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Scene magazine web supplement for Spring 2001 

## **ePLU connects students with careers and Internet economy**

by Katherine Hedland '88

### **[View photos of ePLU students](#)**

Cutting-edge online music search company Cantamatrix found important data—and even more important employees—through PLU's School of Business and ePLU, the new electronic commerce resource center.

And when the PLU Bookstore decided to take its operations online, director Angela Zurcher sought advice from ePLU, run by professor Chung-Shing Lee and a group of enterprising students dedicated to studying and working in electronic commerce.

"They are really bright, exciting individuals, and it was a stimulating environment," Cantamatrix CEO Bill Koenig said of his class visits. "They're really well-prepared for going out and working in the marketplace. Our experience is certainly proof that PLU is producing some great graduates."

ePLU started last summer with Lee and his students laying the groundwork, creating a Website (*eplu.org*) and making contacts with business people. By January, the Website was up and running and more professors, students and companies were involved with the venture.

"We're trying to build a bridge between PLU and the Internet economy," Lee said.

Believed to be one of the only resource centers of its kind at a Northwest college, ePLU aims to give students real-world experience, integrated into course curriculum.

"This way, corporations get to know about the students and students get to know about companies and business," Lee said.

An alum that works at Cantamatrix, Hans Bjerne '99 knew some students at ePLU and helped get his company involved. CEO Koenig went to a class last summer to present students with a few real problems the company had, and let them go to work. Junior Justin Foster '02, one of the founders of ePLU, so impressed Koenig that he's now working for Cantamatrix part-time.

"We got some useful information from the various reports, and we enjoyed the ongoing interaction with students," said Cantamatrix CEO Bill Koenig. "And having Justin around is a great benefit."

With 25 employees, Cantamatrix ("canta" meaning song and "metrix" meaning measure) is headquartered in Bellevue, Wash., with offices in Los Angeles, Florida and Copenhagen. The company designs software to help users find music they'll like by analyzing it mathematically by melody, rhythm, harmony and timbre.

Back on campus, students helped the bookstore prepare to sell texts and supplies online.

"Their project helped us think things through a little more clearly and it was a very helpful tool in helping with our decision making and planning," Zurcher said.

More companies are getting involved as word spreads. Schmidkte & Bacon, a Tacoma accounting firm that specializes in working with start-up companies, has asked ePLU to prepare six technology briefings for its clients, in exchange for research grants for ePLU.

"From what we've seen, we're very impressed," said Rich Schmidtko, a partner in the firm. "We're hoping to utilize their skills and expertise to help our companies who don't have a lot of staff."

ePLU offers distinct benefits for students, such as a résumé profile that links them to potential employers, and to faculty, who can incorporate the center into their curriculum. Businesses and organizations that get involved take away research and reports created by students.

All the coursework projects, including white paper reports on topics such as the digital economy become part of the site, available to anyone looking for information. Specific projects completed for companies will be kept private.

"It showcases what they're capable of – individually and as PLU," Lee said.

The relationships students are creating with the business world are as important as the work itself.

"It's not just a network of information, it's a network of people," said sophomore Chris Allsup '03. "I want to be in the technology industry. ePLU has laid a lot of groundwork for the future."

Contacts with ePLU helped Karl Lund '00, who earned his MBA in December, land a job before graduation with Innuity. Innuity, a Web enablement company with an office in Kirkland, Wash., has discovered a way to rapidly create new Websites for companies – up to 2,000 per hour.

Lund, Foster, Allsup and MBA grad Arne Asphjell '00 were the core group that got ePLU up and running. Membership is growing, and weekly meetings are drawing more people.

"We are all pretty passionate about business and E-commerce," Foster said.

More professors have pledged to work ePLU into their curriculum and several other companies are looking at using students for research. The business students can't say enough about Lee, who has been at PLU since 1998.

"He really loves teaching," Foster said. "He's a diamond. He's an incredible person."

