



Jason Kambitsis received his MCRP from CalPoly in 2008. He works as a Senior Planner in the Department of City Planning, Pittsburgh, PA and is a contributing editor of a the web magazine "Wired".

WHAT I DIDN'T LEARN IN GRADUATE SCHOOL

JASON KAMBITISIS

Jason Kambitsis, a graduate from CRP's master's program, is a successful planner working with the City of Pittsburgh and publishes frequently at the Wired Magazine. In this article he writes about his introduction to the profession, and suggest eight guidelines that young planners should know about.

Getting my Master's in City and Regional Planning from Cal Poly was ne of the best decisions I have ever made. I learned that there are people that truly get excited by the same nerdy subject matter that I do, and you can call a Lexus an environmentally friendly car just by creating a vanity plate for it (sorry Paul Wack!).

eyond this I learned that even after working with all of the great professors and the time that we as students put into understanding planning there is still more to learn. Sure, Graduate School is great at giving you an in-depth understanding of the City Beautiful Movement and how it has shaped the modern city. But there is no textbook, no class you can take that gives you the perspective that working in the field does.

Graduate School gave me a lot. The rest I learned on my own. There are some standard tips everyone needs to follow when getting a job. Wear a suit for interviews, look people straight in the eye, be respectful to those you work with, etc. But, there is still more that you need to know about planning to help you set off in your career and to stay successful as a planner. Here are eight guidelines every planner will either think about or be confronted with in their career.

1. Process, is process, is process. When I was in school I actually worried that when I started my next job I would not be able to do it effectively because I was not versed in every aspect of planning departments, mostly the process of paperwork. But, once I gained understanding of the general principles behind the bureaucratic jungle of governmental planning , I was able to apply these principles anywhere. I recommend you sit in on Planning Commission hearings when you can. Show up to the local governing body such as a City Council when they have land-use related hearings so you can see the ins and outs of this field. Once you know where and why a project starts and ends you will be able to transfer that knowledge anywhere.

2. Work for free and view it as a real job. Graduate school is one of the few times that you can work for free and you are not viewed as a slacker (someone who works for free seems like the opposite of a slacker). If you have never had any experience in the field, talk to a local department and ask what options they have for internships. Get in there and work as hard as you can. These people will be writing recommendations for you. If you do well they will help get you a paid job, or perhaps even retaining you as one of their own employees. Internships are the stepping-stone for your next career move. Those who get them and work hard at them find jobs more easily and advance more quickly. It's as simple as that.

3. If you want to make a lot of money go do something else. True if you want to be a millionaire by 30. But planners do well. Actually planners have a higher median income than most Americans. Plus this is America, the land of opportunity; with your new planner skill set I am sure you can figure out a way to make the money tree grow.

4. Work for government. This is probably the best move any new planner can do. After a few years you will understand how a municipal planning department works. This is good if you want to advance in government or go into the private field. Since governments make most of the contracts they like to hire people who have sat in their seat and understand how to work through a bureaucracy. It's a no-lose situation for you.

5. Not all planners or departments think the same way. This can be a hard reality for anyone in planning. Just because some of my colleagues and I commute by bike doesn't mean everyone else in the office does. Before you pick a job, or even start the hunt, make sure you are going into a place that you are comfortable with and will fit into. A good work environment in a community that values your viewpoint will make a huge difference in the quality of work you do and the satisfaction you get from it.

6. Be objective. The days of a professional dictating the utopian dream to the public is over. Modern planning is based around a collaborative effort. You are a professional, not a dictator. This can be hard, but you need to keep your personal feelings out of the decision-making process and go into any situation with a clear head. People will notice and respect you for it. And in the end you will be a more effective planner and asset to your community.

7. Know the community you work in. When you start working at a new place get out there and explore it. Walk, bike, and drive the streets to meet as many people as possible and start identifying problems and solutions. Inevitably questions will start coming at you from all over the community. You will need to be a resource on everything going on and the history of your place. Also, read your local paper every day. It is a great way to know what is happening. People will expect you know what is going on, especially if you work for the government.

8. Treat everyone the same. It doesn't matter if the person is putting a shed in their backyard or creating or investing \$100 million in a local community. Treat everyone the same and you will earn the respect of the community and your peers.

So here it is. Is there more information I could give you? Sure. Will things be different for everyone? You bet. But wait and see. All of these guidelines for planning practice will confront you either when you are starting to look for a job, or after you started, enjoy.