

Professor Jess W. Everett reflects on 25 years at Rowan

Jess W. Everett was born in Dover, DE. His family moved to Syracuse, NY when he was two years old and lived there during the blizzard of 1966. They moved to South Hampton, PA in time for Jess to start kindergarten at four and a half. He was the last of three children and his mother was ready for some 'alone time'. She taught him to tie his shoes and away he went. By first grade, the family was in Conyngham, PA and by fourth grade, Vineland, NJ. Jess graduated from Vineland High in 1980. His love of music began in Vineland, with piano and trombone lessons. He also sang bass in the Presbyterian church choir.

Jess' father worked for Sears, rising to store manager in Vineland, where he was responsible for 200+ employees. His mother worked as a secretary occasionally, but mostly was a homemaker.

Jess obtained all his Civil and Environmental Engineering degrees at Duke University in Durham, NC. He sang in the 200+ member Duke Chapel Choir his first two years and got to perform in full length productions of Handel's Messiah. He was active in various outdoor clubs, where he met his wife, Denise, a North Carolina native. That same year, Jess participated in the Duke University Experiential Living and Learning Program that combined communal living, coursework, and outdoor activities. He was also a member of the Duke environmental club. He completed his Bachelor's degree in 1984.

His senior year, Jess was invited to do a Graduation with Distinction project, something like Rowan's Engineering Clinic¹. He was asked to stay on for a Masters, with tuition and stipend covered. Jess enjoyed Duke and Durham, so he agreed. He studied using air classifiers to recover recyclables from municipal solid waste. During his time in graduate school, Jess co-founded a rock group who played regularly over the next four years at clubs in Durham, Raleigh, Chapel Hill, and (once) Winston-Salem.

After the Master's, Jess married and started the PhD program in Sociology at Duke. After a year of Sociology, he decided he didn't want to be a sociologist who knows a lot of Engineering, but rather an engineer who knows a bit of Sociology. Jess switched back into Civil and Environmental Engineering to complete his PhD and started a family with the birth of his first child. His dissertation was on the design of curbside recycling programs. It combined engineering, statistics, psychology, and sociology. In 1991, Jess spent 2 months in Sweden studying recycling programs as part of a scholarship funded by the Swedish Trade Association.

In January 1992 Jess arrived at the University of Oklahoma, in Norman, OK, as an Assistant Professor. His second child was born a month later. He was tenured and promoted to Associate Professor in 1997. During his 6.5 years at OU, Jess supervised many graduate students: 5 PhD, 15 Master's with thesis, and 20 Master's with project paper.



Jess arrived at Rowan in 1998, along with Professor Cleary. He became a full Professor in 2001. He is a cofounder and founding Director of both the Engineering Learning Community (2009) and the Sustainable Facilities Center (2018). Jess coordinated the First-Year Engineering Clinics from 2012 to 2024. He advised the Rowan Environmental Action League student group (formerly called GEO) from 2000 to 2023. Jess sang with the Rowan Men's student choir for ten years starting in 2006.

Jess received the University's Service Award in 2021 and Research Award in 2022, the only person to receive both to date. He has conducted research in solid waste management, site remediation, engineering pedagogy, and sustainable facilities. Jess has worked on 77 funded projects--over \$18M--resulting in 64 refereed journal publications. He has supervised almost 500 undergraduate students in Junior/Senior Engineering Clinic projects. Jess has had a joint appointment in the Civil and Environmental and the Experiential Engineering Education departments since 2017. He has served as an interim chair of both departments.

Jess is a life-long environmentalist. He has walked or biked to school and work for over 50 years, starting as that four-and-a-half-year-old kindergarten student. He currently owns 9 bicycles. Jess has owned two Prius hybrids (one a plug-in) and had solar panels installed on his South Jersey house in 2005, by Rowan engineering alumni. The same house has a rain garden and green roof garden shed. When he retires, Jess and Denise plan to build a Pretty Good House² in North Carolina.

Engineering seemed like a good fit when I considered a college major. I was good at Math and Science. Both of my grandfathers were essentially engineers, though they didn't have engineering degrees. One helped build hydroelectric power plants in Central America. The other worked for AT&T in Manhattan on the centralized national communications emergency system that was to be used in case of enemy attack.

