

Celebrating Student Engagement

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By Leah Coppella

For just the second time since being established, this year's Adrian D.C. Chan Award for Volunteer and Community Service has been presented to two engineering undergraduates, Johan Prent and Teodora Bildaru, to acknowledge their innovative commitment to the community during their time at Carleton.

Originally founded in 2012 by Dr. Adrian Chan, professor in the Department of Systems and Computer Engineering, the award looks to recognize students for their involvement and engagement within the community.

Chan notes that there are many well-deserving students each year, often making it a challenge to decide on a sole recipient for the award.

“Carleton is known for being an institution that cares and contributes to its community,” he says. “Giving back to communities is foundational to what engineers do and I believe these values manifest themselves within our students.”

Aerospace engineering undergrad Johan Prent had just submitted his program's final assignments when he was notified of the win. Looking back on his recently completed undergraduate journey, Prent says he fell in love with Carleton when he visited the campus in his final year of high school.

“There aren't many schools that have the reputation that Carleton does for aerospace,” Prent says. “I knew it was the right program for me, especially after touring the campus.”

Prent's motivation to give back to communities began at a young age when he was taught about the importance of community and supporting others. Shortly after beginning at Carleton, an EngFrosh facilitator initially encouraged him to volunteer within the university community, in part as a way to meet new people.

In first and second year, Prent volunteered with Carleton's Mechanical and Aerospace Society as its Events Co-ordinator. At the end of his second year, he was elected as Vice-President External for the Carleton Student Engineering Society (CSES), where he visited other schools, networked with people in industry and attended conferences in order to enhance Carleton's own student society.

Continuing his role with CSES during his third year, Prent also sat as a representative on Carleton Senate. Before completing his final year, he took a year's co-op with Bombardier Aerospace, where he worked on the CRJ aircraft as a project manager. In the final year of his undergrad, Prent was elected as President of CSES.

Johan's work also focused on reducing the stigma associated with mental health. He helped to establish better supports for students, such as burnout talks and continued the tradition of February Feel Good Week, dedicated to self-care and mental health awareness.

“There's been a big push for de-stigmatization over the years and it's even more so at the forefront now with COVID-19,” says Prent. “My time with CSES allowed me to attend workshops on mental health resources and learn practices that I could bring back to Carleton and implement.”



Johan Prent, BEng/20 – Aerospace Engineering

Prent feels he's brought a healthier culture to CSES, creating a workshop focused on how to identify burnout, along with possible coping mechanisms. He delivered the workshop along with CSES director, Colleen McGuckin, to various club and society leaders across campus in hopes that it would trickle down to the student population at Carleton.



Prent also advises students to set priorities when looking to get involved in the community.

“The best way to get involved is to find something that you feel meaningful and that you can accommodate as a student,” he says. “You don’t have to spend 20 hours a week to make an impact, even if it’s just mentoring one student.”

According to Prent, the most rewarding work came from interacting with students and having more intimate conversations about mental health.

“I really worked to help people understand that not being able to do everything doesn’t depreciate your self-worth,” he says.

Having now finished her final year in Carleton’s biomedical and electrical engineering program, Teodora Bildaru originally moved from Toronto in 2015 to study in Ottawa – a city where she knew no one. According to Blidaru; however, the choice to study at Carleton was easy.

“Not only did Carleton offer biomedical engineering, but they also had an electrical specialization,” she says. “That was great because it meant I could specialize early in my career.”

It wouldn't take long for Blidaru to become an active member within the Carleton community. She first volunteered with EngFrosh, joining as a facilitator for two years, before trying her hand at planning. In her final year, she worked both as a Team Lead and in planning.

Blidaru also took on various directorships within CSES, including when she created the society's Breast Cancer Awareness fundraiser, which she ran for two years with Breast Cancer Action Ottawa, a local non-profit. Blidaru also worked as a manager for the Engineering Lounge and helped to organize National Engineering Week on campus, where she volunteered for two years before eventually becoming the Chair in her third year.

“I always wanted to give back at Carleton,” Blidaru says. “The Carleton community welcomed me so warmly that I always felt motivated to get involved and help maintain that community.”

Blidaru volunteered with outreach events for the Faculty of Engineering and Design, such as [Go ENG Girl](#) and [Go Code Girl](#), where she worked to promote diversity and inclusion, especially for women in science and engineering.



Teodora Bildaru, BEng/20 – Biomedical and Electrical Engineering



“My mother works in STEM and my Grandma was an engineer,” Blidaru says. “No one ever told me I couldn’t do anything, but I noticed the pushback when I got older, such as guidance counsellors encouraging women to enter softer sciences than engineering.”

It was those moments that pushed Blidaru to volunteer as a mentor for women and girls even more.

“We still need to do more to promote equality in STEM for women,” she says.

Blidaru recommends that students wanting to volunteer should take the time to find something that fits with their personality and schedule, while maintaining their own place in the community.

“Do the right thing for you. You can always give back to the community, even outside of volunteering, through having a positive energy within it,” she says. “You bring more to any community by *being* a part of it, rather than just volunteering *for* it.”

Prent, now a Systems Engineering Associate at Lockheed Martin, will act as Advisory Officer for the President of CSES next year and hopes to get involved with Carleton’s Alumni Association. Blidaru has just begun as a Quality Assurance Analyst for biomedical firm Tactio Health Group in Montreal. In the coming years, she hopes to get her master’s in clinical engineering.
