

ISSUE 4

# GRADUATE COLLEGE NEWSLETTER

The newsletter for our postgraduate community

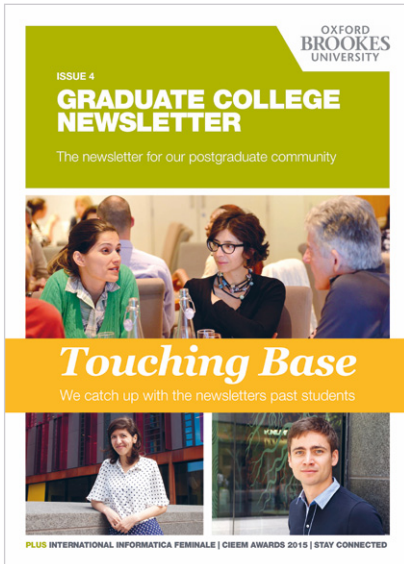


## *Touching Base*

We catch up with the newsletters past students







Graduate College Newsletter is the newsletter of the postgraduate research student community at Oxford Brookes University.

Thank you to all students and staff who have contributed to this edition of the Newsletter.

The University accepts no responsibility for the content of any material in Graduate College Newsletter. Readers should note in particular that the inclusion of news and editorial items does not imply endorsement by the University of the matters reported of the views expressed.

We reserve the right to edit contributions before we publish and to refuse editorial items.

Co-ordinated and edited by the Research Degrees Team.

Designed and co-edited by Creative Services, Oxford Brookes University.

Contributions are welcome from all sections of the University and should be sent to:  
[asa-gcnewsletter@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:asa-gcnewsletter@brookes.ac.uk)



# Hello and welcome...

...to the 4th edition of our Graduate College Newsletter. Graduate students are at the heart of the University research community and the Graduate College is the forum by which your voices can be heard, to ensure that we enable research students to have the best experience possible. I am delighted to be the current chair of the Graduate College Steering Group and we look forward to discussing issues raised by student representatives and meeting as many of you as we can in the coming year. A special welcome to all new research students, we hope you enjoy your time at Brookes and grasp all the opportunities that come your way to develop those important transferable skills as well as make good progress with your doctoral research. It is an exciting time both for you and the research teams that you will interact with.

We hope that this newsletter is interesting and informative in providing you with a glimpse of the wide range of research taking place across the University.

**Professor Linda King,  
 Interim Pro Vice-Chancellor,  
 (Research and Knowledge Exchange)**





# News

Stephanie Poindexter



Joanna Grogono



## Online Conference Winners

### Three PhD students shine at this year's Graduate College Online Conference

This year's Graduate College Online Conference, now in its sixth year, saw a record number of submissions from research students. The conference was open to all postgraduate research students, full time or part time, in any subject area, and at any stage of their studies. Students were invited to submit an online presentation accompanied by an abstract, with the objective of communicating a complex argument in a simple, understandable and visual manner, that a broad and non-specialist audience could access.

Prizes were awarded to Joanna Grogono from the Department of Biological and Medical Sciences, Mina Samangoeei from the School of Architecture and Stephanie Poindexter from the Department of Social Sciences for their clear, engaging and informative presentations.

The conference culminated in a 'live event' featuring a special guest lecture from John Runions, Reader in Cell and Molecular Biology at Brookes. John's talk, entitled 'All I need is a PhD....a PhD and some funding...a PhD and some funding and a big idea....', explored the utility of the PhD degree; the minimum requirement for getting an academic job. It dealt with a number of overarching concerns that research student's face, such as how do you go about achieving other essentials like experience that make you an attractive potential employee? The event was a great success and John's talk was received positively by all those who attended.

\* To view this and previous year's presentations, visit the conference site as follows: visit 'Brookes virtual', select 'wiki' and log in - the 'Graduate College Online Conference' is listed on the left hand side of the page.

**MINA SAMANGOEEI**  
E: mina.samangoeei2010@brookes.ac.uk

**MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION**  
What are the aspects that affect the behaviour to cultivate edible plants on buildings in the UK?

**BACKGROUND**  
This research is looking at the integration of edible vegetation with buildings to produce food, saving and being associated with food production, increasing knowledge of food-related issues (Duck, 2008, UK). (Source: e.g. food security)

**RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**  
These requirements fit within a sequential exploratory mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) research design strategy (Creswell, 2008). Sequential exploratory mixed methods are used to explore a topic in depth. The quantitative data are collected and analysed first, in order to test hypotheses generated from theory. The qualitative data (Phase 2), the findings from this analysis were used to collect qualitative data (Phase 2), which would then support the findings and generate further ideas that may have not been highlighted by the quantitative study. This strategy helps overcome the weaknesses of quantitative data analysis using the strengths of qualitative analysis (Creswell, 2008). In the case of this research, the strengths of the quantitative analysis are that all the questions asked are generated from pre-assessed indicators from the literature review. The qualitative data can bring forward indicators that were not highlighted by the literature.

