Impact

MADE by McGill

The McGill Fund Annual Giving Report 2019

Faculty of Engineering
Over the past 20 years, video games have emerged as a major global industry. Eager to push McGill’s Faculty of Engineering to the forefront of gaming research and innovation, Michael Sukkarieh, president of GameDev McGill, is helping to redefine the role that video games can play in undergraduate education.

Today, video games are more than just a niche market: they have crossed over into the mainstream and become a multi-billion dollar global entertainment industry. Montreal is at the heart of a vibrant and world-leading game development community, and thanks to a group of dedicated and talented undergraduate engineers at McGill Game Development Student’s Society (GameDev McGill), the Faculty of Engineering is becoming a valued part of that community. Supported by the Student Initiative Fund (which is directly supported by gifts to the McGill Fund), clubs like GameDev McGill give students the opportunity to learn a wide range of skills, and get their feet wet in areas beyond the classroom.

For the past two years, Michael Sukkarieh (BEng’20) has been Lead Programmer with GameDev McGill. In the fall, he will take on the role of president. Currently interning at Electronic Arts at Square Enix, to name a few. The presence of so many companies means there is a need for talent, making GameDev McGill more than just a club for like-minded hobbyists. Indeed, the group has become an industry pipeline, connecting students with valuable internships, exposure to industry leaders, and eventual job opportunities. Thanks to groups like GameDev McGill and the student executives who volunteer their time to make it all happen, McGill is also becoming a home for students wishing to make a career in a field which continues to devour the entertainment industry.

Busy Club

The club hosts a number of internal events, the most regular of which are “Tech Talks”—one-hour presentations on a variety of technical subjects given to members by members. During his tenure as Lead Programmer, Sukkarieh gave several of these talks. “Teaching itself is such a crazy challenge,” he says, “because it really tests your knowledge on the subject. It’s one thing to know something, and another to teach it.”

Externally, the biggest event the community puts together is the McGill Jam, the second largest video game hackathon in Quebec, where attendances have 48 hours to create a game based on a chosen theme. The event is made possible by the McGill Fund, along with the club’s sole corporate sponsor, Ubisoft Montreal. The latter represents a vital connection to the industry, but Sukkarieh admits they would like to diversify the pool of sponsors.

The McGill Jam also represents a valuable recruitment platform for the industry: “Employers are expecting extra-curricular activities, or side-projects you’ve been working on after school,” Sukkarieh is quick to point out that this does not negate the importance of academic achievement, but rather sheds light on the long term value of student run organizations.

"The club and its events are a catalyst for exactly these kinds of projects," says Sukkarieh, making GameDev McGill a place where skills are built and showcased to potential employers. “Before the club was created, McGill didn’t have a presence in the Montreal gaming industry. We wanted to put McGill out on the map. I think we have a lot of great talent here.”

Message from the Faculty Advancement Board

There are almost 26,000 Faculty of Engineering alumni in the world today; however, did you know, only 2,300 of us actually donate to the Faculty? You do the math: that’s less than ten percent. Remember the 80/20 rule? Perhaps this should be rewritten as the 90/10 rule. Because it is this ten percent of us who are helping the current generation of McGill students to succeed. We thank you for being one of the ten percent. Sustainability, artificial intelligence, mobile technology: these and other issues are changing the way we live. Students need to be able to contend with important questions such as these, which makes our collective involvement in the education of the next generation more important than ever. As members of the Faculty Advancement Board, it has been our privilege to influence the kind of education McGill provides to its students.

The $2M made by McGill Campaignlaunched this September aims to prepare the University for its third century. One of the goals of the Campaign is to grow the Faculty’s Annual Fund (today known as the McGill Fund), which is a huge opportunity for all alumni to get involved. Can we, with your help over the next five years, actually make it happen? As members of the Faculty Advancement Board, we are all committed to supporting the Campaign, and helping the Faculty and the University achieve its goals. We believe supporting these goals will not only benefit future generations of students, but society as a whole. For those of you who are part of the ten percent who support the Faculty, we thank you. Please help us as we try to reach even more alumni who care as much.

Mary-Jean Eastman, Pasquale Di Pierro, Robert Walsh, Marc Novakoff, Jim Nicell, Eric Lamarre, Howard Stotland, Hélène Desmarais, Gopesa Paquette, Pasquale Di Pierro, John Susanin

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It’s More than Just for Kicks
Sarah Dubois (BEng’18) is thankful to McGill and its donors for providing an amazing environment for student athletes to pursue their passions.

