

Master's Student Earns 2016 Adrian D.C. Chan Award - Carleton Newsroom

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Mohamed Abdelazez wears a sport coat while posing against a bright red backdrop.

By Kirsten Fenn

When Mohamed Abdelazez was choosing between university programs nearly seven years ago, it was a Carleton University information booth at his high school that led him to pursue an undergraduate degree in Biomedical and Electrical Engineering.

Now a master's student in the same field, 24-year-old Abdelazez has been dedicating his time to helping other incoming students learn about the benefits of pursuing an engineering degree, efforts that have earned him the 2016 Adrian D.C. Chan Award for Volunteer and Community Service.

The award is presented annually to a full-time undergraduate or graduate student in the Faculty of Engineering and Design who demonstrates exemplary volunteer engagement in and outside the Carleton community, and maintains a high academic standing.

"Volunteering is really nice because I get the chance to take what I've learned and transfer it to others, or help run events that I know will be beneficial to other students or professionals," said Abdelazez, who moved to Canada from Egypt for school.

As co-chair of the Carleton Engineering in Medicine and Biology Society (EMBS), which is part of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), Abdelazez helped organize the society's 2016 International Student Conference at the end of May along with second-year master's student Zahra Mohammad.

A first of its kind, the event brought more than 200 high school and university students to Carleton's campus from as far as Peru, Italy and South Korea, as well as across Canada.

Students learned about careers in the biomedical engineering field through keynote speakers, networked with peers and experts, and even had a chance to show off their dance moves during a gala at the Shaw Centre.

"We wanted to do something that's social but, at the same time, informative," Abdelazez said, adding that engineers aren't always "social butterflies."

Most of the events he has hosted with EMBS are targeted at undergraduate students to connect them with industry professionals, educate them about what it's like to study biomedical engineering, or help them get to know other engineering students.

"That's actually one of the reasons I started going to volunteering: I realized that I need to build my social skills," Abdelazez said. "I get to build so many skills – communication, leadership and social skills."

Abdelazez first became a volunteer during his second year of university, giving his time to Carleton's student branch of the IEEE. He eventually took on positions as the society's external director and

secretary, helping host flagship events like the annual Student Professional Awareness Conference and Women in Engineering night.

In the first year of his master's degree, he held the position of finance chair for EMBS

"When I took a break from studying, I was volunteering," he says. "And that's why I really loved it, because it's just a different thing other than sitting down in front of books."

Abdelazez said that while anyone can learn technical skills by reading a textbook or attending lectures, interpersonal skills take time and hands-on practice to develop.

That's the benefit he sees of getting involved and volunteering his time to other students.

"At the end of the conference it was so amazing that people came up to us and were like: 'It was an amazing event, I got to meet new people, I made new friends, new collaborations.'"

Talking to high school students about their enthusiasm for engineering has especially kept him driven in his own field of work, Abdelazez said.

"This is why we're doing this."

It's as if his work is "coming full circle," he said.