**RESEARCH DESIGN**  
A sample was taken based on three key groups (those not necessarily cultivating anything but looking to build with the opportunity to do so, those cultivating in the ground, those cultivating on buildings). The quantitative phase of analysis highlighted the aspects that would affect understanding the behaviour of cultivating edible plants on buildings.

**CONCLUSIONS**  
The research is currently in the qualitative phase of analysis. Those who completed a questionnaire and were happy to take part in an interview were interviewed (sampled profiles were checked for each person in order to check that there is a good spread of profiles for the study). The qualitative data are not all general towards environmentalists. A further number of people were interviewed who are cultivating on buildings but did not complete the questionnaire. The data (questionnaire and interview) are used to start a conversation with people based on the key issues, interview and transcripts are then compiled and a final report will be produced using NVIVO software.



# International Informatica Feminale

PhD student Bedour Alshaigy, has been accepted to teach an Introductory Python Programming course as part of the 18th International Informatica Feminale - the International Summer University for Women in Informatics.

Each year Informatica Feminale offers compact teaching in informatics and computer science for female students from all types of universities and colleges as well as for female professionals interested in further training. This year's event will be held at the University of Bremen in Germany from Monday 17 August until Friday 28 August. National and international lecturers and students will meet at Bremen to exchange, experiment and find new concepts for informatics and related disciplines in higher education.

Bedour exclaimed that she was 'giddy with excitement!' on receiving the news and that 'that it just goes to show you that hard work does pay off'.



## Reading Poetry Festival

PhD student Jennifer Wong took part in Reading's Poetry Festival during the latter part of last year, alongside Creative Writing Teaching Fellow, Hannah Lowe.

The festival was a three-day celebration of poetry designed to offer a range of styles and themes, with internationally acclaimed poets sitting alongside talent from Reading and the surrounding areas.

Hannah and Jennifer were taking part in the event in association with the Oxford Brookes Poetry Centre, which is based within the Department of English and Modern Languages. The festival organiser, Dr Matthew Sperling from the University of Reading, commented that he hopes to create a successful centre within Reading University in the next few years.

## Art and Conflict Symposium

May this year saw Wolfson College, Oxford, hold an Art and Conflict Symposium that looked to examine the impact of war on society through artistic and scientific representation. It considered questions such as, 'can art push science to help find the truth and aid reconciliation?; and, can science and art help historical memory and the coming to terms with the impact of conflict?'

The two day event was jointly organized by Brookes PhD student, Veronica Cordova de la Rosa, along with Nicholas Marquez-Grant from Cranfield University and Victoria Syme-Taylor from King's College London.

The symposium was a huge success and incorporated sessions across both days that included podium presentations, art displays, performances, photography and documentaries, along with a performance from Rosie Kay Dance Company entitled *5 Soldiers*.



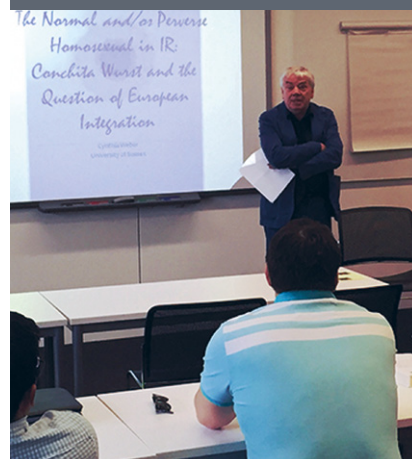


## International Relations, Politics and Sociology Postgraduate Day

The International Relations, Politics and Sociology Programme held its Tenth Annual Postgraduate Day in June of this year. Staff, research students, the current MA International Studies cohort and prospective MA students, were joined for the very first time by online viewers during a livestream of the morning sessions guest lecture.

This year's guest lecture, 'The Normal and/or Perverse Homosexual in International Relations: Conchita Wurst and the question of European Integration' was given by Professor Cynthia Weber, Professor of International Relations at the University of Sussex. Her talk explored representations of Conchita Wurst, the winner of the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest, which led-in to a fascinating discussion of what Wurst means for both understandings of Gender and European integration.

After lunch, current MA students gave five minute presentations about their dissertations, which concluded with talks from three of the Faculties research students; Kavi Thakore and Prembahadur Ale, from the Department of Social Sciences and Francesca Morra, from the Department of History, Philosophy and Religion.



