



PROFESSOR ENGINEERS BALANCE

THROUGH MUSIC

Weekdays, she's BSC assistant professor of Engineering Jen Kessler. On the weekends, she's the guitar-wielding frontwoman of blues-rock trio, Jennifer Lyn.

If you look to stereotypes, the connection between engineering and rocking out in front of a crowd is a stretch. Engineers aren't necessarily known for their outgoing nature.

Kessler tells this joke: "What's the difference between an introverted engineer and an extroverted engineer? The extroverted engineer is staring at YOUR shoes."

While her performing shoes are worth a second look, she's definitely not looking at them when she's on stage. She's relating to the crowd, belting out originals along with classic R&B, blues and rock covers that have made her band a mainstay in the area music scene.

That relatability is one of the commonalities in her two worlds.

"The best way to lose your audience's interest in the classroom and as a musician is by not relating to them." She says it takes someone paying attention at a show three to four songs to see if they even like the band. Students need time as well.

"In the classroom I'm facilitating their learning, not dictating it. They figure out, 'she's cool, I can hang with this teacher.' Same at a performance – they need to know that I'm here so they have a good time."

Kessler's parents talked her out of taking her music on the road right out of high school, gently guiding her to a four-year degree fallback plan.



Kessler in the classroom.
Photo by Glasser Images



Photo by Glasser Images



Photo by Layn Mudder

"I only knew five [guitar] chords in high school, so I'm glad my parents reeled me in," she laughs.

She went to South Dakota State University on a basketball scholarship that segued into a soccer scholarship, earning an undergraduate degree in civil engineering, and master's degrees in both structural and fire protection engineering. Kessler worked as an engineer before moving into teaching.

She refocused on music, especially blues and rock, about five years ago. Her first studio album, a blues rock EP of original songs titled "I'm All Wrong for You Baby," recently was released, and is available on iTunes, Google Play and others, and at her live shows.

Kessler says music is a "balance thing."

"With engineering I can dive down the rabbit hole to nerdville and think only about mathematics, and theory. Music taps into the other side of my brain. It helps me be more balanced."

In front of the classroom, Kessler consciously works on the social and collaborative skills she uses as a performing musician, and that her students will need in the work world.

Second year engineering transfer student Tyler Weigel says Kessler has taught him that you need "more equations than variables" if you are going to solve a problem. He says she also emphasizes that "it's better to work with others than by yourself to figure it out."

"I see that introverted nature with students – and we work on that," Kessler says. "I get them to collaborate with each other. Working with another engineer to come up with correct answer is how we do things in the real world." 

See performance video and learn more about the Kessler's band, Jennifer Lyn, at JenniferLynMusic.com.

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