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Concordia Criminal Justice Highlights

Faculty & staff committed to a higher education.

BY SCOTT HARR, CONCORDIA CRIMINAL JUSTICE DEPARTMENT CHAIR

Among the attributes making Concordia's online criminal justice BA and MA degrees so unique and appealing to adult students working in the criminal justice field who want to return to school but maintain a balanced life are the perspectives brought by faculty and students. Past articles have highlighted what our exceptional faculty bring to our programs; in this article two students who reflect exemplify why our cohort (small learning group) system creates such a rich learning environment are highlighted.

Because students complete all classes in our program online, our cohorts (small learning groups of 10-15 students who remain together throughout the accelerated program taking one class at a time in sequence) can include students who work in all aspects of the criminal justice system from anywhere in the United States or other countries. When one compares it with, for example, learning with other police officers from local jurisdictions, you can readily see the increased perspectives members of a cohort program benefit from.

Cohorts also provide a support system to one another and networking and friendship opportunities abound. Most agree that students and faculty get to know each other far better in the online environment than in traditional classrooms.

In this article I am proud to highlight two students who are typical of our program because

they would be so untypical of most others. Constables Terry Graden and Mark Ulmer are nearing the completion of their criminal justice bachelor's degree program at Concordia and are both police officers with the Calgary Police Department in Canada, but throughout each week of class continue to interact with their cohort made up of students elsewhere.

Concordia was a school that cared and was where I wanted to attend. The entire program is designed for people like me who work in the police field and are very busy. They understood the demands on my life and had a way for me to incorporate school into it. I was told students become a member of the Concordia family, and that has proven to be very true.



Calgary, Canada, Police Department Constables Mark Ulmer and Terry Graden, both pursuing their bachelor's degree in criminal justice at Concordia University Saint Paul

WHY DID YOU SELECT CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY FROM ALL THE OTHER OPTIONS AVAILABLE?

Constable Terry Graden: After completing countless hours of research into post secondary institutions, I narrowed my choice down to three universities — two in the United States and one in Canada. Upon speaking with people at Concordia the very first time I arrived at an immediate decision — Concor-

HOW HAS ATTENDING CONCORDIA ST. PAUL BENEFITTED YOU?

Constable Terry Graden: "Attending" school in the United States has afforded me the opportunity to learn from perspectives other than the Canadian way. Theories, for the most part, are similar wherever we choose to attend school; however, the applications are at times different which has presented me with a new and fresh

perspective within my course of study. Adult education has really advanced in the United States and Concordia appears to have set the bar. From the man programs I researched, Concordia's criminal justice program has taken adult learning theory to an entirely higher level. The variety of students and professors in our programs from different geographical areas and parts of the system really contribute to the overall experience too.

WHAT HAS YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH FACULTY AND STAFF BEEN WITH YOUR ONLINE PROGRAM?

Constable Terry Graden: In my past experience with schools I have been met with unanswered emails and calls at other post secondary institutions, but when corresponding with this faculty and the program administration, my relationship with everyone I have met is unparalleled. I was simply amazed with the manner in which they are eager to assist in any capacity! I have been presented with the unexpected good fortune of receiving life long friendships with my cohort members and faculty. Where else is this possible? And all online; it really is amazing.

DID YOU FIND ONLINE LEARNING DIFFICULT TO MASTER?

Constable Mark Ulmer: Initially I had no idea what to expect but needed a program that fit my busy schedule, having been with Calgary Police for over 21 years now. I expected online college to be inferior to traditional classroom methods and learned I couldn't have been more wrong. Thinking online learning is somehow 'second best' is a major misconception people may have. It was not only easy to learn the online methodology but it

quickly exceeded my past educational experiences and expectations. I haven't been disappointed with anything in the program.

WHAT HAS THE CONCORDIA PROGRAM PROVIDED YOU AS A STUDENT?

Constable Mark Ulmer: This program has enabled me to continue with my studies to complete my university education while not interrupting any other areas of my life including work, family, friendships and other commitments. The program provides the flexibility that allows me to complete school work when I'm able which is especially helpful working shifts or special assignments, or when having family and other commitments to balance as well. But I'm still a part of our class (or cohort as it's called). I consider our group among my best friends and have more contact with them than in any traditional class I've experienced even though it's all online. And because I travel around the world, I'm able to keep up with my studies from any location I can access the Internet.

The Concordia program has opened up a whole new world for me, plus I'll graduate from a well respected 115 year fully accredited academic institution. My experience has been so positive that I plan to pursue the master's degree at Concordia next, then possibly law school.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE CONSIDERING RETURNING TO SCHOOL IN THE MIDST OF THEIR CAREER?

Constable Mark Ulmer: First, choose your school wisely. All programs are NOT the same! Pay particular attention to the philosophy of the program, the faculty & staff,

and who the students and instructors are. Most importantly, find out how the program fits the busy schedule of adults working in the criminal justice system and whether they really understand the demands of our busy lives. A good online program for adults isn't just a regular class placed online. We're not typical 18 year old students any longer.

Then move ahead; don't hesitate any longer. "∞I'll start tomorrow" can continue on for years. It did for me; once I began the program the time has literally flown by and I can't believe we're nearing graduation. It's been that meaningful and enjoyable for me. If I have one regret it's not finding Concordia sooner, but the fact is it's never too late to pursue this dream. College will positively impact your career and other parts of your life. I'm finding doors open I never considered.

Concordia's Criminal Justice Department Chair, Scott Harr, likes to say that all adult students have one thing in common: we are in transition and school provides a viable means of transitioning. Whether it's work transition or personal, he's right — school has impacted all parts of my life as I know it has the other students in our class.

Constables Terry Graden & Mark Ulmer: We're both more than happy to answer any questions about our experience at Concordia. Please feel free to write us at: Officer Terry Graden pol2873@calgarypolice.ca or Officer Mark Ulmer mulmer@calgarypolice.ca

Further information can be obtained by contacting Criminal Justice Department Chair Scott Harr at harr@csp.edu or 651-603-6277 or department recruiter Mike Conner at conner@csp.edu or 651-641-8249 and by visiting www.csp.edu. ■