## Faculty of Business Doctoral Event

June this year saw the Faculty of Business' Doctoral Event, which brings together research students and supervisors from Brookes' Business School and the Oxford School of Hospitality Management. Seven oral PhD presentations, three external speakers, sixty-five attendees, a bright summer's day and an evening meal in Brookes Restaurant, brought the Faculty's doctoral activities in 2014-2015 to a fitting finale.

The PhD presentations came courtesy of seven volunteer students who outlined their likely or actual contribution to knowledge; Barbara Brown, Priscila Pereira, James Pritchard, Nadia Singh, Rachel Wang, Siobhan Ward and Heba Younis. Delivered with great confidence in a very demanding seven-eight minutes, plus questions, each student benefitted from the challenging but positive experience that comes from articulating a succinct research statement to a questioning audience.

The external speakers were led by Professor Gillian Symon, Professor of Organizational Studies at Royal Holloway, London. She focused on qualitative methodology and the

challenges faced using qualitative visual research and qualitative research online.

Sir Andrew Dilnot, Warden of Nuffield College Oxford and the Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, added a quantitative balance with a thought-provoking commentary on the use and misuse of statistics by the Government and others; you, me and everyone. Andrew produced much laughter among the attendees whilst making a number of serious points.

Finally, Christine Toomey, in conversation with Dr David Bowen, Reader and Head of Doctoral Programmes, and PhD student Rosa Codina, drew out similarities between journalistic research and doctoral research. Christine has been a foreign correspondent and feature writer for *The Sunday Times* for more than twenty years and has twice won the Amnesty International award for Magazine Story of the Year. Her sometimes chilling encounters with the darker side of life produced highly relevant and stimulating thoughts on, among other topics, access, ethics and interviewing.



## SCUCA 2015

In July this year, PhD student Cristian Roman, presented a paper at the 3rd International Workshop on Smart City and Ubiquitous Computing Applications (SCUCA), part of the 20th International Symposium of Computers and Communications (ISCC) in Larnaca, Cyprus.

Co-authored with Dr Peter Ball and Dr Shumao Ou, from the Department of Computing and Communication Technologies at Brookes, the paper was entitled 'A Shim Layer for Heterogeneous Wireless Communication Scheduling in Intelligent Transport Systems'. It described part of Cristian's PhD and presented a novel approach to scheduling packets in Intelligent Transport Systems over multiple radio technologies without modification of the existing standards.

Cristian commented after the event that 'Attending the conference was a very enriching experience where I could share and discuss ideas with other researchers from all over the world. I am looking forward, and hope, to have another paper accepted to be able to present again'.

## CIEEM Awards 2015

The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) Awards are an annual celebration of achievements in ecology and environmental management. In total, Oxford Brookes were represented in five of the twenty-five award categories. Professor Tim Shreeve, from Brookes' Centre for Ecology, Environment and Conservation, described the recognition as a '...testament to the hard work and expertise of our students and the staff here at Brookes who help to unleash their potential.'

The Steart Coastal Management Project, which Oxford Brookes is involved in through PhD student Adam George, received a commendation in the Best Practice Award – Stakeholder Engagement.



## Functional Food Centre News

The World Health Organisation reported in 2014 that the worldwide incidence of obesity had doubled since 1980 and that 1.3 billion adults were overweight and 600 million were obese. Weight loss requires an individual to consume less energy (calories) per day than they use in order to utilise the fat stores in the body. But how does each person know how much energy they use per day and therefore what level of energy intake will lead to weight loss?

In 2012, at the annual Nutrition Society Conference, members of the Functional Food Centre (FFC) team came across a device called an ECAL; a small and portable machine aimed at clinicians but still in development. Energy Testing Solutions (ETS), the company developing the machine, had not seen potential in the device so had agreed to loan the FFC a beta version of the device.

PhD student Sarah Kennedy, as part of her research project, is currently taking the ECAL into schools to collect resting metabolic rate (RMR) measures from adolescents, which will be its first use in a community setting!



# Coming up

Training and networking events to look out for this academic year.

## Semester 1 - 2015

DATE	TIME	EVENT
26 September	10.30-3.30pm	Strategies for Employment – effective CVs, Application and Interviews for Researchers
October TBC	12.00-4.30pm	Induction Session for new Research Students
October TBC	From 5.00pm	Networking Social Event for Research Students and Supervisors
21 October	12.00-1.00pm	Time Management: planning your research degree and keeping up momentum
20 November	2.00–5.00pm	Enhancing your Personal Effectiveness as a Researcher: An Introduction to the MBTI Personality Framework
25 November	12.00–1.00pm	The Viva Examination
2 December	12.00–2.00pm	Training to enable Supervisors and Students to develop applications for ethical approval
9 December	12.00-1.00pm	Tackling the Writing Up Stage of the Research Degree
20 December	3.00–5.00pm	Effective Job Search for Researchers

### Services and Support Upgrade

Upgrade offers study advice to all research students at Brookes, from all Faculties and departments, and all years of study.

