

Sugar, Flour, And Everything Nice

Still groggy from having woken up less than an hour ago, I open up the door to Everitt 168. Inside I eye the cardboard box, it's contents illuminated by the rays of the morning sunlight. Sugar. Flour. Oil. Skittles. Bowls. Spoons. Paper towels.

Surveying the room, I begin to set out the contents of the box and move around the desks. A couple other volunteers soon join me. We write our names on the chalkboard. Turn on our Disney playlist. Tape up the 'Chemical Engineering' sign on the door.

The door creaks open.

And just like that I was thrust into my first outreach event as a member of the University of Illinois Society of Women Engineers.

I was less than thirty days into my freshman year, but here I was helping groups of high school girls experiment with making their own mock pill coatings.

I was less than thirty days into my freshman year, but here I was talking about what chemical engineers do and why I chose bioengineering.

I was less than thirty days into my freshman year, but here I was catching the outreach bug.

Since then I've gotten through two and a half years of engineering classes, learned the ins and outs of working in a research lab, joined a student consulting organization, and so much more.

However, throughout my busy schedule, one of the constants in my college career has been outreach events like the one I went to that brisk September morning as a freshmen.

Many will say comments such as "I was able to talk to women in the program and that really helped me" and "It made me want to be an engineer" - true remarks I've seen on surveys given out at events I've coordinated - are what keep them motivated to outreach.

As true as that is for me, it is girls saying things such as "My major concern is whether I have the ability to actually pursue a career in engineering" that really speak to me. When the most accessible stories of engineers are those of success, it's easy to forget the failures that come before.

It is a feeling I know I struggle with myself, and if I can use my experience to show a young girl or boy that you don't have to be perfect to be an engineer. That you don't have to have mastered programming by sixteen or had multiple internships by junior year to be successful. That engineering is everywhere, and it allows you to change the world. Then I feel that I've truly succeeded.

So I will keep waking up on Saturday mornings, setting out sugar, flour, or whatever else is in that cardboard box, in hopes of inspiring a future engineer. And without realizing it, I will be inspired to smile despite a bad exam grade or difficult internship search. I will be inspired to remember what I love about engineering. I will be inspired to continue on my path to become an engineer.