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Our Campus: Wasted Talent artist balances engineering, comics

By [Maitrayee Dhaka](#)

Geoff Lister/The Ubyyssey

In her fourth year at UBC, Angela Melick transformed Club Mech—the mechanical engineering student space—into a disco.

The event, part of the mechanical engineers' Bad Idea Fridays, came complete with lights, disco balls and a troupe of engineers doing the Hustle in 70s outfits. It happened to be the same day that first-year students were touring the engineering club rooms.

"The first-years entered, saw what was happening, and backed away slowly. We also ended up doing the Hustle at my wedding," Melick said with a chuckle.

After a determined effort to have fun in her last year in university, Melick graduated from UBC with a degree in mechanical engineering. She continues to attend the annual alumni meet-and-greet, Old Red, New Red.

While Melick works in the sustainability industry by day, she is perhaps most popular for her web comic *Wasted Talent*, which draws on her life as an engineer for inspiration. Much of her work references her time at UBC. The title, Melick explains, refers to her inability to give up either engineering or art.

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"My mother was a fine artist and my father an engineer. Both of these sides of myself have been developed by either one of them. When it came to high school, I had to make a decision and didn't make one until the last minute. I was enrolled in AP physics and math and chemistry but also the fine arts studio program. I applied to both art schools and engineering schools and was accepted to both. When I chose engineering, I told myself I won't let go of art," Melick said.

First online in 2005 and still updated weekly, *Wasted Talent* is mostly autobiographical. The comic has shown up in dorm rooms and computer screens of engineers struggling to accurately describe their lives. It started off as a way to make her friends laugh.

"My friends showed it to their friends," Melick said. "Soon, people that I didn't know knew me. 'Life of a Second-Year Mech' was probably one my most popular ones and started showing up everywhere. What shocked me was that by the time I graduated, it had spread to other campuses." She now has fans around the world, and she has been featured in *Reader's Digest*.

The balance between fine arts and hard sciences suits Melick.


"A lot of people dismiss [the comic] because I do downplay it," she said of her engineering co-workers, "but it is the way that I process my emotions and it helps me achieve balance, and it has certainly helped me get better at time management. The audience is phenomenal and I've met engineers from across the world and it's great."

Wasted talent or not, she's excited about the future and currently working on the cover of her second book, due for a March release.

"Changes are happening in my career," Melick said. "I have plans to build upon what I learned with *Wasted Talent* but I'm not really sure what the future holds. I'm always working on building new things and have a few projects under development. It's a marathon, not a race."

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