#### Upgrade offer advice in:

- Maths and statistics
- Study Skills, including Planning, researching and writing Referencing and bibliographies Approaches to study i.e. getting organised

The core of Upgrades work takes the form of one-to-one appointments and students who use Upgrade will find us both welcoming and approachable, with the service being completely confidential. Whether you are trying to work out how to reference a YouTube clip using Harvard referencing, preparing for that all important PhD viva, or struggling to cope with what seems an impossible workload, Upgrade are here to help. Upgrade hold over 300 tutorials with postgraduates each academic year.

Further details about Upgrade and the services it provides are available on our website at [www.brookes.ac.uk/services/upgrade](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/upgrade) or if you would like to book a 30 min tutorial then email [upgrade@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:upgrade@brookes.ac.uk)



## Semester 2 – 2015

DATE	TIME	EVENT
3 February	4.00–5.00pm	Endnote Training
12 February	3.00-5.00pm	Marketing Yourself for Employment: Applications Masterclass for Researchers
17 February	12.00–4.00pm	Induction Session for New Research Students
24 February	4.00-5.00pm	Electronic Submission of Theses, RADAR and the Ethos Project
9 March	12.00–2.00pm	Research degrees – strategies for successful part-time study
9 March	4.00-5.00pm	Finding information for your research - an exploration of the most effective methods of searching, discovering and accessing information for your research.
12 March	10.30– 3.30pm	Enhancing your Personal Effectiveness as a Researcher: Using the MBTI Personality Framework
23 March	4.00-5.00pm	Data Management and Storage
30 March	4.00-5.00pm	Managing your Supervisor and Building a Good Working Relationship with your Supervisory Team
13 April	12.00–4.00pm	Induction Session for new Research Students
20 April	1.00-3.00pm	Presentation Workshop – Session 1 (Open to all Students)
21 April	3.00-5.00pm	Marketing Yourself for Employment: Interview Skills Masterclass for Researchers
27 April	12.00-3.00pm	Presentation Workshop – Session 2 (Restricted numbers)
6 May	10.30-3.30pm	Managing a Career in Academia
May TBC	9.00-5.00pm	Media Training Workshop
June TBC	10.00-5.00pm	Graduate College Research Student Exhibition and Research Degree Fair
June TBC	from 5.00pm	Summer BBQ
September TBC	9.00-6.00pm	Skills Summer School

For further information about all the events and venues, and new additions added throughout the year, please visit:  
[www.brookes.ac.uk/students/research-degrees-team](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/students/research-degrees-team)  
 or email: [rd-enquiries@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:rd-enquiries@brookes.ac.uk)



# Research Degree Programmes



**Adrian Twissell**

**Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
School of Education**

**'Mental Representation, Learning and the Construction of Conceptual Knowledge in Electronics Education'**

**What attracted you to Oxford Brookes University to conduct your research?** Having completed my MA, I considered the possibility of continuing with some form of study. This idea coincided with the introduction of the Doctorate in Education at Brookes and I decided to enrol having attended an information evening that was extremely informative.

**What were you doing before?** Alongside my MA, and before that my Certificate in Advanced Educational Practice, I have been a teacher of Design and Technology since 1997. Most recently I have been appointed Head of Department at a Buckinghamshire grammar school.

**Give an overview of your Masters by Research project.**

I initially became interested in visualisation, which is the use of mental mechanisms to translate and manipulate visual representations. While observing our students we noticed some were adept at discussing complex spatial problems without visual referents, while others would draw upon knowledge from other disciplines effortlessly translating from one to the other to support explanations of abstract concepts.

In electronics, as with other similar subjects such as science, the ability to appreciate abstraction and conceptual knowledge is fundamental to learning as abstract phenomena cannot be easily observed or related to everyday experiences. Understanding more clearly the nature of students' conceptual knowledge and their use of representations in its development, presented a rich area for further exploration.

Having completed a study of visualisation skills as part of an EdD module, a realisation occurred that the use of visual imagery involves much more than imagery alone. Subsequently I have explored the fascinating areas of combining verbal and nonverbal representations, analogy and metaphor use, conceptual change theory and embodied cognition.

**What do you enjoy about being an EdD student?** I really enjoy the creation element of the research work. Drafting an assignment, article or chapter is immensely satisfying, particularly when it contributes to something that may eventually be publishable.

**What are your future plans?** I am immersed in my project at present so the future is difficult to perceive. However, having had some success with publishing a section of my research in a peer reviewed journal, I am confident that my research outcomes will be of interest to a wider community, which may lead to new opportunities.

