



Meet Maureen Hinman, a Global Finance, Trade and Economic Integration alum who believes “the Josef Korbel School really cued me up for success in D.C.”

MA, Global Finance, Trade and Economic Integration, (GFTEI), Josef Korbel School of International Studies, 2003
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Tell us a bit about yourself and what brought you to the Josef Korbel School:

I’m a Denver native and I went to the University of Denver (DU) as an undergraduate. I was one of the first students to take part in the dual BA-MA program (which allows DU undergraduates to earn a BA and MA in international studies from the Josef Korbel School in five years).

So you feel your program at the Josef Korbel School was highly relevant to what you do today?

I came to D.C. and started working in the area I studied and I’ve worked in that area continually since I graduated. It is unusual for someone my age to have seven to eight years of experience in the trade policy area and a MA degree. The Josef Korbel School really cued me up for a lot of successes in Washington, D.C. I’ve found consistently that the understanding of international structures, the political interplay and the technical understanding of rules and laws plus the ability to research in a way that is thorough but not biased is a real asset. The foundational knowledge gained at the Josef Korbel School is terribly important if you’re going to be a thoughtful policy maker.

What do you mean specifically by “foundational?”

The Josef Korbel School doesn’t start by jumping into what’s fashionable now. Because policies go in and out of fashion, I think that a lot of schools teach what’s fashionable as opposed to the ability to evaluate the history and evaluate the trends. I found that the foundational and analytical basis of international relations, the institutional basis, which I learned at the Josef Korbel School, really gives you the ability to understand how things are playing out now and the ability to apply historical analysis to an issue as opposed to saying; “well this is what’s popular now.”

What classes and/or professors do you think were really helpful?

International Monetary Relations with [Ilene Grabel](#) really changed my professional perspective. Anyone who has had class with Ilene knows that she’s really tough and expects a high level of intellectualism and the ability to defend your positions -- with factual information. That approach – to be clear and concise in defense of your views – is really important as a professional in Washington, D.C. [Tim Sisk](#)’s International Politics, a foundational course, was really important. It deals with the importance of institutions which I don’t think there’s enough emphasis on. I also took some [International Security](#) courses as an undergraduate which

were very helpful. It's crucial to have an understanding of how the international security apparatus works. If you don't you're going to fail in economic assessments. Based on my experience running overseas projects, when you're running a project and you need to make a decision about when you're going to pull staff out you better have an understanding of how the security situation functions. Because at the end of the day it's not the State Department that decides to pull your people out, it's you.

Tell us a bit about your employment background – where you started out and where you are today?

When I was in graduate school, Tim Sisk very wisely said to me, "Maureen, you should really do an internship in Washington, D.C. And make sure you do it in the fall because if you do it in the summer Congress isn't in session and nothing really happens in the summer." So I got an internship at Oxfam America, took the fall off from school, and became a policy intern. At Oxfam I got my feet wet with advocacy, did some campaign work, as well as some research. My internship turned into a research consultancy and I wrote a paper on international currency transaction taxes that was eventually published.

What did you do to make your internship and job search successful?

When I came to D.C., I decided I was going to dedicate myself full-time to my internship. I also made it clear when interviewing for internships that I knew administrative work was part of the job – it always is for interns – but if I was working for free I wanted hard, concrete outputs I could put my name on before I left. I was persistent when I started, I worked long hours and I treated it as if it were my first job – because I had no experience in the field. I think that's why it led to the research consultancy.

From there I wrapped up grad school, had an awkward year where I worked in Denver, lived with my mom, and saved up money to move to D.C. Most NGOs, the government, and private companies will not fly you out for an interview. So I literally sold everything I owned, packed up my car and moved east without a job (but with a twinkle in my eye.) I slept on couches for three months, met with every person I could possibly meet with. I contacted people at companies and organizations I was interested in and asked them if they could meet me for coffee. And in a stroke of luck I started temping for JE Austin Associates – an economic consultancy– and through that was able to finagle my way into my first job at Nathan Associates. I worked for Nathan for four years doing analytical work, policy analysis, running projects and writing proposals. So I decided I had a choice, either I wanted to become a career project manager in the field I was in or I wanted to start in government. I started working for the government about a year and a half ago and currently work for a federal board that regulates foreign-trade zones. Life has been good in government, it's very different than working in the private sector but it's a good experience.

What could you recommend to people who come to D.C. with a "dream career" in mind?

I recommend people have 5-6 career paths to pursue because things change so much, particularly in D.C., it can be incredibly disappointing if the one you've chosen doesn't open up. Be open and never fall in love with one particular career path because some of the more interesting things that happen in your career are going to be things you never anticipated.

You've given us great advice today, thank you Maureen.

Thank you. I have to say that I am so grateful that there's an active Josef Korbel School alumni association, it's great there are more resources for recent grads to come out here. You do usually have to move to Washington, D.C. sight unseen.

**-Shane Hensinger, MA candidate in International Security
Josef Korbel School of International Studies**