

## Alexander Mirza

Alexander Mirza, Artsci '92 (Political Studies), MA'93 (Political Studies) is the Executive Chairman of HospitalitySoul, an online global talent marketplace serving the hospitality industry. He has over 25 years of professional experience in management consulting firms and senior executive roles in the hospitality industry including serving as a CEO of a boutique hotel chain based in China and head of corporate development for Hilton Worldwide. During his time at Queen's, he was an Aga Khan Foundation International Scholar and President of the Queen's International Affairs Association (QIAA), which won debating awards at Harvard University under his leadership. In 1997, he received an MBA from Harvard Business School, where he focused his studies on corporate strategy and international marketing.



### Please briefly outline what your current job entails.

After spending most of my career as an innovator in the “brick and mortar” side of the industry, I crossed lines and joined the technological side. I lead a global technology company that is creating talent marketplaces using decision sciences to address the labour crisis facing the hospitality industry where a new job is created every 2.5 seconds. As the Chairman and CEO, I am responsible for investor relations, facilitating innovation and challenging the status quo.

### How did your education in Political Studies inform your career path, the job you have now, and any other projects you're

#### currently involved with?

Practically speaking, studying politics has helped me tremendously. In the hospitality and travel industry, we deal with a lot of state-owned enterprises: city, provincial and national governments and their agencies as well as international organizations. But it's more than that. In today's world, successful brands must have a purpose and a cause. It must be authentic and make a positive social impact on the communities you engage in. I learned more about leading social change from studying Politics than going to Harvard Business School, or from spending 20 years in the corporate world.

### Why did you choose Political Studies as a discipline?

It happened by accident. I sat in some second-year courses in international relations and political theory and became fascinated. Queen's also had some terrific history professors and the course work on China, India and the Middle East made it a well-rounded liberal arts education. For an Asian immigrant who started as a Biology major, it was an act of rebellion to say the least.

### Why did you choose Political Studies at Queen's for both your BA and MA?

I majored in Life Sciences in my first year and that is what I came to Queen's to study. I majored in Political Studies because the faculty was truly outstanding and the class sizes were relatively small. I stayed for an MA because, for some reason, I felt incomplete. The undergraduate experience didn't challenge me sufficiently despite the experience I gained leading QIAA and a summer studying U.S. government at U.C. Berkeley. The MA at Queen's was very difficult because there was no formal program, and I had to take core doctoral courses and compete against a much higher calibre of students.

### What led you to pursue a career in business following completion of your Political Studies degrees?

I believe business is the greatest engine of social change in the world. Too many politicians don't know what it's like to manage people, to be accountable to consumers and shareholders, or to build an organization from scratch. For example, the hospitality and travel industry employs 434 million people and is responsible for over 10 percent of global Gross Domestic Product. While there are many challenges and issues facing the industry, it's a huge engine of social change and meritocracy around the world.

### How have you stayed connected to Political Studies?

Stéfanie von Hlatky, associate professor in the Department of Political Studies, is on the board of HospitalitySoul.com, the company I lead, and she advised me in the last venture as well. We wrote an op-ed on China-Canada relations recently. I still read anything Francis Fukuyama writes and glean information from a variety of sources to avoid getting brainwashed by either the corporate world or the media.

### What advice would you give to undergraduate students who have recently completed an undergraduate degree?

My advice would be to seek an employment opportunity in the business world where you can find a great mentor. Pay less attention to the brand or prestige of the employer and focus on the people and culture fit. Seek international experience early on and be ready to pay your dues to learn.

### What's the best career advice you've ever received?

I've had some great bosses including three Fortune 500 CEOs. On my first week in one of those jobs, where I was the youngest senior executive in the company, my boss asked me what I was doing in the office: “There is nothing going on

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here, get out into the field. No one here can teach you anything." Ever since then, I have spent most of my time in operations or engaging investors, developers and consumers.

## If you had to do it all again, what would you do differently?

I would have lived and worked in Asia earlier in my career. I believe Canadians are uniquely prepared to be international executives but still biased towards Europe. There is a tremendous wave of innovation in all sectors coming from Asia despite all the social and geopolitical challenges.

## What are your best memories from your time at Queen's?

My best memory was leading QIAA, which received a lot of support from the Political Studies faculty and the university. It's also where I met my wife of 25 years, Barbara Roblin Mirza, Artsci'92 (Philosophy). Barbara is a partner at Cooley, a high-tech law firm based in California, and we have a 15-year-old daughter, Sophia. ■



Alexander Mirza pictured with Mark Wahlberg at the Wahlburgers Cachet Press Conference, January 2017



Auston Pierce and Addy Egan

## From the Department Student Council Co-Presidents, 2018-2019

Our names are Addy Egan and Auston Pierce, and we are two fourth year Politics students and the 2018-2019 Department Undergraduate Student Council (DSC) Presidents. Over the past year we have been active in trying to implement our two main goals of fostering a sense of community within the department and supporting students.

With the aim of fostering a sense of community among Politics students, we have carried on a number of traditions within the department, such as pub nights, 'Drinks with Profs', and Politics branded clothing sales. To try to create

increased engagement with the DSC, we have also created new events such as 'Trivia with Profs', and hosted the first ever Politics semi-formal, which was a huge success for its first year with almost 100 participants from all four years. Our final social event for the year was to hold a Fourth Year Graduation Dinner to celebrate all the accomplishments of Politics students at the end of their four years. The dinner was attended by both students and professors and was a wonderful way to commemorate the past four years.

Our other goal for the year was to provide support to Politics students from all years. We carried on the tradition of the DSC hosting a POLS250 midterm study session for students each semester with an attendance of about 50 students each semester. A new initiative that we brought not only to the department this year, but also to Queen's, making Queen's the first Canadian post-secondary institution to participate, was the U.N. International Day of Persons with Disabilities. As part of this initiative, we worked with the university to light up Summerhill in purple, and ran an awareness booth in the Queen's Centre. Finally, to better support students in a variety of ways, we developed an equity questionnaire in collaboration with the Politics Department Equity Committee for undergraduate students to fill out should they wish to share any feedback with the department.

It has been an incredible honour to be the Politics DSC Co-Presidents for this year, and as we graduate and become alumni ourselves, we are so excited to see all the growth and work that the undergraduate students in the department continue to do.

Addy Egan and Auston Pierce  
DSC Co-Presidents, 2018-19  
April 2019