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MESSAGE FROM OUR FACULTY’S ADVISORY BOARD CHAIR

The Alma Mater Fund represents 2.8% of the total McGill Engineering budget ($34.7 million) and is the only source of discretionary funding. Your annual gift to the Fund matters—it matters because it directly impacts the quality of our students’ time at McGill. It matters because universities are not just about great academics; they’re about creating societal change, and about a sharing community of which you are a member.

As Chair of the Faculty Advisory Board, I am privileged to have a unique perspective on the needs of the Faculty. And I know that the Alma Mater Fund that you support is at work in so many truly constructive ways. But one of the places the fund is the most empowering to students is within the structure of the McGill Engineering Student Centre (MESC).

When I was a student, there was very little career guidance or organized academic advising provided by the Faculty. That was over 30 years ago. It was thanks to the vision of Ian Soutar (BEng’58) and Helgi Soutar (BEng’58), who in 2006 laid the foundations of the MESC with a generous enabling gift, that thousands of students are now being prepared for the workplace and given a vision of how engineering can be a tool to help society. This report demonstrates how their seminal donations, augmented by your annual giving, has resulted in a unique structure that is actively supporting and enhancing the extracurricular experience of students.

In this annual report we want to show you more than just the figures. We want to show you how you are having an impact by sharing with you examples of brilliant scholarship, of community players and of change agents. We want you to hear from the students whose lives you are transforming through your contribution, so you can see firsthand what you have built and are continuing to build through your annual support.

Thank you!

Fil Papich (BEng’83)
Managing Director, BMO Capital Markets
At 25%, women’s enrolment at McGill’s Faculty of Engineering ranks near the top of Canadian engineering schools. That figure, however, includes a very high percentage of female students at the School of Architecture. So Vanessa Jones (BEng ‘17) tells us how POWE (Promoting Opportunities for Women in Engineering) is leveling the playing field at the Faculty even more.

Is engineering still a man’s world?
→ Vanessa Jones: Today the numbers are still low, and that’s why POWE is so active: because we really want to change this. Engineering should be as diverse as possible, but for some reason it’s still mostly men that go into it. POWE believes that it shouldn’t just be half of the population that is designing, building stuff and solving problems. We think that diversity in engineering is not just important, it’s necessary—because everyone has different backgrounds and different ways of thinking.

Why don’t women choose engineering?
→ Jones: I think it starts really young. Once you decide in high school that you don’t want to do math, it’s over. I think women today still think like they are imposters. They feel they’re not good enough. If they do bad on a test, women tend to take it harder. They say, ‘Oh, I am not good in math, I am not good in physics...’ And for some reason, girls don’t know about engineering in high school. I didn’t know about it; my friends didn’t know about it. Young girls get drawn away from engineering because there is still a societal misconception that applied sciences are for men and social sciences and biology are for women.

POWE was voted “Best Club of the Year” this year; you are co-hosting the Conference on Diversity in Engineering in 2016; you have a successful speakers series; you do field trips to industries; you run the Conference for Future Engineers; you recruit in junior colleges and high schools. You’re incredibly active.
→ Jones: We’re changing the mentality; we’re changing the community. We also have a mentorship program for first and second year students. They’re paired with a senior student who acts as a mentor. I think some people need that community. POWE is there for them. We have ‘Shadow Days’ where junior-college girls come and experience the life of an engineering student. This year a girl named Ilana came from a junior college and shadowed me. A month later she sent me a text that said: “Vanessa, I got accepted in software engineering at McGill!” I just helped her make her schedule last week. It’s really fun to see that what we do actually has an impact.
The activities of the McGill Engineering Student Centre help international students like Marc Chelala make the most of their time in the Faculty, providing avenues for meeting friends and sharing knowledge.

Marc Chelala (BEng’16) has hand-built his experience at McGill out of helping others: former Director of Communications of the Engineers Without Borders McGill Chapter; current SciTech editor of the engineering rag, The Plumber’s Ledger; recent manager of the Engineering Peer Tutoring Service (EPTS); this year’s VP Academic of the Engineering Undergraduate Society... Chelala has his hand in a lot.

International students like Chelala (who arrived at the Faculty from Lebanon at the age of 18) face a number of challenges as they establish themselves in their new country and their new academic community. The activities available at the McGill Engineering Student Centre and the Engineering Undergraduate Society (EUS) have made the difference for him.

“Students feel more comfortable with peer tutoring,” says Marc Chelala.

Shared Experiences
One of Marc’s most cherished activities has been his work with the Engineering Peer Tutoring Service, where he was manager in 2014-15.

At the EPTS, 12 tutors from higher undergrad years give advice and academic support to students from earlier years. It’s a way to ease students who are coming from junior college, high school or overseas into life at McGill.

