

Economics Student Profile February 2017



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In high school, I wanted to be an English professor but upon taking English classes in university, I quickly became disillusioned. I began listening to CBC Radio and becoming more engaged with current affairs, watching CPAC, Politics with Don Newman, and decided to pursue political science. As I went deeper into political science and began reading more journal articles, I quickly found myself more easily persuaded by papers that included data and data analysis as part of their argument. This is where I first encountered p-values and statistical significance. I was horrible at math, and had failed to see its use to me in the past, but now I too wanted to be able to bolster a qualitative argument with quantitative rigor. Thus began my path to learning mathematics. I then saw an interview with John Kenneth Galbraith on television – it must have been PBS or CPAC, and I was enamoured. Galbraith described what it was like providing policy advice to decision-makers, and it sounded so interesting. I decided to finish my arts degree in Political Science degree but pursue a separate science degree in economics.

Discuss positive experiences with faculty/The Department/MUN: During my economics undergrad, Professor Lynch's 2550 course was the first course to really combine economic theory with applications. Given I had entered the Economics Co-op program and would be going on work terms, having a professor open up Excel and start doing calculations was incredibly rewarding. Professor Wernerheim's Micro 3000 course was the first time I got to see this calculus I was learning applied to economic concepts. (MUN taught calculus through a very engineering-heavy lens at the time. That might still be the case.) Professor Locke's Petroleum Economics was the first course that brought together elements I had learned from business courses with purely economic concepts, and again, having a professor share the spreadsheets he was using to analyze economic issues felt very hands on.

Graduate Studies: My favourite course so far has been Macroeconomics. This was a surprise to me, given I had not taken a course from Dr. Chu before, and I had no idea what to expect. Dr. Chu's method of presenting various schools of thought, highlighting landmark papers, and then walking through the assumptions and mathematics of the models these papers presented, seemed to me like a rewarding culmination of the knowledge in economics I had built up so far. The history of economic thought is

important, and it was nice to have it so embedded into a theoretical course. The graduate courses overall have been much more enjoyable than my undergraduate, which was also not an expectation. After being away from university for almost 8 years, I assumed the graduate classes would be hellish and overwhelming, but instead they have generally been a rewarding experience. And I now have many, many experiences of long nights and study sessions that I will look back on with fond memories. I guess I was mildly jealous of people when they'd reminisce about hectic graduate school days. No longer!

Future Goals: In terms of future goals, although it's becoming rare to spend one's career with a single organization, there remains something attractive to that idea. Perhaps this relates to my one-time goal of becoming a tenured professor of English. Additionally, my time in the public service thus far has proved fairly dynamic: I have worked on poverty reduction, homelessness, request for proposal evaluations, government program evaluations, social service provision, and most recently immigration. I take very seriously the fact that the public pays my wages, and use that as a motivation to come to work to work hard. I also believe that the NL public service needs as many economists as it can get. I work in the second largest department in government and there are only a handful of people with economic graduate degrees.

Favorite quotes: There is a rather lengthy quote from John Maynard Keynes about what it takes to be a good economist, and this quote meant a lot to me in my undergrad where I would sometimes wonder if I was too late in arriving at mathematics to be an economist at all. It gave me comfort to know that someone who had had such an influence of the field of economics would seem to encourage the idea that "generalists" can be economists as well, and perhaps even the best ones. I have accepted the fact that I might never be a true "expert", but I will be working in areas where I need to know enough about issues to speak with the experts and to be able to share their insights with decision-makers, and perhaps the broader public. When I hear something on CBC Radio that makes me think: "Not useful to me. Why would I want to know about THAT?" I think of the fact that the master economist that Keynes describes below should never think like that.

"The study of economics does not seem to require any specialized gifts of an unusually high order. Is it not, intellectually regarded, a very easy subject compared with the higher branches of philosophy or pure science? An easy subject at which few excel! The paradox finds its explanation, perhaps, in that the master-economist must possess a rare combination of gifts. He must be mathematician, historian, statesman, philosopher—in some degree. He must understand symbols and speak in words. He must contemplate the particular in terms of the general and touch abstract and concrete in the same flight of thought. He must study the present in the light of the past for the purposes of the future. No part of man's nature or his institutions must lie entirely outside his regard. He must be purposeful and disinterested in a simultaneous mood; as aloof and incorruptible as an artist, yet sometimes as near to earth as a politician." (John Maynard Keynes, The Economic Journal, September 1924, pp. 321-322 – written in response to the death of his mentor Alfred Marshall.)