Ryley Beddoe, Ph.D., E.I.T.

Associate Professor

Royal Military College of Canada

What got you interested in geotechnical engineering?

My interest in geotechnical engineering was first sparked when I randomly bumped into Dr. Richard Brachman and Dr. Andy Take at a Tim Horton's a year after I'd graduated from undergrad. They started talking about a really neat project they were working on which was building an experimental liner test site north of Kingston, Ontario. They asked if I'd ever want to consider maybe working on a project like that and doing a masters, and before I knew it I was a fresh Master's student in geotechnical engineering at Queen's University. My drive to carry on in grad school ended up being motivated by a canoe trip I took with a friend down the Missinaibi River one July. It had been a wet spring, so the river was extremely high, and landslides and shoreline erosion along the banks were prolific. This was fascinating to me and my trip photos were dominated by these features. So I stayed on at Queen's to do a Ph.D. in static liquefaction and landslides, and now continue my landslide research and mass wasting in permafrost. I know many of my colleagues realized early that they had a spark and interest in geotechnical engineering, but for me it really was driven from a chance meeting at a coffee shop and a canoe trip in Northern Ontario.

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Judith Bouchard, M.Eng., P.Eng.

Geotechnical Engineer

Hydro-Québec

How have you been involved with CGS?

I started being involved with CGS almost right after graduating 11 years ago. First with the Western Quebec local section for many years (starting as the person in charge of sodas and chips!), and afterwards at the national level as Vice-President Communications. My involvement with CGS has provided me amazing networking opportunities Canada-wide. It allowed me to stay up to date technically in my field, but also in other geotechnical fields that I would not be exposed to otherwise. The leadership and management opportunities have certainly played a huge role in being more confident at work, and allowed me to learn through both successes and mistakes on how to manage a team. I felt that I was in a safe environment to make mistakes and learn. This is especially beneficial for young engineers that do not necessarily get exposed to those kinds of responsibilities at work. Your volunteering experience will likely not result in a promotion in your job, but it will indirectly add to your value because of the soft skills you would have gained. It is essentially signing up for the school of life though in a friendly environment.

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Leanne McLaren, M.Eng., P.Eng.

Geotechnical Engineer

Thurber Engineering

How can young professionals maximize their opportunities?

The key is to be involved and be present. Young professionals tend to sit together when they go to events but participating and being present does not mean just showing up. It actually means to participate, talk to people, and meet new people. A good target is to try to meet a new person at each event you go to. It takes some guts, but you should walk up to someone that you don't know and introduce yourself. Be prepared with a 15 second elevator pitch on who you are and what you do, and then have some questions prepared for them to engage in a conversation. I got most of my jobs by networking and just talking to people. If there is one key point I would like to pass on to young professionals it is: "There is a geotechnical community, and it is so important to be a part of it and use it. It is there for us."

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Sumi Siddiqua, Ph.D., P.Eng.

Associate Professor and Associate Director of Graduate Studies

University of British Columbia

For the mentors you've had, did you seek them out, or have they appeared naturally?

Mentorship is so crucial to one's success. I would particularly emphasize the importance of mentorship especially amongst female faculty and students. Regardless of your gender, I would encourage everyone to participate in mentorship whether as a mentor or mentee. Mentors have both appeared naturally and I have sought out to them. An example of natural mentorship for me has been Prof. Jim Graham from University of Manitoba who has played a key role in my career through feedback on how to get involved with industry and academia. He is an important mentor for many in our field.

Mentorship can also come naturally through institutional structures. At UBC Okanagan's School of Engineering, mentorship comes from our inter-disciplinary collaborations, and willingness to share ideas.

In my experience, intentional mentorship is crucial to one's success. I have reach out to specific people in the field, who are known experts, to facilitate feedback on my research. If you need advice, do not feel shy. Reach out and get advice and feedback.

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