



# SMALL SCHOOL, Big Impact

Independent Colleges Focus on Innovation

Proper Technique: Pamela Eyring, Director of The Protocol School of Washington, demonstrates the correct way to use cutlery.





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**L**arge institutions, whether private sector colleges, state universities, or private colleges, often garner the lion's share of public and media attention. But there are hundreds of PSCUs that are independent, high-quality, and equally adept at meeting the needs of students who seek a focused education, flexible schedules, and valuable workforce skills.

Indeed, many of the smaller PSCUs have been educating students for decades, while some others are newcomers. Their programs speak directly to the needs of the 21st century global workforce. They may not be as well known, but these small institutions are casting an increasingly large shadow in terms of their expertise at successfully graduating students who enter the workforce fully prepared to add value to companies and to their communities.

### **Sweet Sound of Success**

For example, there is the Conservatory of Recording Arts and Sciences (CRAS) with campuses in Tempe and Gilbert, Arizona. With more than thirty years of educating audio technicians and sound professionals, this small, independent private sector school has turned out hundreds of top professionals in its field since its founding.

"It's a busy time," said Kirt Hamm, administrator of CRAS, referring to the early spring of 2011. That is the time when many of Hamm's graduates eagerly await word on how they fared in a major music industry event, the Grammy Awards. Indeed, in 2010 and 2011, CRAS graduates were involved in the audio production of 63 Grammy-nominated projects. And during that same period, CRAS fielded 12 Grammy winners in 18 categories from its alumni ranks, some having worked on productions by popular singers including Rhianna, Usher, and Michael Buble. In the fast-changing world of popular music,

CRAS is viewed as a reliable source for highly skilled technical professionals. Hamm says that CRAS has relationships with the country's leading recording studios. The school places students in internships at record labels and in production facilities. Ultimately, some students land jobs in those facilities after completing their studies. Executives from East West Studios and Capitol Records regularly come to campus to speak to students and advise them on the industry, according to Hamm.

Given the sometimes tumultuous nature of the recording industry, exactly how does CRAS, a small school, stay ahead of the curve? With technological changes constant in the world of commercial audio, how does CRAS keep its instruction current? Hamm cites strategic investments.

"We just upgraded two of our studios with newer technology," says Hamm. "There are always capital improvements that have to be made. Part of our curriculum is teaching mainstream tech, the other part is a 'bleeding edge,'" Hamm says, referring to a level of flexibility in instruction that is built into the curriculum at CRAS. "We are always balancing what's best for the students' learning and the economics of innovation."

At CRAS, students are also armed with what Hamm calls a "studio in a bag"—a MacBook Pro 13 laptop, a set of headphones, a microphone, and other pieces of technology that are considered the industry standard. Hamm says that students appreciate this package—which is included as part of the total tuition students' pay to complete the 11-month-long program—as an important value-add to their learning experience at CRAS.

"We're one of those small schools that keeps tuition affordable, and we don't





PHOTO COURTESY OF CRAS

TOP LEFT: George Kemper, a CRAS alumni, shows off the camera he operates for Fox Sports during NASCAR coverage.

TOP RIGHT: Kirt Hamm of CRAS, along with a state of the art sound production console.

LEFT: Kemper, along with Fred Aldous, a senior audio mixer at Fox Sports. Aldous often hires graduates from CRAS.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GAME CREEK VIDEO



PHOTO COURTESY OF CRAS

“Sure, I’ve got to keep my eye on the bottom line. But it’s about the student experience. It’s about students succeeding in their industry—and that will bring in future students.”

—Kirt Hamm, administrator of the Conservatory of Recording Arts and Sciences (CRAS)

have layers of bureaucracy, we pride ourselves on it and it’s a selling point to our students,” Hamm says. “We’ve got the flexibility to adapt to the employment market,” he says.

And the music industry companies certainly do seek out CRAS graduates.

### Speeding Toward Success

George Kemper is a CRAS graduate who has experienced that dynamic first hand. After graduating from Oregon State University with a degree in psychology, Kemper decided that the psychology field wasn’t where he wanted to be in after all. So he enrolled at CRAS.

A standout student, Kemper excelled in CRAS’s program, becoming expert in

sound technology and production, and certified on the many tools and techniques of the audio trade.

Fred Aldous is a senior audio mixer at Fox Sports. When he recently found his operation in need of an audio editor for a specialized project involving recording sound from within high performance cars for the cable network’s NASCAR television broadcasts Aldous knew just where to go—CRAS.

“We had a need for an editor, we wanted to record all 43 car radios as quickly as possible, edit down some quick pieces and play them back, on air live. My first call was to Robert Brock at CRAS,” says Aldous.

In short order, Brock told Aldous about Kemper, who was just finishing up his internship at a post-production facility in the LA area. Brock suggested Aldous contact Kemper. By the end of that day, Kemper was hired to work in audio at Fox Sports, Aldous says.