Environment and Women's Health
An Edmonton native with Quebec-born parents, Sarah Dubois was scouted by the Martlets as a goalkeeper at the Canada Youth Nationals in 2013, putting Mcgill on her radar. When she looked more closely at the Faculty’s programs, Dubois found that they fit well with her life goals.

Those goals included chemistry and ecology. The Faculty’s Chemical Engineering program allowed her to take an additional minor in Environmental Studies, which helped her examine the interconnectivity of the environmental crisis. Those combined areas of study gave her a technological background in the environmental crisis. These combined areas of study gave her a technological background in the environment, as well as a basis in policy making.

Dubois is passionate about this “innovative aspect of research,” which drove her to embark on a Master’s program following her undergraduate degree. Her studies focused on how environmental factors affect the human body, specifically, how toxins alter the myometrial tissue of the uterine wall, and how that could cause premature birth and early-onset contractions. For now, however, her studies are on the back burner as she pursues a semi-professional soccer career in Sweden, where she has been since March 2019.

“I’m living off of football, living the dream,” she explains. “A football career has more of a time limit than an engineering career.”

Learning through Resilience
The fact that she even has a soccer career at all, let alone at this level, is even more impressive given the fact that Dubois sustained a serious injury in her second year at McGill, which left one doctor saying she would never play again.

“I lost sensation in my legs during a game. We weren’t sure if it was a hit or a cumulative injury, but I had pain for the next year,” she explained.

She did “a lot of rehab just to get back to studying normally,” and thanks McGill’s Sport Medicine Clinic and her coach for letting her stay on the team.

Dubois is thankful to McGill and its donors for providing an amazing environment for student athletes to pursue their passions.

Staying Power
In particular, POWe’s various networking sessions, company presentations, conferences, career building workshops and recruiter counselling forums help propel students into their careers. One exception: “POWe’s events and activities gave me tips and insights on what the industry was like and what it was like to work as a woman in the field,” Jones remembers. “It prepared me for how it was going to be on the outside.”

The months in the FISU “is today’s star, tomorrow’s leader,” which is accurate assessment of Dubois, who has that rare ability to juggle high-performance academics and athletics, a skill that was on full display in her many leadership roles at the Faculty of Engineering.

Standing Out
The high-tech industry is still largely a man’s game, with women representing only 25 percent of its workforce. Alumna Vanessa Jones, former president of POWe (Promoting Opportunities for Women in Engineering), explains how the organization still supports her, three years after her graduation.

This year, Vanessa Jones (BEng’16) decided to give back to the cause that inspired her so much throughout her years at the Faculty of Engineering: increasing the status of women in the field.

“When I saw the email asking for contributions to support women in engineering initiatives within the Faculty, I knew from experience how much impact even a small gift can have,” she said.

Jones knows because during her undergraduate years she worked in various benefactors, it has put this future leader on solid ground. Moraes. Combined with the generous support of Chemical Engineering Professor Christopher McDougall, Head coach Jose-Luis Valdes and Principal’s Student-Athlete Honour Roll, and the Dean’s Honour List. Dubois credits the financial support as instrumental to her success.

“Societal misconceptions make it that girls don’t get as much exposure to STEM careers at a young age,” explains Jones. “POWe changes that mentality and changes the community.”

POWe @ 30
This group was established in 1990 following the massacre of fourteen women in engineering at Ecole Polytechnique de Montréal, on December 6, 1989.

Celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2019, POWe has since become one of the Faculty’s most visible and active clubs, with a diverse range of activities that promote young women’s ambitions for the iron ring.

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Beyond the social aspects that brightened his years at McGill, Guenkel also found the University to be much more open compared to the door, learn-by-rule experience of his undergraduate at Aachen. Nevertheless, his European background would prove to be useful. Even before he had completed the oral defense for his doctorate, Guenkel was hired by Proctor & Gamble, one of many American companies that were eager to find students with dual North American education. Guenkel and his wife were shipped off to Brussels in 1971, but he became homesick for Canada and later moved back to Montreal, where he was hired by leading chemical company Canadian Industries Limited (CIL). This proved to be the turning point of his career.

It was around this time – 1974 to be exact – that Guenkel began making regular contributions to the Faculty’s McGill Fund (today known as the McGill Fund), an activity he maintained for 39 years. This eventually led him to make a much larger gift, and then later, his decision to leave something for the Faculty after his passing. “I am forever grateful for receiving the McConnell Memorial Fellowship from McGill,” he explained. “I hope that another student at McGill is given the opportunity to do what I was able to do.”

