

# Grad school all that, then some

There's light at the end of the halls of academia—but it's just more studying



ELIZABETH  
MCMILLAN

Four years ago, I thought an Honours degree meant making the Dean's List. Four years ago, I didn't even know what "faculty" meant. And while I went along avoiding life decisions like any other over-achieving high school export, I assumed university was the way to go.

As an undergraduate, the term "grad student" held an elusive quality that evoked images of leather-bound books and intellectual, coffee-shop conversation. I assumed that this never-before-seen breed of student was well versed in the classics, politics and possibly Latin.

In this warped version of academic advancement, I never expected to be 21 and sitting in my first graduate seminar. But now that I am, I've tried to adopt some confidence to go along with my new intellectual status.

Walking across campus during Orientation, I felt a smug satisfaction that I would no longer be taking part in these typical undergrad antics. There would be no cheering or painted face for me. I was a university veteran: I'd survived four frosh weeks, three homecomings, and too many essays to count. I wasn't phased by words like "syllabus" and "pedagogy"—I could almost spell them. I vowed to focus on my studies, which I assumed meant actually

completing assignments and not going out on school nights. I even debated the merits of buying a tweed blazer with stylishly worn elbows in preparation for my semester in the library.

The self-assurance resulting from this newfound maturity and good judgment wavered when I woke up on my first day with a headache that wasn't induced by late night reading. I got lost when trying to get a ONEcard. I even had to ask directions to "the SUB."

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I grimaced when I realized that years of late nights and early classes—not to mention two extra letters after my name—still qualified me as a new student. I began to wonder what separates a graduate student from the backpack-clad masses.

Sure, marks, ambition and the financial ability to continue schooling play a big role, but I want there to be more. I want to believe I'm here because of a dedication to learning and teaching that isn't just a focus on future job prospects. As an idealist Masters student who hasn't yet had her ego burst by brilliant classmates, I

want the comfort of knowing where I will end up and how I will get there. Tenure now? Thanks.

Unlike some of my undergrad counterparts, I'm lucky enough to know what I'm interested in and have a general idea of where it could lead. But guess what: I still need to graduate, so instead of school getting easier, I'm experiencing a new level of self-consciousness about my work. There's an expectation that I should know what I'm talking about, even if it's only from myself.

In a way, graduate work is a reward in itself. Now, I've gotten past the boredom of intro courses and love what I'm studying. Now, instead of trying to suppress freshman interest for fear of being the annoying student who asks questions, I'm grateful to be challenged by my classmates.

While there were no keg stands or frat parties, my first week ended with casual conversation over drinks with fellow MA students. No one mentioned the library, but I'm sure they will point me in the right direction the next time I'm lost.

One week down and what have I learned? It's fun. People are nice. The third floor of the humanities building isn't the Ivory tower I expected at 17—though I'm happy to be there nonetheless. I completed my first reading before the course even started. But rather than taking the rest of the month off, I already feel behind and probably will until I collapse from exhaustion in mid-December. And I might hold off on the tweed for now—though I could do with some smart argyle sweaters.

# Pity the minor minority



EVAN  
SMITH

That, plus I've never seen "underage" on a list of things girls are looking for in a guy—and even if I did, I would probably be creeped out anyway.

I've since passed that magical milestone, meaning I'm now an adult with a little extra perspective and a little bit of wisdom to pass on. A new batch of first-years means a new batch of the "minor minority," and my advice to you old-timers is to look out for the little guys (and girls). After all, minors are one of the only groups against whom it's still legal to discriminate.

So hang out at the coffee shop instead of the pub once in a while—for their sake. But don't treat them like kids: they've had to get through the same schooling and problems as any 18-year-old, and with one less year of life-experience backing them up. The little things count as well, like selling youth bus tickets at the campus information kiosks so the young 'uns don't have to walk over to the nearest convenience store in order to save a few bucks.

As for you minors: whether you're a sprightly seventeen or even a really gifted twelve-year-old, *make some new friends*—even if they're older than you. Start with a, "Hey, what's up?" and go from there. You should also know that a cover charge is like an admission fee to a bar or club (I know it doesn't make sense but you'll learn to live with it), and that the Young Offenders Act isn't all its cracked up to be, so watch it. Oh, and look out for number one. That's me. You can say hi if you want. Lastly, do something with yourself before it's all about booze and strippers. Join a club, paint a picture, or even write for *The Gateway*—all the cool kids are doing it.

When I first came to university one long year ago, I arrived with a certain disadvantage: I was underage.

It all started in my pre-preschool days. I would spend most of my time playing with toys and coming up with all sorts of imaginative dialogues. My mother chalked up this behaviour to my being under-stimulated at home; she decided it would be best for these pre-preschool days to be cut short and for my preschool days to begin.

For the first eight grades or so, my age difference made no difference at all. Kids tended to be bad at math and thus couldn't deduce whether my 1988 birthday made me younger or older than them. They would get confused and distracted, and my secret was safe.

It was around the time of junior high and its accompanying underage alcohol escapades that I realized I would come of age about a year after all my friends. But according to my calculations back then, this moment would happen sometime in my college years, and a vague and distant future that was too far away to care about.

Flash-forward to freshman year. As you may have guessed, I was a bit bitter about my first semester. It wasn't just the bars: the many concerts, parties and general hangout locales that I attended didn't admit minors either, and ID-checks at the door left me home on more than one occasion.

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