

MoMEntum

Department of
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When Andy Mech teaches his students about renewable energy, heat transfer, and thermodynamics, he isn't just giving them lessons on scientific principles. The veteran professor also tries to impart some wisdom that goes beyond the standard mechanical engineering curriculum: the concept of legacy.

But he says he'd never really broached the subject directly until he joined a multidisciplinary team of faculty who tackled the topic of appropriate technologies. While talking to students from the Home for Environmentally Responsible Engineering (HERE) program, he recalls, "I just felt at that moment that it was an opportunity."

On the white board that day, he drew a gravestone with 'RIP' on it. "That may be all that's left of you unless you think of things differently," he told the group before segueing into the idea of one's life legacy.

"I was told by the humanities instructor [who was present] that he was kind of stunned," Mech adds. But for the mechanical engineering professor, the topic is—or should be—very much ingrained in the engineering discipline. Looking back on his former career as a consulting engineer, Mech recalls the role he played in bringing the first hospital to a small town in Illinois.

Even though no one in that community knows who he is, he says that helping build a facility that provides life-saving care exemplifies the inherent benevolence that is part of engineering. And, he adds, "That's worth more than money."

The concept doesn't only apply to engineers, of course. That's just Mech's classroom audience. We all have the opportunity to leave a legacy, and it doesn't take feats of engineering, like a hospital, to do so.

Investing in the lives of those around us, even with so little as a few encouraging words, can make a lasting impact. And, he adds, it feels good to do, too.

"We have so much potential here—even the student who feels like they have nothing to offer has so much to offer," Mech says. "One of the greatest feelings as a professor is knowing that there's somebody out there who was struggling to get through Rose, and you picked them up."

A legacy is not like a trophy, he says.



Students in Dr. Mech's classes are challenged to think beyond classroom lessons, and into what they can offer society.



Fourteen mechanical engineering senior design teams had an

