

Posted September 20th, 2017 by Xarissa Thompson

Testimonials



Andres Lombo and Aidan Aird (both Year 1 EngSci) have both received Schulich Leader Scholarships to study at U of T Engineering.

In 2011, venture capitalist and champion of higher education Seymour Schulich established the Schulich Leader Scholarships. Every year since, U of T has welcomed talented STEM students with a commitment to their community to our program.

This year, Aidan Aird of Markham, Ont. and Andres Lombo from Oakville, Ont. are entering our Engineering Science program. They are both curious, passionate about science and excited to share their enthusiasm with others. Both have started initiatives in their community to encourage kids to get interested in science. Writer Xarissa Thompson

spoke to them about what brought them to U of T Engineering.

Andres Lombo (Year 1 EngSci)



Andres Lombo in the Toronto Nanofabrication Centre, where he has conducted research under the supervision of Professor Nazir Kherani (MSE). (Photo: Jessica MacInnis)

What drew you to the University of Toronto?

The most important thing for me is the community. I was in an International Baccalaureate program with 37 other people. I really liked the sense of a close community all working towards the same goal and graduating together.

What brought you to Engineering?

My parents were both engineering professors in Colombia and they encouraged me in whatever ideas I had. For instance, I built a trebuchet out of Lego, using string and a rock from the backyard. We never got to fire it because it was dangerous. My parents' philosophy is that you either lead society or society leads you. You have to take your curiosity and let it push you into exploring the world. And most times this will lead you into something that will really impact society.

You're passionate about sharing science with kids. How have you helped to do that?

I founded *Voyage Science* with friends. There's a stigma that STEM is for nerdy kids. I first noticed it in the 7th and 8th grade. The excitement for science would die off as people started to just study from textbooks. Science should be open to everyone and I wanted to inspire that. *Voyage Science* did interactive presentations in the gym, not as a lecture, but by presenting awe-inspiring experiments. We'd come in with lab coats and goggles and they'd know something crazy was going to happen. It really created excitement and I discovered that teaching is one of the best ways to learn.

What do you think of Skule so far?

It's great. I went full purple at Orientation Week. It truly exceeded my expectations. Mind-blowing would be an understatement. I've learned so much about U of T and Engineering traditions. Behind the academics I see a community and a history that make me very happy to study here.

What are your future plans?

I am currently very open to a wide range of interests within engineering. I came to U of T because I really like the academic challenge, I want to dig into the nitty-gritty of every single topic that interests me. And I want to be involved with topics at the leading edge of science.

Aidan Aird (Year 1 EngSci)



Aidan Aird at the City of Markham's Children's Festival. Aird founded STEM Kids Rock, a science outreach organization, while in high school. (Photo courtesy Aidan Aird)

Why did you choose U of T?

The Schulich Leaders Scholarship was definitely a big part of it, but also the prestige of the engineering program. It's consistently one of the top ranked, not just in Canada, but globally. It also means I'll be able to stay close to home and keep my connections with the charitable programs I've been involved with, so it was a win-win-win all around.

What got you into Engineering?

My parents really encouraged and supported me in exploring whatever I was interested in. As kids, my sister and I spent a lot of time at the zoo, the ROM and the Ontario Science Centre, which really sparked my interest in science and engineering. It led me to be interested in science fairs, and in grade seven I was fortunate to advance to my first of four national science fairs. The first year I built a three-meter totally functional wind tunnel, and then I started to focus on developing inventions to help the people living in the developing world.

You're very interested in encouraging others to explore STEM. How have you done that?

After returning from my first science fair I started an organization called Developing Innovations to promote young STEM innovators and we've featured over 70 STEM students so far. A couple of years ago my sister Keeley and I started STEM Kids Rock, a science outreach program for kids. We have an extensive collection of prehistoric fossils, exotic insects and unique minerals that we take to community centres, museums, libraries, schools, and community events. We have over 50 student volunteers that have helped inspire over 100,000 kids. By the end of this year, we should hit our goal of 150 STEM outreach events since we started, which will coordinate with Canada 150.

You have also worked a lot in philanthropy.

My parents and grandparents were a big influence on me and taught me the importance of giving back. I organized my first big event when I was about eight, a hockey food drive. I'm very passionate about ending youth homelessness and have even slept on the streets a few times during the winter, in order to get a better idea what it may be like to be a homeless youth and to help raise funds and awareness. It was tough. It was really eye-opening to think that kids do this every single night and then still go to school. I struggled to do it one night a year.

What are your future plans?

I'm in the engineering science program, which will allow me to continue exploring the things I love. Ultimately my goal is to be an entrepreneur. I love creating and inventing, and this would tie together all my passions. I look up to people like Elon Musk or Bill Gates, who really give back through philanthropy, and I aspire to one day be like them.

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