

women in engineering

tayah's story

When you love physics, maths and chemistry, it is a given that you should pursue engineering right?

By the time I had reached that all-important point in my life where I had to decide what I should be doing for the next 30 something years, my mind was well and truly made up.

Although I didn't fully understand what engineering was, I wanted to take on the challenge, defy stereotypes and continue my studies in the field of problem solving. That's how I used to define engineering: problem solving.

My knowledge was limited about exactly what an

engineer did but I knew I wanted to come to work every day and be faced with a new challenge.



The more I started to share my desire to become an engineer, the more surprised and apprehensive were the responses. I even had people ask me why I would want to do such a manly job. Still in high school, I simply couldn't understand what they meant. I loved physics, maths, chemistry and, most of all, problem solving, so why shouldn't I pursue a career in the things I enjoy the most?

In a way, the apprehension that I was met with made me even more determined to achieve my goals. I put my head down and devoted a lot of time to my year 12 studies and, as a result, got accepted into Curtin University studying a Bachelor of Petroleum Engineering.

I began my university studies in 2013, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. But towards the end of my first semester, I noticed a disturbing trend in my future industry. Oil and gas prices were plummeting and countless people were being made redundant. This was the first time that I questioned my career choice.

After assessing my situation, I switched degrees to Ocean Engineering. I always had an interest in offshore infrastructure and the resources sector, so I decided to make the change. As a result, I had to take myself and my studies over to Launceston, Tasmania. It was a big move but after 2.5 years of studying ocean engineering, I again began to worry about my job prospects. This time, I had chosen such a niche area of engineering and I was genuinely concerned with the limited supply of jobs that would be available to me upon completion of my studies. After further contemplation and advice I made the decision to come back to Perth to study civil engineering.

Civil engineering appealed to me for a few reasons. Firstly, it was one of the broadest disciplines of engineering, which meant the expectation of a large pool of potential jobs. Secondly, I had always been intrigued by infrastructure and larger scale projects.

Back in Perth, now studying a Bachelor of Civil Engineering and during my final year at university, I decided to join a university engineering club that was specific for females. This opportunity opened many doors for me as I learnt the importance of soft skill development, networking and branding. Through volunteering my time with the club, I built rapport with the faculty staff, developed a large friendship group and was given opportunities to attend conferences and events. One notable example was being flown to Melbourne for a two day Women in STEMM Symposium. Another example was that I began to recognise the platform I had built whilst being a female engineering student.

The rewards I gained from volunteering empowered me with the interest in giving back to the community and I decided to do this by beginning a high school outreach program through the club. This program allowed me to talk to young students at various schools about engineering through the eyes and experiences of a female. My goal was to become an ambassador for encouraging young females to pursue careers in the sciences, in particular maths, chemistry and physics. This outreach program was one of the most rewarding experiences I have had to date and I strongly encourage everyone to take the opportunity to do the same.

When I reflect upon my time at university and my studies in engineering, I can't help but feel proud that I stuck with my passion for problem solving, for seeking challenges and achieved what I set out to achieve.

Reflecting back on why I would want to do such a manly job, there were many times where I was the only female in a room full of males. However, it never really bothered me because, from my experience, the support from my male student



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colleagues was overwhelming. There were, unfortunately, circumstances where I was discriminated as a result of my gender, however, I always found the best way to overcome; to achieve levels higher and greater than that person who spoke down upon me.

I feel as though university prepared me for the real world and allowed me to develop myself knowing that within any engineering industry, I will often be a minority in the room. Although this gender misbalance still exists, it hasn't and will never deter me from my choice to be an engineer. If anything, it motivates me to be a presence for young females within engineering and to continue to achieve my goals.

As of November 2017, I completed my final exam and have now begun my career as a Graduate Engineer with APA Group. I'm looking forward to the challenges that I face in this new chapter of my life and like anything else, I look forward to taking the bull by the horns, working hard, learning and growing from every opportunity that comes my way.