

Mitchell: Engineers Without Borders creating social change and leaders

By Ravi Amarnath

Gazette Staff

Parker Mitchell, co-founder and co-chief executive officer of Engineers Without Borders, met with Western's chapter members and engineering faculty on campus yesterday.

Mitchell and fellow EWB co-founder George Roter are on a month long tour of the organization's 30 Canadian chapters.

"For both myself and George, it's absolutely critical to reach out and be supportive of what [our chapters] are doing," Mitchell said.

The organization was founded in 2000 to contribute to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. Today EWB has 15,000 student members, eight full-time members, a board of directors, and has sent 160 volunteers overseas on development projects.

Mitchell attributes the organization's success to its broad appeal among student leaders.

"Our organization is not just for engineers," he said. "We are able to attract people who are committed to making social change and help them grow into leaders."

Over the past six years, EWB has evolved into Canada's fastest growing international development organization. As the initiative has grown, so has EWB recognition

abroad.

"Before we were approaching organizations abroad, and now we are at the stage where people are approaching us and asking us for volunteers," Mitchell said. "We also now have two full-time staff in southern and western Africa who evaluate different projects."

In addition to EWB's international activities, they have also started taking on initiatives within Canada through their high school and public outreach programs.

"We realized that if we are going to have a broad social conscience where people don't accept the



Engineers Without Borders founder Parker Mitchell

social inequalities we have, we need to have young people who understand the plight of those who suffer abroad, and children and young adults are the most empathetic to that."

Prior to co-founding EWB,

Mitchell worked as a business analyst with the management consulting firm McKinsey & Company. Although he now works in the non-profit sector, Mitchell still incorporates numerous skills he learned in the private sector into EWB.

"I think one of the things the non-profit sector could learn from the private sector are the benefits of efficiency and focus. There are certainly some non-profit organizations that are focused, and others that aren't because they try to please multiple constituencies.

"When they try to please too many groups, sometimes they compromise, and compromise doesn't always work out," Mitchell said. "What we've learned from the private sector is that we're just going to focus on development. We want to do one thing and do it really well."

For creating EWB, Mitchell and Roter were acknowledged in 2005 as two of "Canada's top 40 under 40" in a program managed by the Caldwell Partners. Neither partner has hit 30 yet.

Mitchell credits the organization's success to the volunteers who run the various chapters.

"They have got great social causes, but they also get things done. As long as we keep attracting good people, the sky is the limit for us."