

MEET OFF CAMPUS STUDENT ALLIE GOLOTTA

by Tanya Bird

The Off Campus student is elusive. Eternally absent, but always listening. You might find them lurking on the discussion boards of Moodle, or see them emerge from the shadows at exam time. These ambiguous creatures are shrouded in mystery. Yet if you shine a light upon them, you will discover a vibrant individual behind every user name.

This issue we welcome to the spotlight, Off Campus student, Alexandra Golotta. But you can call her Allie.

Allie, 28, is studying a Bachelor of Arts (Professional Communication) part time, while working full time for Arts Centre Melbourne. She lives in Carrum, in Melbourne's southeast, and uses her train commute to and from work for Uni reading. And Sudoku.

'When I finished year 12, I never wanted to write another essay again,' says Allie.

After finishing school, Allie made the decision to defer University and work for a year while she figured out her career path. Her lingering interest in photography saw her enrol at Photographic Imaging College where she studied photography for two years.

'I met some photographers and decided that's not the life for me.'

She then took a job within the Visual

Communications field, but says that her brain was crying out for something else to do. At 25 years of age, she was not interested in the 'full submersion experience' of University. Long past her days of pub crawls, she decided to study off campus, so that she could continue working.

Allie trialled a public relations unit with Open Universities and spent six months researching her options, before deciding to enrol at Monash.

'From the first two units I did, I absolutely loved it. I found that it really suited me.'

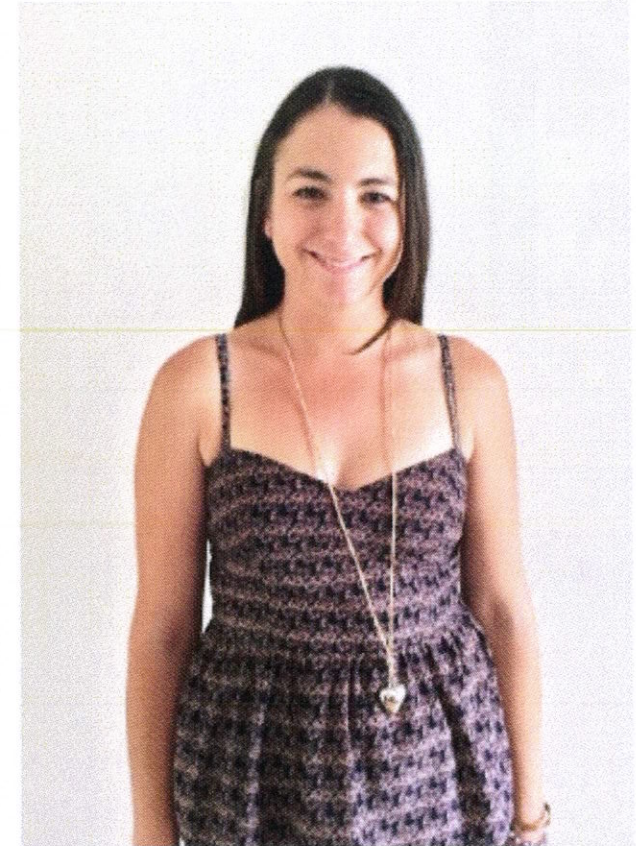
She found that motivation came naturally to her and that Off Campus learning enabled her to focus, away from the distractions of a classroom.

'I work with people all day at work, so it's quite nice to come home and have this private project that you work on.'

For Allie, the best part is being able to dictate how study fits into her life. Saturdays and Sundays are her dedicated study days, and she tries to maintain a strict nine to five approach.

'I still can't believe they let you do that,' she laughs. 'It makes it so accessible. I would never have been able to go back to Uni full time.'

As she begins her fifth year of study, she admits that the isolation from other students can also be the challenging part.



Alexandra Golotta, 28, is an off campus student studying a BA in Professional Communication. She successfully juggles full time work, part time study and a myriad of hobbies.

'Particularly in the cold, dark, winter months, when you've spent the entire weekend inside, sitting still, on your own, reading Max Weber theories.'

The pay off comes at the end of the semester, when she is sitting exams.

'You realise that you know all of this stuff that you didn't know three months ago,' she says.

Allie credits her success to always being proactive, and keeping on the front foot. Her advice to other students is to approach each unit from the point of view of the lecturer and avoid getting bogged down in the detail.

'Don't sweat the small stuff, and think more broadly about what you should be taking away from the unit. Don't try to understand every word because there is some stuff that will just drive you crazy. If you are trying to understand something complicated, put it in your own words, and post it on the message board. Dumb it right down. Talk to people on the message board, because that has got to be the best tool we have.'

Allie now nears the end of her degree with a sort of reluctance. The temptation to keep studying is trumped by her need to pay her mortgage. She is forced to think of her post study career path, and is currently considering a future in print media, or corporate communications.

'I'm still figuring it out, but I've narrowed it down,' she says, laughing. 'Corporate communications would be an interesting area to work in. I've always been interested in how an organisation presents itself to the

public. Particularly when it comes to the fringe government cultural sector, it's a dialogue that happens because those organisations only exist to provide something for people. So how do we talk about that?'

For now, Allie continues to research and sample her options. She finds time to produce and present a Saturday afternoon show for her local community radio station. She contributes to Pearl Magazine, an online publication dedicated to the arts in Bayside and the Morning Peninsula, and writes music reviews for the DMG radio website. She also plays the piano (yes, she has time for a hobby).

'I figure if I spend some time doing these things, I'll find out if I like doing them in reality.'

We wish you all the best Allie.