

Metals group finds winner of national scholarship at AU

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Stephen Rooney grinding metal

When it came time to present its top national scholarship a \$15,000 award the [Ellwood Group, Incorporated](#), (EGI) found itself in an unlikely location the [Kazuo Inamori School of Engineering](#) at [Alfred University](#), a place internationally renowned for its work in ceramics and glass.

But Stephen Rooney, a junior who is majoring in both materials science and art at Alfred University was clearly their top choice for their metallurgy scholarship and an internship at Ellwood Quality Steel this summer.

“Stephen was selected as the recipient because he is an exceptional student and a well-rounded, ‘hands on& individual, with an interest in the metals industry,” according to the EGI press release announcing Rooney&s award. “He’s a creative thinker who enjoys transforming his ideas to reality, with interests and skills in art as well as in science and technology.”

The process for choosing the scholarship recipient is a rigorous one. To be eligible, students must be a college junior majoring in metallurgy or materials science. In addition to their resume, they must provide two letters of recommendation, an official college transcript and an essay about their interest in the steel industry. Additionally, each of the finalists is invited to tour three of EGI&s manufacturing facilities and undergo a two-hour interview with selection committee members.

It was happenstance that led Rooney to apply for the EGI scholarship. “I was looking for something to do this summer” in a field relating to metals. “Summer has always been a time for me to refocus myself on metals, whether it&s working at a sheet metal design and fab company, doing aerospace-titanium research, working as a sculpture intern or taking art courses in metal casting and forming.”

“I had just returned (to Alfred) from my home in New Jersey and was casually looking through Blackboard and found a posting for the Ellwood scholarship,” said Rooney. “It seemed, for lack of a better word, perfect. The due date for submission was a week away, and I scrambled to get all my materials in.”

His effort paid off.

But Rooney, the son of Stephen and Cindy Kaplan Rooney of Montclair, NJ, and a 2008 graduate of Montclair High School, isn't afraid of a little effort.

He knew he wanted to study both fine arts and engineering, which to some may seem an unlikely combination, from the time he was in high school. His choice of majors "gave my parents a headache," Rooney admits, but since "I've been known to do things in the hardest way possible, it didn't surprise them."

In looking at colleges where he could do both, two places stood out: Carnegie-Mellon and Alfred University, a school located in Western New York that "I had not heard of prior to college searching." While Carnegie-Mellon had strong programs in metals in both art and engineering, Rooney felt the school was not right for him.

And even though Alfred's materials science reputation is strongest in ceramics and glass, not metals, "I found this small school to be a perfect fit. I appreciate the close relationships with faculty and students, the freedom and independence to pursue my own interests, as well as opportunities to work with my own hands in the fields of materials science and fine arts."

Dividing his time between the materials science labs and art studios has been difficult at times, Rooney admits. "It's hard to balance the workload and scheduling between the two," something other dual majors will admit as well. "But the knowledge in one very often relates directly to the other," he said. "For example, I learn in my materials science courses about how materials are structured and how it affects their observable properties. In my art classes, I am always seeking methods for how to accomplish a specific task, or to fashion a new procedure or tool for myself to experiment with. Art serves, in many ways, as a laboratory and playground for engineering concepts, while engineering serves as a source of information that leads to inspiration in the lab and in the studio."

For that reason, he sees little demarcation between his coursework in art and engineering, and finds the combination of both "has provided me with practical experience in both fields that has compounded into a series of unique skills that have served me equally in internships in industry and academic research. It's really hard to say, looking back, what skills I learned from where, and what part of my education I really owe (to art or engineering). Everything feels so intertwined."

Rooney says he doesn't divide himself into "artist-Stephen and engineering-Stephen," and that's why he doesn't see that either art or engineering will emerge as the clear winner in his choice of a career after graduation.

"I plan on working as an engineer initially," he said, gaining some industrial experience before continuing his education. "I plan to work on art during my free time, and feel blessed that I can create artwork as a passion, not a career. Like many pursuits, being an engineer and an artist are both lifestyles, as well as viable careers. But these two lifestyles do not interfere or diminish each other by an apparent need to divide my attention.

"Neither art nor engineering 'wins' because they are not competing," he said.