I started at Duke University as a Mechanical Engineering major. I was interested in the environment and switched to Civil & Environmental Engineering by the start of my Sophomore Year. I didn't particularly plan to be a professor, but I enjoyed school and living near a campus and kept getting opportunities to stay. Eventually, it made sense to try to become a professor. I was lucky enough to get a position right after I finished my PhD. In fact, I defended my dissertation and loaded up the moving van the next week.

We moved to the University of Oklahoma in January of 1992, right after the two-month scholarship in Sweden. Oklahoma was far from the Northeast and North Carolina. But the people were very friendly, and it was a nice place to raise our two children. I sang in the choir at St. Thomas More Parish and started making furniture. I became faculty adviser to OU's Knights of Old Trusty, a secret society of students that supports engineering clubs.

At OU I was mostly focused on research, teaching two graduate classes and one undergraduate class a year. I got a bit worn out supervising many graduate students. And I didn't like seeing each undergraduate cohort just once during their four-year program. That, and a desire to be closer to family, prompted me to apply to Rowan's still new College of Engineering.

I arrived at Rowan in 1998 just as the first class entered its Junior year. Doug Cleary and I were the fourth and fifth faculty members to join the Civil & Environmental Engineering (CEE)

department. Over the next 15 years, I taught 16 different courses! New course preparations take a lot of time. In my first two years I taught four new courses that I never got to teach again, in part because we had yet to hire a Water Resources faculty member. Not only were they new, three were outside my area of expertise!

For many years there were only about 25 students in each CEE cohort, meaning there was only one section of each class. This meant that most Civil faculty had three different course preparations every semester, including Junior/Senior Clinic. Even when assignments are not new, teaching three different courses means more time spent preparing to teach each semester.

At OU I had been super busy working on research with graduate students. At Rowan, much of that effort was channeled into teaching.

Two things made the first years at Rowan special: seeing every student in multiple courses over their four years, and the Engineering Clinic. The small class size was also nice. I really enjoyed getting to know the undergraduates in a way that is only possible in a small teaching program.

I also appreciated the opportunity to conduct research through the Engineering Clinic at what was then a primarily undergraduate University. I was fortunate enough to lead some of the early research projects in the college. Some of my early Junior/Senior Clinic teams got to travel to other states to do field work, including Alaska, Oklahoma, Massachusetts, and Delaware. Field sites included fuel and solvent contaminated sites on Air Force bases and an abandoned coal mine. In talking with alumni from the last 25 years, almost every student--unprompted--brought up the importance of the Engineering Clinics to their career success.

More recently, the college has grown significantly, in students, faculty, buildings, and research expenditures. I am proud that I have successfully returned to the research focus I began at OU, primarily through research associated with the Engineering Learning Community and the Sustainable Facilities Center. I am also pleased that Rowan continues to keep class size low. We still do not allow huge lectures with hundreds of students.

I have many memorable memories from my time at Rowan, especially regarding wonderful faculty and students. I'll mention four.

I enjoyed having the opportunity to sing with students, first in the chorus of several operas, then for ten years with The Statesmen, the Rowan men's choir. I also enjoyed singing outside of Rowan, with the Our Lady Queen of Peace Church choir in Pitman and the Cathedral Singers of Camden.

I was lucky enough to advise the Rowan Environmental Club for 23 years. A highlight was when the Club organized a week-long teach-in on Climate Change in 2008, part of a national event called Focus the Nation. The club won a rare President's Award from then Rowan President Donald Farrish. I was a largely "hands-off" advisor. I helped when they asked.

I am pleased to have co-founded the Engineering Learning Community in 2009, directing it until now. The ELC has helped more than a thousand students make a good transition to college. Three NSF STEM grants allowed us to fund over \$2M in student scholarships.

Finally, in 2005-6 I was able to spend half of a sabbatical living in Sweden, a wonderful experience. It snowed every day for the first two months we were there! I used that time to create the PathFinder web portal. For over ten years, we have used it to provide affordable web-books to over six thousand students at Rowan and local community colleges. At the same time, I worked with many faculty members to develop the activities and projects that we use in more than 30 course sections of First- and Second- Year Engineering Clinic each semester. I am proud of the active learning opportunities that we developed during this time.

I've enjoyed my time at Rowan. I will miss it when I retire in 2025.

Written by Jess W. Everett in February 2024

1. 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.

2. A Pretty Good House (www.prettygoodhouse.org) is energy efficient, right sized, and comfortable.