

Aboriginal Access Program (ENGAP) at the Faculty of Engineering celebrates 30 years of success

Amber Anderson Skrabek

Founded in 1985, The Engineering Aboriginal Access Program at the University of Manitoba (ENGAP) is the most successful program of its kind in Canada, providing guidance to Indigenous peoples pursuing a degree in Engineering.

"The success of this program really hinges on the people," says Randy Herrmann, P.Eng., Director of ENGAP. "We don't just provide our students with counselling services, assistance in finding employment, daycare, or academic and financial support...we provide a community where our students feel at home and can thrive."

Dan Brown was the first graduate of the ENGAP program in 1991. Like many future ENGAP students that would come after him, he didn't come to university right after high school and that presented him with some challenges. "When I was in high school I had no idea what I was going to do with my life," says Brown. "After being in the workforce for close to a decade I began to think about my future and my career in a different way. That's when I heard about ENGAP." Working at Manitoba Hydro, two hydraulics engineers there told him about the new program, but having been out of school for so long, Brown had no idea what was involved in going to university. "ENGAP provided so many supports that I didn't even know I would need," says Brown. "Tutoring, navigating the university, providing access to community based supports and counselling...these were all things that were really the keys to my success." Brown is now the Manager of Process Control and Automation at Syncrude Canada Limited in Alberta, and sits on the Senate of the University of Alberta.

Accessibility to all peoples has always been a priority at the University of Manitoba. The U of M is committed to Indigenous Achievement and to ensuring the success of First Nations, Metis and Inuit students and graduates. "The Faculty of Engineering takes pride in being a leader in this important initiative," says Dr. Jonathan Beddoes, P.Eng., Dean of Engineering. "The ENGAP program has created a unique environment for Indigenous students to succeed."

Brown agrees. "Just having my high school diploma was not going to get me where I wanted to be," says Brown. "The mentors I met through ENGAP gave me the ability to believe that I could get an engineering degree."

ENGAP is having an impact. "We still have a long way to go," says Herrmann. "Less than one percent of engineers in Canada are of Indigenous descent, but knowing this program is having an impact and can help grow that number is quite rewarding."

This year the program celebrates another milestone in watching their 100th graduate receive an engineering degree. Rene O'Laney, grew up in Sagkeeng, Manitoba and he, like Brown, worked for several years prior to coming to the University of Manitoba. "When I first thought about coming back to school, it was just to get my carpentry ticket," says O'Laney. "Then I went to a career fair and met a really nice lady from ENGAP. After speaking with her, I believed I could get an engineering degree. It wasn't easy, but I did it!" O'Laney is now working on projects in northern Ontario for PCL Constructors.

ENGAP's 30th anniversary celebrations will be highlighted during the Faculty of Engineering's Homecoming 2015 festivities on October 2 & 3. Events will include the Faculty Homecoming Reception the afternoon of October 2 that will feature a talk by Dan Brown, entertainment by Sagkeeng's Finest and the unveiling of a permanent installation in the EITC Atrium to mark this special occasion.