



# LEARNING <sup>TO</sup> NETWORK

→ CONNECTIONS MADE IN COLLEGE  
COMPLEMENT ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE

BY MICHELLE WALLAR MARTIN ←



**Several years ago,** Leigh McMillan wanted to supplement her high-tech Seattle day job with something different she could do on evenings and weekends—and after she retired. Despite initial trepidation over the idea of textbooks and assignments, she signed up for Washington State University’s 1.5-year Enology Certificate Program, which consists of nine online courses and three in-person “Wine Camp” weekends, and requires writing a business plan for a winery. Program director Thomas Henick-Kling is a renowned wine researcher and educator based at WSU Tri-Cities.

McMillan quickly found that learning the ins and outs of winemaking was a welcome break from her day job. She credits both the foundational knowledge she

gained and a new friend she made in the program with helping her launch her own commercial winery, Welcome Road, based in West Seattle, with a tasting room in Woodinville Wine Country northeast of Seattle.

“My best friend in the program was a guy named Alan Holtzheimer, from Burlington, about an hour north of Seattle,” she says. “He owned a towing company. The chances of our meeting in any other situation were zero. He was going to open a winery, and there was nothing that was going to stop him. His enthusiasm was infectious.”

Holtzheimer’s encouragement and ideas gave her the boost she needed to follow through on her dreams, she says.

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It's even possible to research and learn a new skill without ever talking to another person. Yet it is connections with others that can provide an outside perspective, inspire us, spark our creativity, boost our confidence, complement our strengths and mitigate our weaknesses.

College classes and programs not only offer knowledge, they benefit students by providing ways to meet others with similar interests and valuable skills; form relationships with classmates, professors and other experts; and come into contact with industry leaders. These opportunities can play a key role in helping students achieve personal goals and professional success.

"I like wine, and I got curious," McMillan says of her decision to pursue the enology certificate. "I always wanted to own a business, and with the wine industry, you get a little bit of farming, a little business, a little marketing. And it's just happy. What's better than sitting on the back porch with a glass of wine?"

McMillan and Holtzheimer became fast friends at the first of the three hands-on Wine Camps in Eastern Washington. They shared a similar sense of humor and worked well together. "Alan encouraged me and is super resourceful. He figured out inexpensive ways to get equipment and different ways of doing things. He was so awesome about sharing his ideas," McMillan says. "After wine school, we teamed up and made a vintage together. We were able to trade knowledge and mistakes, and encourage each other as we did it."

While Holtzheimer was pursuing the certificate, he and his wife started Silver Bell Winery, with a tasting room in La Conner, Washington. McMillan—who retains her day job as vice president of marketing for an online directory that helps consumers choose attorneys—followed in his footsteps a year later, starting Welcome Road in 2011 with her partner, attorney Kristen Dorriety.

Their 2012 Roadtrip Red Bordeaux-style blend has won gold medals at regional competitions, and their

**Technology is useful for staying connected and sharing information, but nothing beats in-person connections.**

2012 Syrah won a bronze medal in an international competition. Their highly rated 2012 Atelier red blend is selling fast, and they just released two white wines: the 2014 Roadtrip White and the 2014 Sémillon.

McMillan has a few tips for networking: "If you see someone doing something really well—the way you would want to do it—ask him how he does it. Get his insights," she says. One of her instructors in the enology program, Gordon Taylor, is the owner/winemaker at Daven Lore Winery near Prosser, Washington. He had welcomed his students to his winery to learn about equipment, and McMillan learned so many useful and practical things from him that if she ever has an equipment question, she asks herself, "What would Gordon do?" Whenever she's in Prosser, she says, she tries to stop in to say hello and ask Taylor questions.



COURTESY WELCOME ROAD WINERY

**Leigh McMillan opened her own Seattle-area winery with the encouragement of WSU faculty and fellow students.**

"The wine industry is very, very competitive. There are all kinds of wine competitions. People looking at a shop have to pick your wine over another one,"

McMillan says. "But even as competitive as it is, it is the most welcoming and sharing industry that I've worked in. People are always willing to offer suggestions."

Technology is also useful for staying connected and sharing information, McMillan says—"Alan and I will text questions back and forth, and Facebook is

another great tool”—but nothing beats in-person connections. “If there’s an opportunity to get together at a wine fest or event, I always try to reconnect with people there,” she says. “The wine industry is social by nature. As much as I love tech—it’s been very helpful—there’s nothing like face-to-face.”

A school’s program administrators can also be helpful in keeping people connected. Theresa Beaver, the viticulture and enology certificate coordinator at WSU, maintains a contact list of graduates and sends announcements of new wineries started by current or former students to more than 400 certificate-program graduates. “She sent out a note inviting everyone to our wine opening,” McMillan says. “This network of fellow graduates is like having a resource and a knowledge base that you can tap into at any time.”

