

Darren Reger ('011) became a Data Scientist at Pinterest

Darren Reger was born in Hillsdale NJ and grew up in Middletown, NJ (Exit 117 parkway). His father worked at a corrugated box factory, until he became a car mechanic. His mother mostly worked at daycares, until she used her registered nurse degree to go back to nursing.

Darren graduated from Rowan Civil and Environmental Engineering in 2011. He went to the University of California - Berkeley where he completed a Master's (2012) and a PhD (2015) in Transportation engineering. His dissertation was "Economically and Environmentally Informed Policies for Road Resurfacing: Tradeoffs Between Costs and Greenhouse Gas Emissions". He was a postdoc at the University of California - Davis from 2015 to 2016.



At this point Darren realized that--in addition to being a great Transportation Engineer--he was also a great data scientist. There were many job opportunities in that area. He joined the startup Galvanize to help other people become data scientists (2016-17). He joined the team at Facebook working on video ads (2017-18). He spent 2 years at StitchFix, building internal tools for stylists and expanding experimentation capabilities (2018-2021). Finally, he joined Pinterest to work on Machine Learning (ML) and Experimentation. He is now a Data Science Manager II, running a team of 7. His team helps the Experimentation and ML platforms scale in terms of efficiency and utility, building out prototypes for new features, testing new technologies and improving measurement and user experience.

Darren married a year and a half ago to a therapist, from whom he's learned and been able to grow his people skills and understanding of organizational psychology which he leverages in his day-to-day work. He lifts weights, enjoys the outdoors and reads 20+ books a year. He volunteers for The Jobs Forum, helping people start second careers in computer science and tech, using his path as an example. This year, he's focused on helping The Jobs Forum with a goal of inspiring more women to pursue careers in technology.

I chose Rowan because it was affordable, offered me the best scholarship, and had a common first two years for all the engineering majors, making it possible to easily switch between majors. [Editor's note: The first two years are no longer common, though students can still change majors.]

I chose Civil & Environmental Engineering because I loved Legos as a kid and I thought I wanted to build structures. I joined Professor Mehta's asphalt Engineering Clinic¹ my Junior year and it started me on my slow path to data science. We measured different asphalt parameters and then mixed asphalt batches with different ingredients and measured how the properties changed. The experiments were basic, but that clinic was my first introduction to the power of statistics. Mixing asphalt led me to Berkeley and ultimately Pinterest.

Professor Mehta would come into the lab and say “I love the smell of asphalt in the morning!” His enthusiasm was infectious. Our Clinic was physically demanding. We hung out together. We studied together. We had comradery. Working with Dr. Mehta, I accomplished things that created a hunger in me to grow my toolkit in applied statistics even further. Publishing a paper as an undergraduate student at Rowan put me ahead of the game in graduate school.

Professor Sukamaran was my adviser. When she learned that I was interested in graduate school, she encouraged me to pursue a doctorate. We had a discussion on what my GRE scores would have to look like to land where I wanted to go and I found that incredibly motivating to have this clear goal. I studied hard to make her proud and was able to get the score I needed to receive full scholarships to many top graduate schools, ultimately choosing Berkeley.

If I had gone to a bigger school than Rowan I might have ended up in a regular engineering job, but I don't think I would be where I am today.

Based on an Interview with Jess W. Everett on 2024-2-28

1. Engineering Clinic is a hallmark of Rowan University. Students take a Clinic class each semester, eight total. Many are interdisciplinary. All are hands-on. First-year Clinics focus on engineering's place in society and fundamental engineering skills. Sophomore Clinics merge communication coursework with an engineering design experience and are team taught by engineering, writing arts, and rhetoric faculty. Junior and Senior Clinics have students work in teams on research or design projects, usually externally funded.