Over the years the number of research students, range of topics and degrees conferred has grown consistently at Brookes. The University has also developed its portfolio of research degree programmes, so in addition to MPhil and PhDs, we now offer Practice Based PhDs, Professional Doctorates and a number of Masters by Research programmes.

Here, along with our regular research student profiles, we speak to a Doctorate of Education (EdD) student, to gain an inside perspective of one of the University's Professional Doctorate research degree programmes.



**Camilla Chlebna**

**Faculty of Technology, Design and Environment**

My PhD focuses on 'The Role of Institutions for the Path-Dependent Development of the Wind Energy Industry in Germany and the United Kingdom'.

Despite having the best on and offshore wind resource in Europe, the United Kingdom does not have a single large scale manufacturer of wind turbines. Germany overtook Denmark as the world leader in turbine manufacturing in the early 1990's, which in part was down to the creation of a strong home market enabled by the introduction of a feed-in tariff for decentralised sources of electricity in 1990. Only recently has the potential for offshore wind turbines been recognised in the United Kingdom, so the industry is now trying to 'catch-up'. Consequently they have to buy in key technology from elsewhere, notably Germany.

My research is placed within Evolutionary Economic Geography and uniquely combines the strands of the path dependency literature and neo-institutionalism. It puts forward the argument that technological development cannot be seen in isolation and must be understood as socially embedded activity. Therefore institutions need to develop alongside technological innovation for the successful creation of new industries. It also argues that institutions carry a particular role in favouring or hindering the industrial development within a country or region, as they determine the influence that a civil society and agents from the established industries have in shaping that country or region's destiny. The institutions themselves are the outcome of struggles for influence between past agents and

are continually evaluated and recreated by society.

Prior to my research studies, and having completed my Master's Degree, I did a number of customer service jobs, which I didn't particularly enjoy but I did learn a lot in regards to office environments and employment in large private sector companies. I was incredibly lucky in that my Master's dissertation supervisor, along with another lecturer I had stayed in touch with, contacted me and asked whether I was interested in doing a PhD. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that I could not pass up!

Being a research student can be extremely challenging and I know that we all experience times where we feel we are moving backwards instead of forwards. However, as much as it can sometimes be painful, I enjoy the continuous challenge; for me it is what was missing in my previous occupations. I also really like being a part of the research community at Brookes; it is incredibly supportive, it offers a number of amazing additional courses, and it has provided me the opportunity to meet a number of inspiring researchers from a variety of fields.

I am quite open as to what I do next, and I have not yet decided whether I want to pursue an academic career. I could see myself working for a large company again as much as I could see myself being in a team of researchers within a private research institution.

My research is placed within Evolutionary Economic Geography and uniquely combines the strands of the path dependency literature and neo-institutionalism.





**Michael Mawhinney**  
Faculty of Health and Life Sciences

My PhD title is 'Optimising the Care of Patients receiving Oral Systemic Anti-Cancer Treatments: a Mixed Methods Study'.

I learnt about Oxford Brookes through my partner who studied Psychology at the University in 2006 and spoke very highly of his experience. I was aware Brookes had a nursing department so always kept up to date with what academic activity was happening surrounding my subject area. Prior to starting my PhD earlier this year, I worked full time as a staff nurse; over three years in acute Haematology/Oncology, over one year in early phase cancer clinical trials and one year in critical care. Alongside full-time shift work, I completed my part-time MSc with University College London, focusing on global health and HIV. I am also trained as a disaster relief worker and am registered with the United Kingdom International Emergency Trauma Response (UKIETR) agency, which works in conjunction with the NHS to respond to global disasters.

I was extremely fortunate that I was able to obtain a Brookes sponsored studentship for my PhD project. When the program was advertised it specified a role within teaching as one of its core components, which had been a keen interest of mine having been involved in nurse education.

Originating from a cancer nursing background, it feels appropriate that my research project surrounds the care of patients receiving oral systemic anti-cancer treatments (SACTs). SACTs refer to any drug or medication, given via any route, which actively target cancer cells, with a prime example being chemotherapy. Historically chemotherapy

was largely given intravenously (IV) through a cannula straight into the blood stream. While this remains the largest proportion of administration routes, there has been a stark increase in the availability of oral products, which is likely to increase further within the coming years.

In many ways oral products are more advantageous to patients. Treatments can be as effective, taken at home, require fewer hospital visits and the patient may feel more in control of their treatment. However, while the advantages may be clear, the risks however remain similar and debatably larger. Cancer treatments can have severe and life threatening side effects or adverse events (AEs). These adverse events need to be treated promptly and appropriately to prevent further, potentially life threatening complications, which is why pre-treatment education plays a vital role.