### Common Bonds at Whitworth University

Kristin Haile is the senior manager of global compensation at an Eastern Washington–based world-leading technology company that helps clients responsibly and resourcefully use energy and water. She says that a master’s program gives you an instant network of connections, and the shared experience of school can

### NETWORKING TIPS

**Christina Fong** teaches business students how to create and maintain relationships. She is principal lecturer of management and organization at the Michael G. Foster School of Business at the University of Washington. Here are a few of her tips for making the most of opportunities to connect with others.

#### Strive to meet new people.

“One of the biggest mistakes that people make when they go to a networking event is only talking to people they already know,” Fong says. “Networking means you need to meet new people.”

She acknowledges that it pushes many people beyond their comfort zone, but she says to do it anyway. “Give yourself the task of finding someone who is as different from you as you



COURTESY CHRISTINA FONG

can. Any social event is a chance to diversify. See if you can meet someone who looks at the world in a completely different way.”

She says to do some introspection prior to an event to understand your objectives: “Why am I attending this event? What do I hope to get out of it?” When you know the answers to these questions, she says, you can set some goals about what you’re wanting to learn. For example, you may want to learn more about the culture of

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a certain company or industry.

Once you are at the event, you can share those goals with other event attendees, Fong says. For instance, you could say, "I'm here because I want to know how people in this industry are thinking about new products [or whatever your identified goal was]. Do you know anything about that?" **Attend events related to your interests.** It's easier to approach someone new when the socializing is happening around an event you are genuinely interested in, she says. "I always encourage our students to look for ways to socialize by attending events that they are passionate about—I really want to learn more about X, or get involved with Y, rather than, 'I'm going to this event because I think there will be a lot of important people there.'"

It's particularly productive to

participate in events where you can get involved and actually do some work, she says. For example, helping to organize an event is the best way to ensure that you will have something to do and that you can show off your skills, abilities and passions. "We know that this will yield more meaningful connection than having cocktail-party conversations at a networking event," she says.

**Avoid wish lists.** It's a mistake to think of networking as a way to find someone who can do something for you, Fong says. She cautions against having wish lists, such as saying to yourself, "I'm hoping to meet someone who works for XYZ company who can help to get me a job there." Instead, follow your interests and speak with new acquaintances about topics of genuine interest to you, she says.

**Consider how you can help others.** Think about your network, and ask yourself, "Is there anyone I already know whom I can help?" Fong says.

It can be any kind of help, she notes. "Say there is somebody I know who really wants to learn how to play golf, and I know an expert golfer. I connect them," she says. "Everybody does better in those situations."

Helping someone else makes both people feel very good, she says. "Just because I'm helping you doesn't mean I'm hurting my own self-interest. And furthering my self-interest doesn't necessarily hurt other people. They are not mutually exclusive."

A book she recommends is *Give and Take*, in which University of Pennsylvania Wharton School management and psychology professor Adam Grant

discusses how we can actually become more successful when we give of ourselves and help others.

**Look for ways to make personal connections.** Along those same lines, it's always good to be generous with your thank-you notes, Fong says.

"Even just dropping a note to say you're grateful for the conversation—most of us love to receive emails like that. We could all be writing more of those.

"Personal touch is important," she says. "If you read an article that you think someone else would be interested in, send it to them with a short note."

She adds that using sites such as LinkedIn and other social media sites to let others know what you're up to is a good idea, as well. —M.W.M.



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Developing strong connections with people from different fields who are in your master's program can help with solving unfamiliar problems.

bond people together. Haile completed her MBA in 2012 at Whitworth University in Spokane, then earned an MBA in international management at Whitworth in 2014. "What's nice is that even if I'm not close on a friend level

to someone in the master's programs, we shared something. If there is someone I haven't talked to in a couple years, I have zero issues calling them up and picking their brains."

Developing strong connections with people from different fields who are in your master's program can help with solving unfamiliar problems, she says. Additionally, you can often find out about job openings you wouldn't normally hear about. "I made the switch from a company I'd been with for a while. That was a direct result of knowing someone in the MBA program," Haile says. "What it gives you is options. You can do something new, and you can go somewhere different. Having been in the MBA program has been incredibly valuable."

KAREN BRIDGES



A graduate program also helps students speak the same language as those in their chosen fields, she says. "The MBA is fantastic. You talk about big business. You're talking about what executives are doing and what they're talking about. It gives you a platform, a really good starting place, for speaking with different executives or meeting with top VPs."

Nate Webb (left) and Andy Kalamaris started Craftport, a beverage-exports-related company, after meeting each other in graduate school.

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### NETWORKING



And her MBA in international management gave her the confidence to interact with businesspeople all over the world, she says. “I could easily list 20 or more amazing networking relationships I have developed with individuals in countries such as Brazil, France, Germany, Hungary, China, South Africa—and the list could go on.

“Some of my newly developed networking relationships are ones I’m absolutely certain I will take with me throughout my whole career path. Some are relationships that I am certain will exist even outside of my career, and that is also exciting. The MBA in international management really opened the door for me in such a global way—I feel so connected to so many different regions and countries that I wouldn’t have, otherwise.”

