

ACEC Nebraska MEET Mentoring Program

New Program Aims to Foster Nebraska's Future Engineers

ACEC NE's MEET Mentoring Program supports engineering students through undergrad

If you ask an engineering student and a current professional in the field what makes a great engineer, you'll likely hear two different answers.

A student might respond with, "Someone who's great at math and science."

An engineering professional might say, "A great problem solver, collaborator and communicator."

ACEC NE has set out to resolve that disconnect with its new MEET Mentoring Program in collaboration with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Civil and Environmental Engineering Programs. MEET's mission is to support engineering students through their undergraduate years with mentoring and educational opportunities.

Students are often steered toward the engineering profession by school counselors and educators who notice a propensity toward math and science. While those subjects are important and integral to the profession, the full picture is much more dynamic.

Today's engineers are team problem solvers, savvy communicators, and pioneers for safety and sustainability. They liaise with the public, listen to key stakeholders, and implement solutions that improve lives for generations. They're also strategic thinkers with an eye for detail.

"I believe we need to change the engineering mentality and perception," explains Mike McIntosh, Design Group Leader with Lamp Rynearson and ACEC Board Member. "Engineers provide improvements to communities and safe areas to live; they can positively impact the environment and make lasting, sustainable changes to the world. We need to encourage our next generation of students to consider these as the top reasons for going into engineering, and that can only happen through exposure, education and support from all of us."

The MEET program matches freshmen and sophomore students with a professional mentor, creates a sense of community by connecting students with one another, and offers students opportunities to learn from and ask questions of engineering professionals.

Through this multi-pronged approach, Jeanne McClure, ACEC NE's Executive Director, hopes students will graduate at higher rates and feel more prepared for their engineering careers.

"I think we need to flip the idea from a gate-keeping effect to a nurturing effect," McClure says. "What we're trying to do is give students tools they can use to get past the struggles of their

coursework. And, we're trying to convey to them that we need them, we want them and we're excited for them to join our workforce."

Shannon Bartelt-Hunt, Chair of the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at UNL, liaised with ACEC NE and faculty members to help establish the program.

"This program shows how much support there is for Nebraska's future engineers from the professional community – it's just unparalleled," Bartelt-Hunt says. "The mentorship for our students is invaluable, and I hope this program helps us to retain more diverse engineers to help us solve the state's future engineering challenges."