

Maxx Hartt



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How do I Use Mathematics?

When I was younger mathematics was part of my identity. I excelled in school and pursued it in undergrad. However now my educational background surprises people. An urban planning academic began in mathematics? For some, it's an enormous leap across the great divide between "hard" and "soft" sciences. I just smile and nod.

Although I rarely need to recall the specific skills that I learned in my undergraduate education, my approach to solving problems is completely indebted to mathematics. I approach my work meticulously and systematically.

A firm understanding of mathematics is a skill that begets other skills. It imbeds an innate perspective that helps one to think critically and solve problems. In my experience, being proficient in mathematics is always beneficial.

High School and Undergraduate

I was born and raised in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. I attended Dartmouth High School, where I played hockey and graduated with High Honours. I enjoyed and excelled in mathematics so I pursued an Honours Bachelor of Science in Mathematics at Saint Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. Although I enjoyed my courses, it was my honours thesis project that propelled me to graduate school.

Graduate School

I didn't want to rush into anything. I took a year and a half to wander (Africa, Europe) and contemplate what aspect of my mathematics education were most fulfilling. I decided that I wanted to pursue an interdisciplinary degree, as I was interested in the practical applications of mathematics. I settled on the Systems Science (MSc) program at the University of Ottawa. Here I had the opportunity to work on an international multimillion-dollar climate change research project: C-Change. I had always been passionate about the environment and interested in complex systems so it was a natural fit. In my project, I modeled the impacts of storm damage on coastal communities.

Once again, I did not want to rush into anything that I wasn't passionate about. Although I had enjoyed modeling and simulations, I was increasingly interested in the complexities and "wicked problems" of real life. I found myself drawn to the social sciences. I, once again, moved abroad (Ireland) to breathe and contemplate my future. Ultimately, I decided to pursue a doctorate in urban planning.

I was accepted into the School of Planning at the University of Waterloo where my focus turned to demographic change, economic decline and population loss – or what some call "shrinking cities".