The Oxford University Hospital Trust has devised and successfully implemented a specific clinic for patients receiving oral SCATs in response to recommendations from several healthcare governing bodies. My PhD project will seek to evaluate this service and identify any areas where patient care could potentially be optimised and outcomes of treatment improved. The research questions I seek to answer surround the experience of patients receiving oral SCATs, the perceptions and experiences of healthcare professionals and investigating the role of pre-treatment education in ensuring prompt escalation and actions upon treatment-related toxicities.

Originating from a cancer nursing background, it feels appropriate that my research project surrounds the care of patients receiving oral systemic anti-cancer treatments (SACTs).



**Pamela Sitko**  
Faculty of Technology, Design and Environment

My PhD is entitled 'Transferrable Methods for Identifying Urban Disaster Resilience: A Case of the 2011 Bangkok Floods'.

With rural assumptions underpinning humanitarian aid, urbanisation has been called the 'game-changer' for international relief and development work. My research is focused on looking for new ways to protect rapidly growing low-income neighbourhoods from exposure to disaster risk. Using the 2011 Thailand floods as a case study, my PhD project investigates the operational reality of resilience in the Bang Bua Canal in Bangkok. Over 100 people were interviewed from three low-income neighbourhoods and a further 40 key informants from the Government, aid agencies and the private sector. The aim of my research is to learn from the 2011 Bangkok flood in order to develop a framework for urban disaster resilience that will help humanitarians to better assist the urban poor to prepare for and respond to disasters.

Before joining Oxford Brookes I was deploying to disasters in Asia and the Pacific with a charity organisation. During this same period, I was also working with the United Nations and other aid agencies to train governments and communities in disaster preparedness and response in countries such as Afghanistan, Malaysia, Indonesia and Kenya. My first student experience with Brookes was as a Masters student in the Centre for Development and Emergency Practice (CENDEP) within Brookes' School of Architecture. CENDEP and its MA in Development and Emergency Practice

have an international reputation and are highly regarded in the humanitarian aid and development community. It was because of this reputation, as well as the research departments focus on theory and practice and the support that it offers, that I decided to also complete my PhD at Brookes. I was inspired by one of my supervisors, Professor Georgia Butina-Watson, who highlighted the importance of seeing more women studying at higher levels and taking on leadership roles.

Brookes' research environment is excellent; a range of tools, training and software packages to support my research were offered to me right from the start. The training provided has enabled me to develop new specialist skills in critical thinking, as well as enhancing specific life skills such as communicating clearly, presenting confidently to specialist and non-specialist audiences, remaining motivated and being self-driven. My office colleagues have also become good friends and are a great source of support and encouragement. I greatly enjoy the freedom of managing my own schedule. It is a privilege to spend so much time reading and thinking about how to make a real difference in the world.

After completing my PhD, my hope is to return to humanitarian work. From the research I have already conducted I have a much better grasp of the role theory can play in building a practical approach to disaster resilience for low-income neighbourhoods. I would like to put this to good use.

I was inspired by one of my supervisors, Professor Georgia Butina-Watson, who highlighted the importance of seeing more women studying at higher levels and taking on leadership roles.





**Caroline Rond**  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

The title of my PhD is 'Imaginary Companions: An exploration of Adult Memory Narratives'.

I completed my MA in Childhood Studies through Brookes' School of Education and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Immediately thereafter it was suggested that I apply for a research studentship and delightedly my application for partial funding was successful. Prior to moving to England from the USA to complete my Masters, I worked as a Psychotherapist with inner-city youth in Philadelphia. I now live in Bristol, and to maintain my involvement within the mental health sector I carry out some counselling work alongside my research degree.

The idea for my PhD study grew essentially from an interest in children's imaginative play. Having worked in psycho-educational settings – clinics and schools – in Southern Africa and the USA, I observed children irrespective of circumstance using their imaginations to express themselves through play. I observed how children used their imaginations to construct meaning about their worlds and their specific place within those worlds, transforming themselves and their surroundings. Clinical settings, schools and playgrounds revealed an authority of the imagination, permitting children to move beyond the actual into a place of projected alternatives.

For my Masters dissertation I completed a literature-based study on imaginary friendships. Theoretical findings pointed to a developmentally meaningful relationship between children and their imaginary friends. The study

considered links between the emergence of imaginary companions and theory of mind, links to cognitive flexibility and mental displacement, levels of self-knowledge and richer narrative ability. The emergent picture was one of children benefitting personally and socially from these relationships. My PhD study is an extension of this, exploring how adults make sense of these early imaginary relationships.

