

## **Matt DeNafo ('06, '07) still remembers that one Surveying class with Professor Mehta**

*Matt DeNafo was born in Winslow Township where he lived for 30+ years before moving to the next town over where he now resides with his wife and two children. He grew up with a family of educators, his mother, father and two sisters all graduated from Rowan and work(ed) in education. His brother was the only sibling that didn't follow the family tradition of going to Rowan. He graduated from Stockton and works in sales.*

*Matt completed his Rowan CEE Bachelor's degree in 2006 and stayed an extra year to complete a master's degree in environmental engineering in 2007. After graduating he took a job as an Associate Engineer at Atlantic County Utilities Authority (ACUA) in summer 2007. The ACUA is a governmental utility that provides solid waste and wastewater services to residents in Atlantic County, NJ. Matt was promoted to Senior Engineer in 2011, around the time he became a licensed Professional Engineer<sup>1</sup>. He became Vice President for ACUA's Centralized Maintenance & Asset Management Division in 2017. Finally, he was promoted to President of ACUA in 2023, responsible for all ACUA operations, a \$70+ million annual budget, and 300+ employees.*

*Continuing a family focus on teaching, Matt has been a member of his local school board the last six years with the past two as the acting President. He is also focused on his family, with two children at home.*

I come from a very close family so staying close was important to me and Rowan was also a bit of family tradition. With the opening of a new engineering program and the ability to commute, Rowan made a lot of sense. I was not the most academically accomplished student in high school, so the smaller program with small classes where I could better interact with professors was very appealing. Rowan was the place for me.

I initially wanted to be a Mechanical Engineer (ME), but I was not accepted. I arrived at Rowan as an undeclared student, i.e., without a major. Professor Dusseau gave me my shot at engineering by laying out a plan for me to get accepted into the Civil and Environmental Engineering (CEE) program. I think he recognized my enthusiasm and determination. I thought I still might transfer to ME later, but once I started in CEE I really liked it: the courses, the professors, and the students. Because I was undeclared my first year, it took me 5 years to complete my CEE degree.

Professor Jahan took me under her wing. She helped me become the student I wanted to be. I did a Junior Engineering Clinic<sup>2</sup> with her on arsenic contamination of drinking water. She took us on a trip to Bangladesh to study the world's worst mass arsenic contamination. It was my first trip out of the country. It changed the way I viewed and understood the world.



I remember the Solid Waste Management class with Professor Everett and Dr. Neil Seldman, co-founder of the Institute for Local Self Reliance. That course opened my mind to different ways to think about engineering.

Professor Mehta also had an impactful influence on my time at Rowan, he was one of the most challenging professors I had but he was so enthusiastic about the topics you had to love his classes. I recall one class I had with him, Civil Engineering Surveying, which involved some outdoor labs. For the first lab, in late winter, it was raining, snowing and just very cold. We all thought we would stay inside to the point that no one brought the appropriate clothing to be outside, but Professor Mehta wasn't going to let the weather get in the way of learning how to survey. We ended up surveying the outside of the Engineering Building in this freezing, windy weather, I remember coming into the building periodically to run warm water over my hands to warm them up. It is still something I laugh about with some of my fellow classmates. After you took one of Professor Mehta's classes, everything else seemed easy.

Completing the CEE degree at Rowan was one the greatest experiences of my life. I formed life-long friendships with my classmate that I still call friends today sharing new life experiences such as weddings, kids and even some work. The tight knit program at Rowan has also allowed me to keep in touch with faculty throughout my career. I have had the opportunity to hire and work with engineers from various colleges and honestly none of them compared to the ones from Rowan. You can see a difference in the Rowan alumni, from their level of understanding, ability to problem solve, and most of all the ability to communicate.

*Based on an Interview with Jess W. Everett on February 2, 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. 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.