“Students feel more comfortable with peer tutoring,” Chelala explains. “A professor may have only two or three office hours a week, and those hours might not fit your schedule. There’s also the McGill Tutorial Service where you can have one-on-one tutoring. But the great thing about peer tutoring is that you don’t even need a schedule—you can just drop in.”

From 388 student visits in 2012-13, in two years Chelala and his team grew the service to 1,700 student visits. A recent influx of student-levied funds made the difference. Five additional tutors were added, including tutors for math, computer science, along with mining and materials—all dedicated to first year students. As well, the office was able to operate all week long.

“What I like about EPTS are the drop-in hours. You see a few students come by, and the next time they bring in their friends. It’s a nice hub for people to come in and study. And all of it is offered for free for students.”

Giving Back
That ‘free factor’ is thanks to student contributions and Alma Mater Fund donations that underwrite the academic support programs at the MESC. Chelala’s academic life, as well, has been personally touched by alumni giving: he’s received three major awards, the Hatch Scholarship, the Brodeur-Drummond Scholarship and the Edgar R. Parkins Scholarship.

“The other day I got to speak to an alumnus who was part of the Engineering Undergraduate Society,” Chelala says. “Alumni donate because they gained a lot from their time here and they want to give back. You look at them and you realize this might be you in a few years. So you don’t want their donation to go to waste. You want to make good use of it so that you will grow yourself and you will one day be able to give back.”

“Students feel more comfortable with peer tutoring,” says Marc Chelala.

PEER-TO-PEER

“Students feel more comfortable with peer tutoring,” says Marc Chelala.

JENNA LAHAM

"The MESC helped me to recognize and realize my potential."
Selina Liu, BEng’15

Selina Liu, BEng’15
GLOBAL ENGINEERING

The McGill chapter of Engineers Without Borders is encouraging students to see that there’s more to engineering than just building things. The group of 50 movers and shakers is bringing social responsibility to the heart of the McGill community.

It all dates back to a snowy day in 2001 when Alexandra Conliffe (BEng’04) was leaving the office of then-Dean John Gruzleski. She’d just finished explaining to the Dean how a brand new national organization called “Engineers Without Borders” might be worth taking a closer look at.

She’d had no expectations of setting up a McGill Chapter at that meeting. In fact she was heading out the door when Dean Gruzleski called out to her: “Alex, if this organization is going to do what you say it will do, eventually you’re going to need money. Make another appointment when you do.”

It was the enabling gesture funded from Alma Mater Fund contributions that allowed the McGill chapter of EWB to grow into what it is today—a socially-committed organization that is transforming students into change agents who are shaping the future of our society.

“If I design something, I shouldn’t just think about the profitability, but how it will affect other people,” explains current EWB president, Bailee Johnson (BEng’18). “EWB has made me into a more well-rounded engineering student. It has taught me to see issues I didn’t think were issues before.”

Johnson is the new head of an organization of 50 members from engineering, architecture, arts, geography, international development, political science and general sciences who are working in a range of local, national and international projects. These committed students are leading the student body to see engineering as an agency for positive social change.

Engineering Vision

On the international plane, the EWB McGill chapter is focused on five African countries, sending one of its students each year on an international development project, such as a recent project in sustainable water distribution in Malawi. What makes the group unique is its strong views on the long-term impact of their projects.

“It’s not just about building wells,” says Johnson. “We have to think about what happens after we disengage from a country: who and how will the work be continued?”

McGill’s Engineers Without Borders is about international development, and a whole lot more. Locally, the team recently helped McGill to receive its fair trade certification; they are developing a web-based tool that can reduce food waste in Montreal; they hold bi-weekly workshops for McGill students about socially-minded topics, and are planning a symposium where students can take progressive social ideas and turn them into tangible goals and actions.

“We’re helping youth to engage their problem-solving skills and to think about having a wider impact than just their personal goals,” says Johnson.

Expanding Horizons

It’s been awhile since that first meeting in the Dean’s office, and Alexandra Conliffe has gone on to obtain her MSc in Environmental Management and PhD in Geography from the University of Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar. She worked for the Canadian government before taking on her current position as Vice-President, Operations of Engineers Without Borders Canada. On the national level, Conliffe is helping make EWB a major player in the development field (EWB Canada recently teamed up with Bono’s ‘One’ organization in the fight against extreme poverty). She’s also on McGill Engineering’s Faculty Advisory Board, which works to improve the overall experience of education for students in the Faculty.

“McGill’s EWB resonates with students and fills a gap that formal education doesn’t provide,” says Conliffe. “Students care a lot about their world, and they want to engage outside of their classrooms. EWB allows them to do that.”
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Aesop

The Advancement Team at the Faculty of Engineering produced this report with the hope that it would help you to better appreciate the good that your gifts do. Your kindness plays a major part in helping to shape the education of our current and future students. We would like to express our sincere gratitude for your continued generosity and we encourage you to contact us if you have suggestions about increasing gift-giving at our Faculty, if you want to get involved, or if you have any questions about this publication. Thank you!