As a research student, one is afforded a fair amount of freedom. There are obviously ethical and academic parameters, but unlike any taught course, there are fewer deadlines or yardsticks by which to measure progress and no classmates to assist in the navigation of obstacles. This can certainly feel scary at times. One of the ways to overcome this is through making an effort to engage with other research groups and to attend workshops and seminars that the University organise. This includes research student gatherings and social events that are organised to facilitate inter-departmental engagement. Regular supervision meetings have also been imperative to my progress.

Oxford Brookes has a strong and formidable research community, which ideally serve to support one another through this journey. There are some very experienced staff members and researchers who are willing to assist and I am extremely fortunate to have two wonderful supervisors who are always available to me.

Prior to moving to England from the USA to complete my Masters, I worked as a Psychotherapist with inner-city youth in Philadelphia.



**Alaaddine El-Chab**  
Faculty of Health and Life Sciences

The title of my PhD is 'The Effect of Dietary Standardisation on the Reliability of Performance, Nutrient Oxidation and Blood Biomarkers'.

Albert Szent-Gyorgyi once said 'Research is to see what everybody else has seen, and to think what nobody else has thought.' For me this is the most exciting part of the PhD. As a research student I have the opportunity to think critically, come up with hypotheses and test them. I discovered that personally, finding the answer to a research question is not the most enjoyable part of research. It is the mistakes, continuously learning something new, the achievements, meeting new people and the ups and downs, which is what I love and all of which are part of the process.

The overall objective of my PhD is to investigate subjects' adherence to dietary standardisation practices. The reason it is so crucial for subjects participating in studies to follow instructions given by the researchers is because the outcomes of a research study can be influenced by how each subject prepares. For example, a study that measures the effect of a specific food on physical performance must ensure that subjects begin testing in a similar state of preparedness. Ideally, subjects should be tested in an identical state of nourishment and health. In order to achieve this state, researchers conducting a sport science or nutrition study, use one of the following dietary standardisation techniques as a tool to help subjects replicate their diet; controlled diet, food diary and dietary recall. If uncontrolled, some dietary components can add

noise to the results and make it more difficult to detect changes associated with the intervention.

The most striking result to emerge from the original data collected was that approximately 70% of studies either did not check the compliance of subjects to the diet given or did not mention it. This raises an important question on whether participants in these studies are really replicating the same amount of food they were told to consume or not. In this situation researchers can be misled into thinking that their subjects are starting each session in the same state of preparedness.

Due to the unexpected results it was decided that a number of aspects needed to be evaluated; the ability of athletes to replicate a diet when a controlled diet, food diary and dietary recall were used as dietary standardisation techniques; whether the differences in nutrient intakes found in the above study could have any effect on the results of studies; and finally to test a new method of controlling nutrient intake prior to experimental trials using liquid pre-packaged meals instead of solid pre-packaged meals.

For more current research student profiles please visit: [www.brookes.ac.uk/students/research-degrees-team/current-students/graduate-college/student-profiles/](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/students/research-degrees-team/current-students/graduate-college/student-profiles/)

The reason it is so crucial for subjects participating in studies to follow instructions given by the researchers is because the outcomes of a research study can be influenced by how each subject prepares.



# Congratulations!

Congratulations to all our Research Students on the successful outcome of their vivas and the conferments during the period August 2014 – July 2015.

## Faculty of Health and Life Sciences

### Master of Philosophy

**Beatrice Bathe**  
An investigation into the efficacy of kinematics and kinetics of the sternum as a method for stride-characteristic measurements of horses trotting on a treadmill

### Doctor of Philosophy

**Constanza Alcaino Ayala**  
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Baculovirus as a gene delivery and expression vector in mammalian cells

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Exploring the combined use of electrical and hemodynamic brain activity to investigate brain function

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The illegal drug use behaviour and social circumstances of older adult class A drug users in Britain

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Advancing the concept of rehabilitation towards cultural sensitivity: a concept analysis

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Understanding drinking behaviour: Affordances and an ecological approach to cognition

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Brookes has a strong and vibrant research student community. Here are just some of the ways you can stay in touch:

## Researcher Career Pathways Event

*Would you like to examine the transferable nature of your research skills, both inside and outside of academia?*

Come along to the next Researcher Career Pathways Event to look at the transferable nature of your research skills as part of your ongoing professional development.

“It was a really useful day with some great tips from the Careers Service as well as the opportunity to hear some very diverse real-life stories from previous students. I feel more equipped now to make decisions about my future career and am more aware of the opportunities open to me.”

The event will be opened by Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alistair Fitt, whose previous role at Brookes was Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Exchange. There will also be a keynote speech given by Dr Sarah Robins-Hobden, an experienced professional in researcher development and training, a lively workshop, run by Dr Jo Moyle from the University's Careers Centre, and three interactive panels featuring academics, local employees and PhD alumni.

