and are team taught by engineering, writing arts, and rhetoric faculty. Junior and Senior Clinics have students work in teams on research or design projects, usually externally funded.