Once in a Lifetime Opportunity

At CIL, Guenkel had the opportunity to develop a more efficient process of producing mononitrobenzene (MNB). The young chemical engineer found a way of oxidizing nitrobenzene with a method that virtually eliminated the energy necessary for its production. It was the biggest Canadian chemical company at the time, and they did some wonderful work. Creating the MNB process was really the founding process for the company. It provided good fortune. I grabbed a once in a lifetime opportunity and made it happen,” he said.

Guenkel later brokered his expertise in MNB into the launching of a start-up company, NORMAN Engineering, which grew to become one of the world’s leading suppliers of this compound. All of these successes lead to Guenkel being inducted into the Canadian Academy of Engineering in 2002, as well as a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of British Columbia in 2013. Clearly, he has made his contribution to the Canadian economy, and society.

“Once I was at McGill there were 30 people in the Department and only four Canadian engineering students, was summoned to the Principal’s office, was promptly seized and the entire Editorial Board sheepishly left the Principal’s office, having been overjoyed not to have to face the humiliation of that founding moment of bringing people together around a common cause.

It was the lowest part of the war. Marshall Erwin Rommel was poised to take Cairo. In those final months the Germans were shifting south, the Japanese had taken China and Singapore and were rampaging down the islands towards Australia, and in North Africa, German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel was poised to take Cairo. It was the lowest part of the war.

Why has it been important for you to remain close to the Faculty?

Engineering was a challenging degree, and it is certain many of you studying with your classmates. I could not have earned my degree without working with my classmates—working on problem sets, studying for exams together. So when I think about the degree, I think about it as a bit of a collective achievement.

We were all members of the McGill Army Reserve’s Training Battalions. Half the time we were parading in uniform. In those years, you were not allowed to study unless you were in the army. Those who were able to avoid being called up when we graduated ‘44, and those who were not, worked in the war industry. It made our class very unified.

I hope that another student at McGill is given the opportunity to do what I was able to do.”

–ALFRED GUENKEL

Two graduations with sixty years between them—Tomas Pavlasek from the Class of 1944 and Alexandra Conliffe from the Class of 2004 give two perspectives on their Alma Mater, the field of Engineering, and what it was like to be a student at the Faculty in their day.

What happened in the world when you were at the Faculty?

I was at the Faculty in September 2001. (During 9/11). I vividly remember being in the Engineering Undergraduate Society office when I learned the news.

Alexandra Conliffe

I can give you a feeling of what the world was like Christmas 1941. In that moment the Germans were shifting south, the Japanese had taken China and Singapore and were rampaging down the islands towards Australia, and in North Africa, German Field Marshall Erwin Rommel was poised to take Cairo. It was the lowest part of the war.

What were the most important engineering challenges facing the world when you were in school?

When I was at McGill the millennium development goals were announced, and globally people were trying to tackle inequality and injustices. This was one of the reasons that Engineers Without Borders started up. At that time this was the sense that the role engineers could play in tackling these global challenges was understated and that engineers wanted to contribute their skills.

Engineering and technology had seen incredible development during the war and they were now being passed on to our generation. The nature of Engineering itself was going through a major transformation. It was about thinking about the nature of the world we were living in, what the war was doing to the world we were living in. Engineers had to think about what was ethical and what was just. It was a very different world from when I was in school.

What advice would you give to a first-year Engineering student?

Try to hold in mind what is the change you want to see in the world and then think about how the skills you are developing can help you achieve it. Engineering is a tremendously technical degree, and it’s very easy to lose sight of any broader context for the work. Holding intentionally your thoughts around what a good world looks like and what important change is needed can help contextualize what could feel very technical over the course of four or five years.

Most of the things I have done in my life are unpredictable. Often, an opportunity to do something comes as a nuisance, but turns out to be an important thing to do.

Looking back at your story at the Faculty, what are you most thankful for?

Education was very expensive in those days. I would not have been able to go to McGill had it not been for the benevolence of some individuals who sponsored my studies. I had a scholarship while I was at McGill.

I provided summer funding to do interesting work overseas during summers. I spent one summer teaching English in Pakistani refugee camps, and I spent another summer in Uzbekistan with Doctors Without Borders. These experiences were very important for me to think about how I could have a positive impact in the world. It would be amazing to make a difference in the kinds of opportunities available to more Engineering students.

Alexandra Conliffe

Tomas Pavlasek

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Thank you

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“The results of philanthropy are always beyond calculation.”
—Miriam Beard

2,424 Alumni contributed to the McGill Fund in 2017-18. While we would like to be able to publish all of their names, we only have space to list ‘leadership’ gifts on this page (those who contributed $1,000 or more). The list is not comprehensive; many individuals wished to remain anonymous.