

Joe Michiels ('03) always wanted to be a Civil Engineer

Joe Michiels moved to Medford, NJ when he was five years old. Both of his parents worked in construction, his father as a site superintendent for a home builder, his mother as an office manager for numerous home builders and site contractors. He has one brother who is an operations manager for a local technology firm.



Joe graduated from Rowan in 2003, part of the fourth engineering class. He interned at Taylor, Wiseman and Taylor (TWT) for all four years during college. After graduation he was hired full time at TWT and worked in both the transportation and land development departments primarily designing housing developments, shopping centers and industrial parks. In 2009 he moved to HAKS Engineers, Architects and Land Surveyors in land development and public infrastructure (storm water, dams, roads, and sidewalks), with his career still straddling both areas, and worked his way up in the firm from Project Manager to Vice President. He moved to BL Companies in 2019 where he is a Senior Project Manager, managing the public infrastructure (PI) group for NJ and Eastern PA: mentoring a team of engineers, managing various infrastructure projects, and developing new business as this was a new geographic market for BL's PI department. Joe is a licensed Professional Engineer.¹

Joe is chair for the Board of Trustees at YMCA of the Pines, which has an 800 acre overnight and day camp in Medford, NJ and a YMCA Community Building in Woodbury. He went there as a kid, volunteered in high school and college, and has been the camp's engineer since 2009, which led to joining the board in 2017 to help develop a new master plan.

I always wanted to be a Civil Engineer as long as I can remember. I grew up on job sites with my parents, and remember at career day in elementary school wanting to be an engineer. I chose Rowan Engineering because the program was new, the small classes, and I was impressed by Rowan Hall which had just been completed. The Engineering Clinic classes were also a draw, as I wanted exposure to different disciplines and hands-on learning.

I've been fortunate to have the opportunity to come back to Rowan and speak at American Society of Civil Engineers club meetings, due to my past roles as SJ Brand and NJ Section President for ASCE. I've often told a story about an interaction with Professor Mehta in his first year at Rowan. He gave us a take home exam with 10 questions. We were supposed to complete it individually in 24 hours. It was incredibly difficult, and we quickly realized it would be impossible to complete on our own. Because of the relationships that we built together, and the small class size, everyone in class knew each other and we decided to work on it in teams. When we turned it in, we told Prof. Mehta how difficult it was and that we worked on it together. He laughed, recognized that it was too hard, and admitted he had missed the mark. After grading it, he ended up giving everyone a 100. It meant a lot to the students that he was flexible, honest and willing to admit his mistake, which showed a lot about his character. I used

that story when presenting him with the Educator of the Year award a few years ago with South Jersey Professional chapter of ASCE. Though I tell that story about Dr. Mehta, that mentality was true of all of the CEE professors, as we knew that they all cared about their students, were extremely accessible, and got to know us all during our time at Rowan.

Another thing that I've always told students at Rowan is that the curriculum and professors here set me up to succeed in Civil Engineering. The Clinics helped me learn how to work on multidisciplinary teams, understand things outside of my part of a project, and see the bigger picture. The public speaking assignments and classes prepared me to give technical presentations at any level, from elementary students to professionals.

The shared stories of classmates and friends working together to figure out a problem, building lifelong relationships and having professors that were committed to our success are some of the things that I look back on the most about my time at Rowan.

Based on an Interview with Jess W. Everett on 2024-1-29

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."