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Metro Grads> from left, Barbara Burns, Woody Yee, Tom Jasmin and Martha Butler earned Master's degrees at CSU Los Angeles and graduated together.



## Four Long, Hard Years But These Employees Earned Master's Degrees

- Jasmin, Burns, Butler and Yee graduated together from CSULA

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By REINA V. SLUTSKE

(June 22, 2006) Back in 2002, Tom Jasmin was up for a promotion in Bus Operations Control when the supervisor called him in.

"Well, you have the experience," he said of Jasmin's Metro years. "But you've done nothing with your education in thirty years. You have a bachelor's degree, but I have someone else who has less experience, but he has his Ph.D. Now, who would you pick if you were me?"

Jasmin, now director of Operations Control, knew it looked like he had done nothing to advance his education. The supervisor suggested that Jasmin go back to school and get an advanced degree. Within a week, he was registered in CSU Los Angeles' program for an MS in Public Administration.

He wasn't alone. Three other Metro employees were registered there as well: Barbara Burns, assistant manager of Transit Safety Education; Martha Butler, a Transportation Planning manager; and Durwood "Woody" Yee, a Stops and Zones supervisor.

Together, the four of them celebrated their graduation from the program this year.

**Thirty years later**

Jasmin had received his bachelor's degree from CSU Los Angeles, so returning to the campus after a 30-year absence was jarring.

"Each quarter when you have to introduce yourself,' he says. "The first day I said, 'I remember this class thirty years ago. They haven't painted it, they haven't changed the floors, and the air conditioning in this building probably still doesn't work.'"

Woody Yee, like Jasmin, received his bachelor's degree from CSU Los Angeles. He noticed the cultural shift at Metro, where top positions were requiring higher levels of education, and was interested in continuing his education.

"We decided to take the challenge, go back and see if our study skills improved or not," he laughs. "Mine didn't."

All four would take one class per quarter, working full-time, going to school at night, and doing homework on the weekends—or at least, trying to find the time to do homework.

**Cut into lots of fun**

Working full-time and going to school means cutting into a lot of fun time, or even into other obligations.

In addition to work and studies, Burns was also in the Naval Reserve until 2004. She remembered that, while on weekend duty with the Navy in Dallas, she was working on her first grad paper. She researched it in the hotel room, and wrote it in the airport.

"It became a real juggling act," she says.

Meanwhile, Martha Butler, whose daughter Tara also graduated this year from UC San Diego, had been missing all the fun family events that her large family does together, opting for studying as opposed to days at the races.

Yee had to work out a schedule with his wife to spend part of the day with her on weekends and study the other part.

"The program is demanding," Yee says. "Even though the professors say, 'We understand that you're working full-time,' they still pile the work on."

**Suddenly they were classmates**

Butler, Burns, Jasmin and Yee all work in different Metro departments and most didn't even know each other until they showed up in a college class together.

Since master's classes are so small, the four of them could comprise up to one-third of the class.

Working at Metro allowed them to apply their experiences to their school assignments. Burns' thesis was developing a bus safety program for kids, while Jasmin worked on job succession planning.

Of course, his workload at times Metro made it hard. Jasmin is on call with Bus Operations Control 24 hours a day, and was contacted about incidents during two final presentations. He finished his presentations, and immediately excused himself from the class.

**Now it's over**

After four years of master's classes, Jasmin seems almost startled by at the amount of free time he now has.

"I go home and I realize, 'There's nothing to do,'" he said. "When you're in college, there's always so much."

What all four have in common is that they're all looking forward to relaxing in their spare time and doing what they love.

"My house is neglected," Butler said. "I liked working out in the yard a lot, and I didn't have a chance to do that."

Meanwhile, as they all look for other activities to do, Burns may have said it best: "Right now, I'm going to take some time off."