

Walt Walker ('05, '06 MS) remembers traveling to Bangladesh as a Rowan student

Walt Walker grew up in Vineland, NJ. He was raised by his mother with help from his grandmother. Walt's grandmother moved to Vineland from Puerto Rico in 1961 and worked 30+ years at the Wheaton glass manufacturing plant in Millville. [Editor's note: Professor Everett interned at the same plant in the summer of 1982.] Walt's sister also works in manufacturing as an inventory control lead. His mother worked a variety of jobs in the healthcare industry (currently as a manager), sometimes working multiple jobs at once, often using her bilingual skills in English and Spanish. The strong work ethic of his mother and grandmother had a big impact on Walt. He worked full-time at Old Navy in the Cumberland Mall for all five years while completing his undergraduate and Master's degrees at Rowan.



Walt finished his Rowan undergraduate degree in 2005 and Master's degree in 2006. He went to work at Taylor, Wiseman and Taylor (TWT) in Mount Laurel, NJ, joining a few other Rowan alumni. After the housing market collapse in mid-2008, Walt joined BCM Engineers in Plymouth Meeting and worked there for 7 years on projects for municipalities and utilities, especially related to water/wastewater treatment facilities. During this period, he obtained his Professional Engineer¹ license. In 2016 Walt became a project manager at Greeley and Hansen (G&H) in New York City. He is now Vice President, Equity Practice Leader, at G&H, in Philadelphia.

Walt co-founded the Philadelphia Professional Chapter of Engineers Without Borders² (EWB) in 2006. He also co-founded the social justice design cooperative 'JustDesign' with EWB colleagues in 2017, to incorporate social justice principles into community design projects. This work, along with work as a member of the US Water Alliance, led him to convince the G&H CEO to advance a water equity & social impact practice at G&H. Water Equity in engineering practices occurs when all communities have access to safe, clean, affordable drinking water and wastewater services; share in the economic, social, and environmental benefits of water systems; are resilient in the face of floods, drought, and other climate risks; and have a role in decision-making processes for water management in their communities.

I always wanted to be an engineer and to center environmental justice in my work. I chose Rowan because it was close to home and affordable. I lived in Vineland with my grandmother the entire time I was at Rowan. I liked the small classes. Open house was impressive: Rowan Hall, lab demonstrations, hands-on learning, and the accessibility of the professors. Rowan felt like a community. I made the right decision coming to Rowan. I chose Civil & Environmental Engineering because I had a passion for environmental protection.

I loved Engineering Clinic³ and my Environmental Engineering classes. I really enjoyed the Solid Waste Management course I took with Professor Everett. I still remember taking the Fundamentals of Engineering¹ exam that year and it included a landfill design question covered in class the week before!

During the Fall of my senior year, I stopped Professor Jahan after class to ask for advice on environmental engineering jobs. She decided to take me on a trip to Bangladesh in January 2005 to study drinking water quality issues. I also worked with Rowan's EWB student chapter that year, led by Professor Mehta. I ended up staying on after graduation to complete a Master's degree with Professor Jahan working on a wastewater reuse project. These experiences (Bangladesh, Master's, EWB) had a big impact on me. I saw the challenges faced by many communities. They led me to co-found the Philadelphia Professional Chapter of EWB. My EWB experience helped me get the Project Manager position at G&H, where my first project was a waste transfer station. Once again that Solid Waste Management course helped!

I started to find myself at Rowan. I still have relationships with professors and students I met at Rowan. I come back periodically to talk to classes and EWB. I got to be the College of Engineering commencement speaker in 2015. Rowan prepared me for my career. I wanted to 'do more' and Rowan helped.

Based on an Interview with Jess W. Everett on January 29, 2024

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. Engineers Without Borders-USA is a non-profit organization that helps communities around the world implement sustainable engineering projects, e.g., drill drinking water wells, treat drinking water, build schools or health clinics. Prof. Mehta founded an early student chapter at Rowan in 2004.

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 give students to work in teams an opportunity to work on research or design projects, usually externally funded.