

Fransiska Bektı – NAWIC Scholarship Application

What drives you as a woman to enter an industry such as the one you have chosen and explain why? Describe any challenges you believe you will be/are faced with and how they can be overcome.

When I was growing up, I've never thought that I would be interested to pursue a career in construction. The idea of working/designing things in an office seemed a lot more appealing. Besides, I didn't think I could ever make it in the world of STEM as all the females I knew had no such career. I didn't even know what 'engineering' even meant! Had it not been for my science teacher at school, I probably would never have gone down this engineering path. He was one of the first who made me realise and appreciate the beauty of science and attracted me to the field.

I've always admired the aesthetics of heritage listed buildings, modern apartment blocks and interesting bridges. I knew that I wanted to be involved in the design of one of these amazing structures, adding my own twist to it. For a very long time, being an architect seemed to be the only plausible career for me – there was no way that I'd be stuck doing calculations and forced to wear one of those bulky boots. However, it was only a mere month or two before my QTAC application that I had a change of heart. I realised that my passion did not only lie in designing aesthetically-pleasing structures, but I was rather more drawn to the overall thought-process behind the design stages. Ironically, I wanted to get out of my way to do those calculations that I originally dreaded – I just wanted to make sure that the house that I was designing for a Graphics assignment would actually stand up. I was even more intrigued when I was exposed to the humanitarian application of an engineering degree. It seems to be the most logical thing; being able to better the quality of life of a large group of people in one way or another and I figured that the best way for me to do so was to study Bachelor of Engineering (Hons) and Bachelor of Arts. My curiosity and interest for civil engineering and geography drove me to pursue my study path – I didn't even think of the effects of being a part of the minority group would have on me.

This reality first hit me on the Welcome Event for new engineering students back in 2016. It was quite a strange feeling to walk into a room that is filled with boys who are much taller and bigger than me. As I delve more into the world of engineering, the male-dominated nature of the industry became more apparent which proved to be quite intimidating. Despite this, I was and still am very driven by my curiosity to learn about the world of construction. Now that I'm in my third year, I have much more of an appreciation for various structures and how they were designed and built. Being in the 20% minority has done little to dampen my spirit. Not only am I more interested in structural design, but I also find myself wondering about other processes associated with constructing a structure. The limited exposure to project delivery and management, environmental impact and mitigation and town planning only adds to my curiosity. I am still astounded by the many different pathways that this degree has to offer. Studying engineering and geography has opened up so many doors for me and this just makes me wonder why there are not a lot more girls pursuing the career.

I've always known that women are rarely seen in STEM careers. Even so, I have never really thought of being a female as something that can be quite limiting in the industry. I actually think that sometimes it can be quite the opposite. The shortage of female representatives present a challenge for us to make a mark and stand out in the industry. It could be quite difficult to perform when people around you have little to no faith in your ability. This is especially true when sometimes we are merely seen as

those who ‘fulfil the desired gender equality quotas’ for companies – that we get special treatment for being a girl. At such times, I usually like to remind myself of the reasons for me to continue to be pursuing a career in construction. If I was able to fulfil such a role, it would not be through pure luck, but rather through hard work and determination. I also believe that we’d have to set a standard for ourselves in regards to how we want and deserve to be treated by our male colleagues. We have to earn their respect, especially if we want to get along with them.

One of the biggest challenge that I have personally encountered is one associated with intimidation. I first encountered this in senior schooling as I was the only girl in a few subjects. I found it to be quite difficult from time to time to fully connect with my classmates due to the gender difference. The ‘boys club’ mentality was fully evident, especially when it came to group work and voicing my opinion. Even though the struggle had somewhat eased since going into university, I had recently found myself in a similar predicament during work-placement. At one place, I was yet again the only girl in the department – with the exception of an all-female administration team. At another, the statistics was improved only by a little bit. Overall, there seemed to be an under-representative of females in the industry and I feel like that is one thing that could deter other females as some could feel the pressure of fitting into a ‘boys club’ that tends to generally be rougher and louder than their personalities. This is why I really value having other female role-models to encourage a higher participation of girls in STEM. I, myself, had been inspired by past UQ Women in Engineering mentors who have demonstrated that it is possible to make it in the male-dominated world of engineering. I too, want to be able to say that ‘I made it’.