### Networking into a New Venture

When Andy Kalamaris began the Portland-based Executive MBA program at the University of Oregon in 2012, he had one goal: to continue to rise in the ranks of the pharmaceutical industry. Then he met his future business partner through the program, and they embarked on a completely different venture even before they graduated last year.

One evening in 2012, Kalamaris was at a restaurant in Rio de Janeiro with fellow EMBA student Nate Webb during their program’s study abroad trip to Brazil. The two were inspired by a simple observation: Budweiser was the only American beer they could see being sold at local restaurants and beach kiosks. Surely, they mused, people in Brazil would appreciate Pacific Northwest craft brews. The idea behind Craftport LLC was conceived.

Kalamaris and Webb’s final graduate-school capstone project was all about their new company, which would manage exports of craft beers, wines and spirits from small to medium-size Northwest companies to South America and Asia. The proj-



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**NETWORKING**

**Talk to professors and to fellow students, who often have great ideas and a wealth of knowledge from previous work experience.**

ect was a great way to inform classmates and professors of their idea.

“My adviser during my capstone project used

to be an executive for a global venture-capital company,” Kalamaris says. “He had so much relevant real-world experience and was able to challenge me on almost every idea or observation. He helped me to focus on supply channels and identify niche opportunities within supply channels historically dominated by large multinational companies.”

Kalamaris recommends taking advantage of every opportunity to “tap into the networks of your university.” Talk to professors and to fellow students, who often have great ideas and a wealth of knowledge from previous work experience, he says. “Clubs and alumni associations are also places to find new contacts and spread the word about what you’re up to.”

Officially launched in March 2013, their export-management company works with producers that export the products. Craftport facilitates the process from beginning to end. It finds the distribution channels, assists with export documentation, vets prospective buyers, and ensures proper storage and handling.

“Essentially, we are a contracted export department working side by side with our clients—small and medium-size enterprises that often lack the resources and experience to run their own export programs,” Kalamaris says. “Craftport fills that need on behalf of our clients.”

For a business such as Craftport that doesn’t have a product of its own, relationships are especially vital, he says. He made a connection through his dentist with the first brewery that Craftport partnered with

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**NETWORKING**

to export beers to Brazil—Alameda Brewing Company in Portland. That was in May 2013. Craftport has now helped

**Advice for success: You need to listen—listen more than you talk. Listen carefully, and then also be transparent and share ideas.**

five brands enter Brazil and expects another three brands to be sold there by the end of this year. People from across the globe who are attending the 2016 Olympics in Rio will find several Oregon craft beers available, Kalamaris notes.

Another lead came through a friend just the other day, Kalamaris says. Keep contacts informed through conversations and social media about what you're doing, because people will want to help you when they can, he says.

Social media has become even more important to him since he moved to Kuala Lumpur, which is 15 hours ahead of the West Coast, in December 2014. While retaining his co-ownership of Craftport, he started a new Malaysian beverage-distribution company—West Coast Craft—which is a sister company to Oregon-based Craftport.

West Coast Craft was formed to create a buyer in Malaysia for Craftport-represented beverages. West Coast Craft purchases and imports products brokered by Craftport, sells them through Malaysian trade channels, then finds distributors to physically transport the products in Malaysia.

Craftport now not only manages exports to Brazil and Malaysia, but also Japan, the Netherlands, Spain, England and Taiwan. It represents a total of nine breweries, three wineries, two cider houses and four distilleries, all from the Pacific Northwest. In May, the Oregon Consular Corps and its trade partners recognized Craftport as the state's top new emerging exporter.

Kalamaris has some advice for success-

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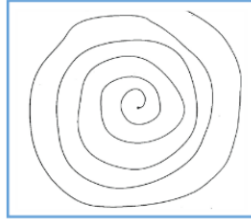
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## NETWORKING



**Connections can provide the opportunity to help businesspeople in your community and in other countries.**

ful networking: “You need to listen—listen more than you talk.” He describes a meeting that he and Webb had with the Brazilian consulate in which they learned a great deal about what it would take to manage an export business, something that neither of them had experience doing. Listen carefully, and then also “be transparent and share ideas, informally as well as formally with lots of people,” he says.

Webb notes that he’s known since high school that he wanted to be an entrepreneur, and he “just needed the right team and resources to turn that dream into reality.”

“I found everything I needed in the Oregon Executive MBA program, including my business partner, Andy,” Webb says. “Craftport is incredibly satisfying on a professional level because I have a positive impact on both my local business community and beverage culture all over the world.”

NATE WEBB, ANDY KALAMARIS, KRISTIN HAILE AND LEIGH McMILLAN all discovered that one of the biggest benefits of higher education can be the connections formed with fellow students, teachers and industry leaders.

Those connections can provide valuable insights, an encouraging boost at a critical time, a lead on a new job opening, and the opportunity to help businesspeople in your community and in other countries. Networking can even change the trajectory of a career. It turns out that making and maintaining relationships can make a world of difference. ■

*Michelle Wallar Martin writes in Seattle.*

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