Students say they have already learned a lot about the importance of a strong business plan and analysis beforehand. The idea that selling something online guarantees instant success is outdated. But the students at ePLU believe E-commerce is here to stay.

"You can see why it's so important to study it," Foster said. "It's essential. The Internet and technology are a changing force."

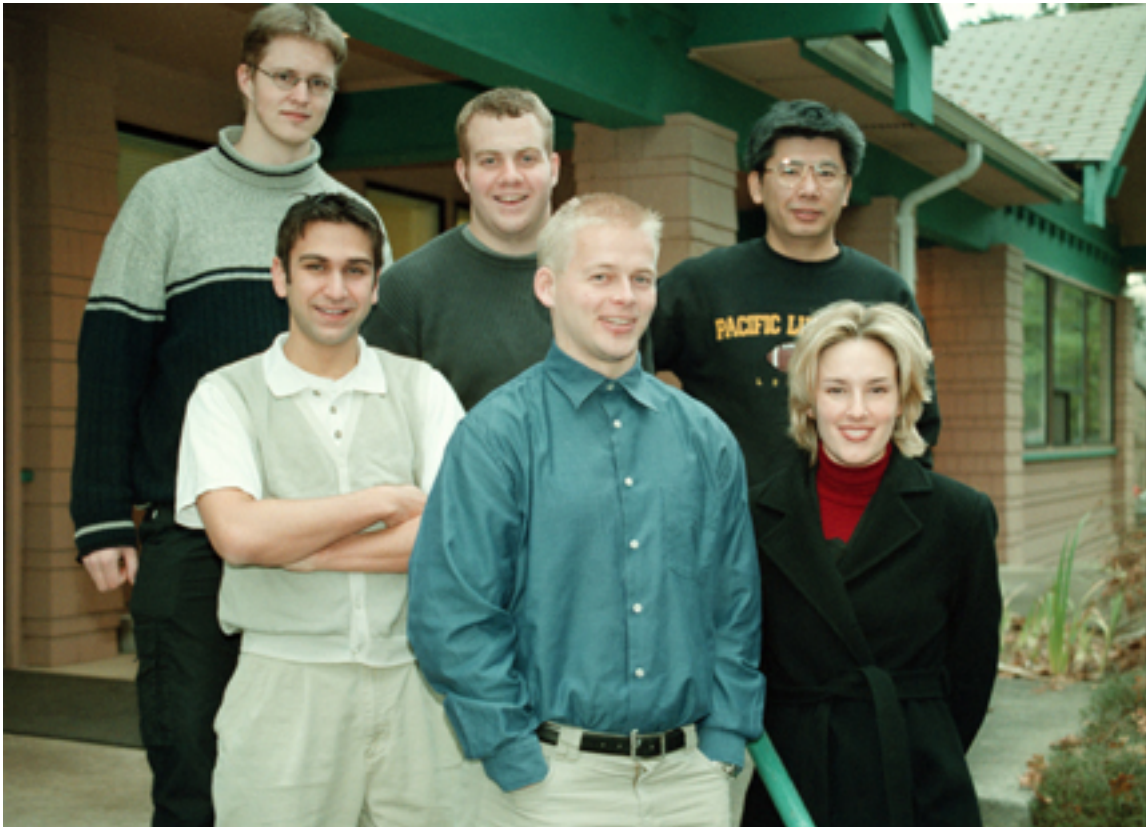
[Back Home](#)

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## ePLU founders



ePLU founders, from left, back row: Arne Asphjell '00, Chris Allsup '03 and Dr. Chung-Shing Lee; front row: Justin Foster '02, Karl Lund '00 and Ginger Moriya of the School of Business.

**[Next Photo](#)**

**[Back Home](#)**

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## Authentic experience



Dr. Chung-Shing Lee, business professor, works with MBA student Karl Lund on a project in the ePLU office. Lee worked with Lund '00 and other students to establish the electronic commerce resource center.

**[Previous Photo](#)**

**[Back Home](#)**

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