



## get schooled

Capilano College offers a ticket into the mountain bike biz

OWEN THOMAS, A 33-YEAR-OLD MOUNTAIN BIKER from Toronto, was burnt out on his job as a tool-and-die maker. He dreamed of a career connected to his passion for trail riding, but had no idea where to start. Mountain Biking 101 wasn't an option at college.

Then, two years ago, Thomas picked up a newspaper and read about a school in British Columbia that was launching a curriculum centered on the business of mountain biking. "I signed up for it the next day," he says.

Thomas moved west and enrolled at Capilano College. He paid about \$5,000 to complete two four-month semesters at Capilano's small Sunshine Coast regional campus, which has about 150 full-time students. He earned a graduate certificate in Mountain Bike Operations and now works for Hoots Inc., a B.C.-based business that designs mountain bike parks and trails.

Amazingly, every one of Thomas' 16 classmates scored jobs in the mountain bike industry. They were hired by resorts including Whistler, Sun Peaks and Silver Star, as well as municipal trail associations and even the bike manufacturer Norco.

"As soon as the industry realized these guys were coming out of this program knowing what they were doing, they were hired," says Jay Hoots, a Capilano instructor who owns the park and trail-building company that hired Thomas. "There's nowhere else in the world offering this type of program."

**EXTRA CREDIT**

Capilano College's high-tech test lab



So what exactly does one learn about in the Mountain Bike Operations program? A little bit of everything—classes cover event planning, wilderness first aid, environmental studies, risk management, trail building and tourism. They provide specific training for jobs such as race promotion, guiding and trail design.

Hoots says a growing interest in mountain biking, from both resorts and municipalities, creates a demand for education. "For us to have a sustainable sport, education is a compulsory part of it," Hoots says.

Since the only way to teach trail building is to build trails, the fruits of the students' labor are there for the shredding. "We have a mountain bike park that's surrounded by a large parcel of public land," says IMBA Canada director Mark Schmidt, who teaches classes at Capilano. "It's our own laboratory of trail opportunities, and anyone in the world can come ride it." For more information, check out [capcollege.ca](http://capcollege.ca). —KIP MIKLER