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When Kashtin Apsassin, MGB ’21, arrived in Austria for the last leg of his Master of Global Business (MGB) program in 2020, he was excited to spend another semester exploring a new country and continent with his international cohort of classmates. He didn’t expect that he would have to fly home just a few months later due to a global pandemic. However, after a rollercoaster year filled with highs and lows, Apsassin is graduating and excited for the official start of his post-graduate life.

Apsassin is one of many new grads around the world who finished their degrees during a pandemic. In his case that also meant starting a co-op, beginning a job hunt and starting a new career, all without leaving his home. The situation was complicated by the fact that the conclusion of his final co-op coincided with the beginning of the pandemic and one of the most uncertain job markets in recent memory. He applied to dozens of jobs and received few responses. "Graduating from university is already an uncertain time," Apsassin says, "and added to that was the most unpredictable period in recent times."

During the tough months of lockdown following the end of his program, Apsassin found creative ways to use his time. "As I dealt with the new normal of the pandemic, I kept my spirits up by trying to be entrepreneurial," he says.

He soon decided to start a photography and web design business, and even worked helping others spruce up their résumés. "Graduating from university is already an uncertain time," Apsassin says, "and added to that was the most unpredictable period in recent times."

Another thing that helped Apsassin through this time was sharing his experience with peers. He highlights how important it is for graduates to be honest about their immediate post-graduation experiences. "Coupled with COVID-19, I had to deal with post-graduate depression, which is a very real thing. It was the first time I had to face mental health issues in my entire life. What I soon found is that people need to talk and express what they’re going through, and communicate with others who are going through similar experiences so that they can know they’re not alone."

In fact, it was through sharing publicly about the challenges he faced that Apsassin found the perfect job opportunity. After Apsassin posted to Facebook about his difficulty finding a job, a manager from a co-op Apsassin had previously had with the BC Public Service reached out and offered him a contract position working with Global Affairs Canada’s Free Trade Promotion team. It turned out to be a job perfectly tailored to his background in global business. "I went from having dozens of applications and no responses, to being offered a great job on a silver platter with a team and role that I really liked."

Although his MGB experience was changed by the pandemic, for Apsassin the program offered him an invaluable experience and satisfied his life-long interest in traveling the world and getting to know other cultures. "During my MGB experience in Taiwan and Austria I found myself serving in an ambassadorial role between cultures. Every time I met someone I felt I served the role of representing Canada," he says. "It was an incredible experience." Apsassin had originally been drawn to the MGB because of his interest in living abroad and working with other cultures; so how did that pan out in a time where global travel suddenly ground to a halt? "Even with the pandemic changes, the MGB prepped me for my work with government, whether it was working [through Zoom] with international companies during my internship with Global Affairs Canada or just learning about global approaches that I can apply to my current work."

Apsassin’s application of his skills continues with his new job as a policy analyst for Indigenous Services Canada. Originally from Edmonton and a member of the Blueberry River First Nation, Apsassin is excited about his future and the projects he is helping develop. In his role as a policy analyst he will develop a process for Indigenous self-governance in the education sector, in particular looking at how education can be funded, organized, designed and delivered in First Nations communities, both for pre-secondary and post-secondary programs. It’s something he feels a personal connection to. "It was myself a beneficiary of these [post-secondary] programs before I ended up in this position," he says.

Apsassin is now officially set to graduate this summer, an event that brings up many fond memories of his time studying abroad. When the pandemic took hold and students were being flown home, Apsassin and his MGB cohort got together in their communal kitchen for one last dinner.

“That’s when I realized the importance of the program,” he says. “I realized how much I had embraced the people I was with. Many of those in my cohort are still near and dear to me, and when we left I thought I had missed out on developing those friendships. But I’m realizing now that many of them are going to be lifelong friends.”