The event will take at Headington Campus on Tuesday 12 January 2016 and is open to all contract research staff and research students across the University.

For further information and all informal enquiries please contact your Faculty Research Manager.



## Come and see us!

Don't forget the Research Degrees Team is located in Student Central in the John Henry Brookes Building and deals with all the central administration associated with your research degree. We are available from 9.00am to 5.30pm Monday through Friday all year. Please do not be put off if you find the shutter down at the Student Central Counter, if the office appears closed or if there are queues of students at the counter. Just call us on the phone, which is located opposite the Student Central office and next to the vending machines. Dial the extension number provided on the list of Staff Contacts fixed to the wall above the phone and one of us will come to the counter to see you or take you into one of offices. If you would prefer to pre-arrange a time to see us email [rd-enquiries@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:rd-enquiries@brookes.ac.uk) or give us a call on **+44 (0)1865 484244**.



# A year in the life

**DANIEL BUTCHER**  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Follow the experiences of one of Brookes' research students through a year of their studies.

Dan's research deals with *Figuring and Becoming: first steps on the road to negotiating personal, professional and academic identities among new student nurses*.

This article might be of interest to current and prospective research students, and their supervisors. It gives an insight into the challenges that research students face, along with the opportunities and experiences that become available to them during their studies.

Sometimes I envy my colleagues who have chosen to study for their Doctorate on a full-time basis; the opportunity to focus each day on work that has the potential to contribute to the sum of knowledge in a particular field. Yet there are other times I am glad to have chosen to undertake a professional doctorate, interweaving the academic with the professional. It challenges me to knit together the threads of what I do in my 'day job' as a Senior Lecturer in Adult Nursing, with the learning of new subject areas and developing the skills of the investigator.

I have been a student on the Doctorate of Education programme for four years and have completed the taught elements and all of the preliminary modules in research methods and theory. However, it is this last year that has seen the most exciting and challenging part of the programme.

I came to realise, over a year ago, that I wished to explore the way in which new nursing students developed their professional identities; it is not an easy time for anyone working in the UK health service and all health care professionals need to construct a clear sense of who they are in order to make a significant contribution. The tricky part of my realisation was designing a way in which to explore this.

For me, a critical phase in this exploration, was preparing for and completing the Research Ethics approval process, which was far from straight-forward. The process of completing the forms was simple enough but the necessary shift in thinking took longer than anticipated to achieve. I am not new to the application of ethical principles in everyday life and work as nursing practice is ethical practice, but a

change in viewpoint was required for me to achieve a break-through.

My break-through came when I began to think like a research participant rather than a novice researcher. Up until this revelation, I had been proposing methods that seemed likely to achieve my research objectives but that, on closer inspection, had very little continuity or practicability. I struggled to see the reason for some of the questions I was being asked to consider or safeguards that seemed to be required; 'I'm a nice person. I'm not going to cause harm with my research activity!'

As soon as I began to consider my research proposal from the perspective of potential participants, things began to fall into place. The details of data collection, which used a version of narrative interviewing technique as well as digital audio diary entries, became clearer in my own mind. As a result, it was easier to explain my aspirations and intentions to my colleagues, my supervisors, UREC panel members and ultimately those people who had agreed to participate in my research study.

This time last year, I had an idea and an interest, I even had a theory, but I didn't really have a plan. Taking a year to develop this has been both frustrating and liberating. The notion of being able to focus on solving a research problem with the potential of achieving new insights, without the inevitable distractions of a teaching work load and module management responsibilities, had sometimes appeared extremely appealing. However, the 'slow-burn' development of my research design, alongside my personal responsibilities of lecturer and student, has helped me to more fully appreciate the value and importance of the professional doctorate.



## Interested in your University's research?

Research Forum, Brookes' bi-annual magazine, brings you the latest and most topical research, along with opinion pieces from our leading researchers. If you'd like to be kept up-to-date with how the university's research is making an impact in the real world, subscribe now by emailing your details to: [researchforum@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:researchforum@brookes.ac.uk)

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# *Research Degree Studentships*

Much of the knowledge-based economy is underpinned by research. At Oxford Brookes research enjoys an international reputation, attracting high quality staff and students, as well as major funded projects. Research students join a supportive environment and benefit from expert supervision and a strong programme of research training.

Throughout 2015 we will be celebrating our history, achievements and the future of Oxford Brookes University as we reach our 150th year.

Therefore, in addition to a range of faculty funded studentships, the Graduate College, in recognition of the celebration, will be offering 150 awards towards funding for full-time PhD studentships.

Visit the following website to access full details of all funding opportunities currently available:

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