

▼ POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Setting the table for your future

The first day I stepped on the campus of UBC in Vancouver I felt like a freshman.

A rookie with the wisdom and experience of a gnat. I came from being a big fish in a little pond.

I had known everyone at KLO Secondary, classmates, teachers, counselors, janitors—it was like a second home.

While some students thrive in a large campus educational setting, I found it tough.

Not academically tough, but at times I felt like I could have been absorbing more.

In a class of a few hundred it is difficult to stand out, get extra help and most importantly, network.

In my last semester while I was compiling my application for graduate school I came across a significant problem. I didn't really know any of my professors.

I had one political science seminar, China and the West, that had fewer than 15 students and I had made an effort to get to know my professor, but outside of that class I was in trouble.

Luckily for me I had other supporting references.

I had worked on campus and had been a varsity athlete so I also had an employer and a coach who could both provide a positive recommendation.

When I enrolled in the fourth largest private univer-



**CHRISTINE
ULMER**

School's In

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sity in the United States, I was afraid I might run into the same problem.

At Boston University's College of Communication

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the class sizes were small and the communications department was very much its own entity, as I am sure is the case in many programs at large Canadian universities such as UBC—political science just didn't happen to be one of them.

Even though my classes at BU were small, I approached graduate school with a different attitude.

I got to know my professors. Granted, the atmosphere of grad school is different, professors are willing to meet for lunch or go for a beer after class, nonetheless, it is really up to students to take advantage of educational opportunities through networking.

When I graduated with my master's degree I thought it was a golden ticket.

When I began sending out resumé's I was surprised to find that I wasn't getting a great response.

When I did hear back from employers they were candid in telling me that my education was impressive but I had no relevant work experience.

Ah, so that's important too? In short—very.

Professors are linked in. At any quality school faculty have industry knowledge and connections.

Creating a network while you are in school is incredibly important. There are many ways to do it.

Working as a research assistant or taking on a co-op

are both great ways to get to know faculty and potential employers.

Andrew Malashevsky is in his final year of a bachelor of business administration degree at Okanagan College.

He didn't graduate this spring with many of his friends because he is currently working at Grant Thornton.

Andrew has been with the accounting firm for eight months and is taking summer classes while working part-time. He'll continue that schedule into the fall and then graduate in December.

When he receives his parchment he will have a first-class education, references within his desired industry, a little extra money in his pocket (one of the great benefits of working while going to school) and most likely a full-time position waiting for him.

Going to school and getting an education is important, but it is what you do while you are there that will make the difference in the early stages of your career.

First off, choose the school that is right for you, and then do more than just show up.

Make connections, get some experience and ask for references. You'll be glad to have them when you start pounding the pavement.

Christine Ulmer is a writer in the public affairs bureau of Okanagan College.