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## Blog Post: Top Alumni A-ha! Moments

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# Top Alumni A-ha Moments

Alumni Questionnaire, Student Life

There are a lot of myths, rumors and hearsay swirling out there about the pulp and paper industry. Oftentimes, once our scholarship recipients return from a co-op or a graduate enters the workforce, they come back to us shocked about how misperceptions they had about the industry were quashed and corrected. Here are some of their a-ha realizations:

## 1. The Industry is Thriving

This is a common misconception and one that we've talked about before. Students, alumni and industry professionals all know that the pulp and paper industry is alive and well (very well, actually) and they're not shy to say when their perceptions are wrong. Alumnus Lucas Preble shares: "As a life-long Mainer having witnessed mill closures, I was skeptical when companies would come to campus and tell us how well the packaging and tissue industries were doing. I no longer have any skepticism." Recyclable, eco-conscious packaging and paper products are in high demand with no signs of slowing down.

## 2. You Don't Have to Work in a Mill

Yes, paper mills are vital to the industry. Many Pulp and Paper scholarship recipients fulfill their co-ops, internships and even their entire careers in a mill. However, just like other industries, it's multi-faceted. Alumna Jenny Williams admits, "My idea of a job in the industry was working on a paper machine all day every day. I was so happy to learn that there are many other opportunities available." There is ample opportunity in sales, management, marketing, research and development—the list goes on. While it's beneficial to understand the workings of a mill, you don't have to work in one if it's not for you.

## 3. You Can Live Anywhere

With mills, suppliers, distributors and manufacturers supporting the industry all over the globe, you can pick almost anywhere on a map to start your career. Many scholarship

recipients or graduates have travelled internationally while working co-ops, internships or jobs in the industry. Traveling can expand your professional knowledge and network as well as your cultural awareness, too. You never know where you may learn something new.

#### **4. The Industry is Tight Knit**

While the industry extends all over the world, our alumni have been surprised that they often run into other professionals in the industry, adding that somehow “everyone tends to know each other.” Alumna Alyssa Burkard said it best, “Since graduating, I’ve run into many people I met at conferences and events with the Pulp and Paper Foundation. There are alumni everywhere I look. It’s so nice to be a part of a community like this, where people truly care about the work they do and the people they work with.”

#### **5. Automation and Innovation Abound**

Even though the pulp and paper industry is centuries old, it’s not stuck in its old ways. Innovation, creativity and always looking to push past limits and standards are the spearhead of continued industry success. Alumna Sage Duguay was “surprised at the level of automation present in the pulp and paper industry and the push towards promoting continued automation and driving data initiatives.” She adds, “I can check the real time operating status of a 60-year-old paper machine on a cell phone from anywhere in the country.” How cool is that?!

The pulp and paper industry is about more than producing paper. It’s reimagining workflows to increase efficiency. Conceiving new processes in order to keep mills and manufacturing sites safe. Visualizing and demanding new ways to protect our natural resources. These ideas and innovations come from experience, education and an open mind. Don’t be afraid to test your assumptions—they may open new doors for you.

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