After that, within a few days Kemper had begun work using state-of-the-art equipment to capture racing car drivers’ radio transmissions, edit them, and broadcast them during Fox’s airing of the Daytona 500. It was a pressure cooker environment, requiring Kemper to not only capture the sound but also to edit it, and then line up the pieces of sound and have them set to go when the director would cue him. Kemper was exhilarated, and believes the expert instruction he had





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received at CRAS prepared him to meet the challenge.

“The rush of knowing what you’re doing is going out live is amazing,” says Kemper. “I never could have gotten into this situation and succeeded without my education. I never would have even considered it,” Kemper says.

“I went to CRAS for music, like the vast majority of people do, and when I was there, I was like, ‘Wow, there’s this whole other world of audio that exists, a lot of other really awesome opportunities.’ Sound for TV is just one of them.”

Kemper seems very much at home in his new world, especially considering that

he knew next to nothing about NASCAR before he started. After Daytona, Kemper traveled to Phoenix, AZ, for the Subway 500 race, where he reconnected with his CRAS instructor Robert Brock, who was attending the event. As Brock tells it, Kemper has very quickly become part of the Fox Sports family.

### **Minding Manners at the Highest Levels**

Score one for the quick wits and extraordinary talent that brings NASCAR roaring to life. When it comes to having big impact in the world, it’s often the people behind the scenes of government, corporate, and world events who ensure that things run smoothly. Enter the Protocol School of Washington, an APSCU mem-

Students practice the proper way to hold a glass during a toast.

ber school in the District of Columbia offering training for protocol officers, domestic and foreign governments, military, corporate, and academic staff.

Pamela Eyring is director and president of the Protocol School of Washington. A former student, she purchased the school from its founder five years ago after a career as chief of protocol at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio. The school boasts more than 3,000 graduates in 45 countries, many in high-ranking positions in government, nongovernmental organizations, even presidential palaces. Recent national media attention was focused on the school when newly elected Speaker of the House John Boehner sent one of his congressional aides to the school’s “train the trainer” course.



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—Pamela Eyring, director and president of the Protocol School of Washington

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“Organizations like Speaker Boehner’s office understand the need for protocol and etiquette knowledge,” says Eyring. “We have given them all the materials to do that successfully.”

Eyring says that when the school first started, its primary student market was entrepreneurs looking to become corporate etiquette trainers. “It was not a charm school. We focused to bring business acumen into the workplace. When I purchased the school, our student population was still about 70% entrepreneurs,” she says.

Today, corporate employers from Boeing to Forbes to John Hancock and Exxon-Mobil employ graduates of the school. “The impact from our graduates in the corporate environment is that they are truly changing behaviors, and improving communications in a company,” says Eyring.

Building on the corporate base, Eyring brought her background in military and government protocol to the curriculum, the school continues to grow training in that area, and now more students are attending from those fields.

“We created a new program called Protocol Officer Training. Graduates work for governments, military, and corporations to plan high-level VIP interactions,” Eyring explains. “It could be handling an international VIP, or domestic government like a senator visiting the executive offices of a company.” Eyring says the roles her school’s graduates land are different from event planning positions because they focus on the people and VIPs, on building the relationship.

“The Protocol Officer Training class has blown us out of the water,” Eyring notes. “We’re doing them internationally; we do two a year in Dubai and have one coming in Trinidad and Tobago. We’ve been to Turkey for the government. It’s absolutely booming.”

At the Dubai school, students represent such diverse groups as the government of Dubai, Office of Her Highness, Doha, Qatar; Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Abu Dhabi; Ministry of Presidential Affairs, UAE; Abu Dhabi’s Crown Prince Court,

UAE; the world’s tallest building, the Burj Khalifa; Presidency of The Republic of Lebanon; African Union Commission, Ethiopia; and the Royal Court of Bahrain.

Domestically, in the Washington D.C. area alone, the school trains FBI, Smith-



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sonian, Federal Reserve Bank, and NASA employees, as well as all levels of federal, state, and community government officials.

“One of our graduates, who is a protocol officer for the FBI, has handled his Holiness the Pope,” Eyring says. “That’s an example where there are many specifics of do’s and don’ts from an international perspective. He was handled in a way that was honored and respected.”

### Learning from Others

Pamela Eyring says that as a relatively new APSCU member, she hopes to learn from the larger schools that she comes in contact with. Although her small school occupies a niche educational market, she sees opportunities to play alongside the big boys. “My hope is to continue our growth, and learn from bigger schools. That’s why we became accredited,” she says.

Eyring, like other executives at small but mighty PSCUs, says she appreciates the opportunity to develop a great reputation within a high-demand niche.

Kirt Hamm of CRAS says the key to big success as a small school is staying true to your core model.

“I’ve been in the industry almost 30 years, and I want to stay true to our private postsecondary school’s grassroots—skills-based, good quality education, no fluff. Get students out and working in the industry,” says Hamm.

“Sure, I’ve got to keep my eye on the bottom line. But it’s about the student experience,” Hamm says. “It’s about students succeeding in their industry—and that will bring in future students.” ■

**TINABETH BURTON** is Managing Editor of *The Link*

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