

*In her own words: "Measures success by her ability to explore areas outside her comfort zone, to accept failures with grace, and to meet her full potential at work and in her personal life."*

**D**on't let your degree pigeonhole you." It's good advice that many new graduates ignore as they rush into the job market, but Hilary Chen took it to heart even before she left Queen's. On the verge of completing her Political Studies degree in 1999 — and planning to head to law school next — she tagged along with a friend to an information session hosted by a management consulting firm.

"It was a bit intimidating because of all the business types there. I had no idea what management consulting was. But the presenters were stressing skills that I had, like analyzing and problem solving. I did some research, applied for a job with Bain & Company in Toronto and started working for them as an Associate Consultant in September, 1999."

In a nutshell, explains Hilary, top-tier strategy consulting firms like Bain assist companies in making decisions that include a broad spectrum of strategic issues, such as evaluating another company for acquisition or designing an e-commerce strategy.

At first glance, then, her background in Political Studies seems to have limited

application to consulting. But her job — which involves tasks such as assessing a company's financial performance or conducting customer interviews — calls upon precisely the kind of research and analytical skills she picked up in her university studies.

"The Arts degree, in fact, gave me an edge. For instance, knowing how to master dozens of chapters on an obscure topic in time for next week's mid-term comes in handy when you start a case in an unfamiliar industry. Researching diligently, building sound arguments and communicating insights effectively are all skills that I use daily at Bain. And knowing how to balance my work and my personal life is something that I learned at Queen's. Maintaining that balance is critical to my job satisfaction, which directly influences my work performance."

Now almost two years into her job, Hilary has already completed a three-month transfer to London and consulted with clients in the telecom, banking, real estate and insurance industries. She has discovered that the work is a good fit with her personality. On performance reviews she consistently scores high on communication and teamwork skills. "Some people learn by reading a book. I'd rather sit and discuss a problem with my team the way we did in fourth-year seminars at Queen's. The best way for me to learn is to listen and toss around ideas with other people."

Connecting with people is what drew her to Queen's in the first place. She wanted to attend a topnotch university but she was also looking for a close community. It took just one Homecoming Weekend to convince her that Queen's was her first choice. "I wanted to meet people with different perspectives, and I was immediately caught up in the Queen's spirit. I ended up making many friends outside of my politics courses."

The desire to connect with others also threaded its way through a busy schedule of extracurricular activities — everything from chairing the Political Studies Department Student Council to sitting on a task force to improve the university registration guide book to hitting the pool for intramural inner-tube water polo. The Queen's community continues to be an integral part of her life at Bain, where she spearheads the company's recruiting effort at the university.

"One of the best parts of my job is going back to Queen's to talk about what I do. It's great to open up opportunities for other students, especially those in Arts and Science who, like me, are non-traditional candidates in the consulting industry. I'm strongly encouraging Bain to take a good look at students with different backgrounds. Forward-thinking companies want to hire people who can push the boundaries. People with all sorts of degrees — Commerce, Law, English, Engineering — can make up a great team at Bain that's richer for the diverse perspectives."

Efficient teamwork is critical in her business, says Hilary, who believes one of her strengths is providing solid support to her colleagues. "We have very tight deadlines, so it's imperative that we all pull our weight. I'm good at delivering quality results on time." That involves taking initiative. "I always hit the ground running on a case. You have to know the right questions to ask."

For Hilary, asking the right questions is also the key part of any job search. "Queen's has the responsibility of supplying support services for graduates searching for work, but there's a lot of individual responsibility involved, too. You have to know what you're capable of, research your options, and talk to people. You have to keep digging deeper to find the answers."

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Sometimes Hilary still can't quite believe how chance delivered her to the doorstep of Bain &

Company. "If someone told me a few years ago that this where I would be, I would have been mildly shocked." Now she has a strong business and analytical background that equips her to work in other business fields — finance, marketing or operations — or to return to school for post-graduate studies. She also benefits from Bain's commitment to its employees, who can transfer periodically to an overseas office and participate in fun events run by the company's "Esprit" committee.

"Fortunately, Bain is filled with people who are young and spirited, which for me made the transition from the Queen's community much easier." ❖