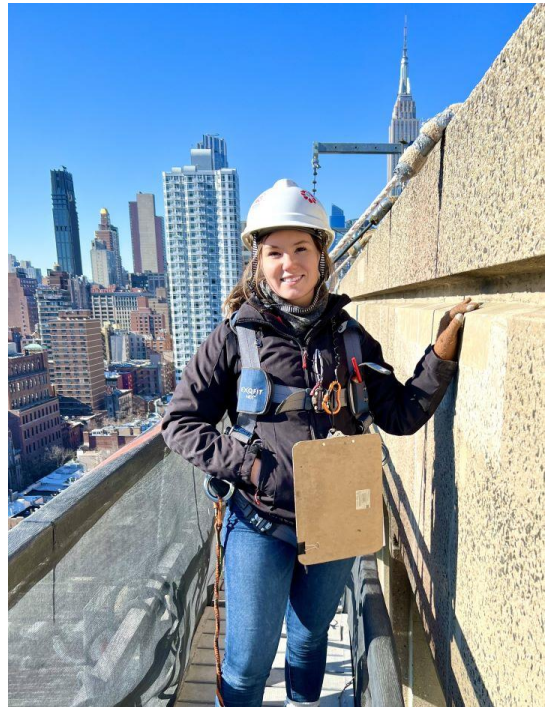


Tiffany Szeles ('14) remembers the hands-on learning at Rowan

Tiffany Szeles was born in Red Bank, NJ. She grew up in Keansburg, NJ. Her mother, a single parent, worked for AT&T in an administrative role in cyber security. Her older brother is a union ironworker. Tiffany is the first in her immediate family to obtain a college degree of any kind, let alone a PhD.

Tiffany graduated from Rowan in 2014. She did one more internship that summer, then started a PhD program at Pennsylvania State University as University Graduate Fellow with tuition and stipend covered. Her dissertation was on damage mitigation and service life prediction of concrete structures affected by alkali-silica reactions (ASR). She defended in December 2018.

The next month in January 2019, Tiffany started work as a consultant at Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates (WJE) in the Manhattan office. WJE “solves, repairs, and avoids structural, architectural, and materials problems in all types of structures and facilities in the built world.” WJE has 29 offices across the US and one in London. Tiffany has risen to the Associate III level. She focuses on structures and materials, mostly concrete. She conducts condition assessments, investigations, monitoring, and analysis of facades, parking structures, slabs, and other structural components. She is in the field 50 % of the time and is often in a harness inspecting building facades of high rises over Manhattan. Tiffany manages her own projects and has her own clients. She is currently in the process of becoming a licensed Professional Engineer¹. She is busy with her career but enjoys spending time outside work with her long-haired chihuahua Cocoa and going out to brunch in the city with friends.



I chose Rowan because it made financial sense for me. My family had limited resources. Rowan was affordable and I received scholarships. It was the right distance from home, not too far, but not too close. It was also the right size, not too big, but not too small. I could be involved in so many things at Rowan.

I applied to Rowan as a Journalism major. My high school calculus teacher and mother convinced me to switch to a STEM major. I looked at the options and Civil and Environmental Engineering seemed best. I liked the environment aspect, though I ended up more interested in structures, particularly the building materials side once I started classes.

I still remember Dr. Mehta and his materials classes. His teaching style forced you to learn at a deeper level. He was very passionate and had high expectations. You had to understand the theory. Materials was also very tangible to me – they're something you can see and feel. He encouraged me to apply to graduate school.

My materials background, the hands-on learning, and the small classes at Rowan prepared me well for graduate school. I was comfortable talking to professors. The Engineering Clinic² and other classes had many laboratory activities and reports. That experience at Rowan helped me in graduate school, where I ran many experiments and procedures and had to compile reports on my findings. My current job also includes both hands-on work and compiling those results

into deliverables and reports! I plan to become part of the Senior Associate staff soon, like a Partner in a law firm.

I had to earn money during college, which drove my college experience somewhat. I worked at Kmart my second year, borrowing a bicycle to get there. I was a resident adviser my last two years, which was a game changer financially since my housing and meal plan was now covered. I spent a lot of time on course work and working to meet expenses, but still had fun and did things with friends. My core group of six Rowan friends are still my closest friends today. I left Rowan with small student loans and ready for my career. Rowan made that happen.

Based on an Interview with Jess W. Everett on 2024-2-23

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.