

# Featured Alumni - Colin West (PLC '06)

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*Physics professor, University of Colorado Boulder*

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Colin West (PLC '06) is known amongst his professional colleagues for his cardigans, bad puns, and sense of humor. He currently lives and works in Boulder and was brought back to Boulder by accepting a job to work in the CU Physics Department. He says his work days are full of variety and allow him to explore long-term projects while also keeping a lecture schedule.

Colin's professional path was never directly focused and he remembers always having a long list of career goals. After graduating from CU, he moved to New York to study at the Yang Institute pursuing a Masters and PhD in quantum theory. After finishing there, he took a job as a researcher and instructor at UC Santa Cruz for two years. Dr. West says that his return to CU was exciting for him and being back around the PLC program was icing on the cake.

He realized his potential in teaching when he gave his first lecture at CU. Previously, he had not taught large classes and remembers feeling nervous about such a large lecture environment. After giving the lecture, Colin said he felt completely energized and saw how much he loved teaching physics to people; he knew he was in the right place.

Colin says that PLC shaped his social circle and influenced what he did with his spare time during his undergraduate career. As an Engineering Physics and Applied Math student, he felt immersed in his own world of hard sciences. The PLC program gave him "a balance within academics and an excuse to explore his interests outside of science." He encourages first-year students to be vulnerable with other first-year students, even when it's hard. PLC can be an intimidating program to come into and Colin recalls, "I think often times people put their walls up and try to hide their own insecurities and hide their ignorance in the first-year classes. It's the exact opposite of what you want to do! You can learn so much from the people around you."

PLC still continues to impact Colin's life through his friendships and networking. He feels that he has people in his circle from PLC that he can ask for career advice and mentorship. He also knew that coming back to CU to teach would give him the chance to reconnect with both the PLC program and PLCers in the area.

Colin says that his mentors at CU contributed to his decision to teach at a college level. Their mentorship gave him a taste of what a career at a university would look like and how he could achieve a balance between researching and teaching. He feels that their advice and experiences helped shape the type of career he wanted with his return to CU.

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