University of Kent

The GradPost

Researchers in Residence programme

Meet the new team

Female bodybuilders

A newsletter created by postgraduates for postgraduates
Welcome everyone to the new academic year and the shiny new GradPost.

This winter edition heralds the arrival of many new faces on the editorial team – which means we should be better than ever!

The team now consists of old hands including:
• Kate Rees (PhD Pharmacology)
• Tinashe Mushakavanhu (PhD English)

and new members:
• Kylie Grant (MA Creative Writing)
• Clare Hetterley (MA English and American Literature)
• Nidzara Ahmetasevic (MA Conflict Resolution)
• Sarah Scanlon (MRes Art Philosophy).

Not forgetting, the lovely people at the Graduate School, the Publications Team and the Design & Print Centre, who have made this all possible – many thanks to them as always.

We aim to cater for everyone in postgraduate-land here at Kent. This is, however, only the third edition of the GradPost and it is still a work in progress. Your contributions and suggestions are always welcome at grad-editors@kent.ac.uk

Best wishes for a successful year!
Kate Rees
PhD Pharmacology
Chief GradPost Editor

Welcome

A Researcher in Residence

Tinashe Mushakavanhu discovers the unexpected benefits of the Researchers in Residence programme.

What is a literary researcher? This is a question that lingered in my mind when I volunteered to participate in the Researchers in Residence (RinR) programme. The equation has always been ‘research = sciences’. I wanted to tear down the wall of misconception and raise the humanities flag.

As an RinR, you receive training before your placement and support while you are in residence. There is no cost to participate and you can claim back up to £100 of your expenses for travel and materials. What is required is a little of your time, commitment, passion and love of your subject. After induction, my destination was Folkestone Academy (a University of Kent partner school), talking to Year 9 English students. I became more apprehensive as people warned me about unruly British teenagers and how much hell they were going to give me.

I made two half-day visits and had a wonderful time with a bunch of friendly and eager-to-learn students. I have since realised the benefits of the process. I enjoyed sharing my academic enthusiasm and refined my ability to explain my work in simple terms – particularly valuable when the audience represented a possible future audience for my work. Also, dealing with a bunch of honest and open-minded kids made me consider the social implications of research.

Speaking to the students gave me an opportunity to find and trust my own voice. One question intrigued all the kids. How come you are African, eloquent in English, studying for a PhD in your second language? I told them, if curiosity killed the cat, then in my case curiosity opened the eyes of my heart. As Zora Neale-Hurston once said: ‘Research is formalised curiosity, it is poking and prying with a purpose.’ I grew up with half the story. Colonialism told my ancestors, my parents and myself that we were eternal victims and sub-standard humans. I was curious enough to come to the other side of the Atlantic to learn the rest of the story – hence a comparative approach to my research between an English writer Percy Shelley and the Zimbabwean, Dambudzo Marechera.

A small girl in the class, sat glumly and said she could not go to university because she was not ‘smart’. I told her and the rest of the class about the signature line on my personal email: “Be realistic and demand the impossible.” Why should you accept that the sky is the limit? Aim higher, go higher. Go for the glory beyond the sky. The little girl’s face lit up with a big smile. She knew that you must never say never.

My job was done. In my talk and activities, I had tried to offer the kids food for thought and issues to ponder and discuss in and outside class. The children not only got a flavour of my research work, but also my personality, interests and experiences. Their excitement also showed me what aspects of my work have the power to captivate and enthuse. I can say the experience developed my presentation skills, raised my confidence and self-belief, and gave me the opportunity to learn how to manage small groups of students.

Tinashe Mushakavanhu
PhD English

This is a really exciting chance to step outside the world of academia and develop your communication skills in a completely different environment. RinR is sponsored by the Research Councils and Wellcome Trust. Visit: www.researchersinresidence.ac.uk/cms
Focus on research

Muscling in: researching female bodybuilders

Tanya Bunsell (SSPSSR) is working on her PhD thesis which provides a unique insight into the female bodybuilding subculture in the UK.

sexuality, their masculinity, their appearance and their rejection of the normal pathways open to women in contemporary society.

Studying with Professor Chris Shilling, a leading world expert in the sociology of embodiment and the interdisciplinary field of ‘body studies’, Tanya has already presented papers on her research to conferences and has had published an early collaborative paper entitled ‘The Female Bodybuilder as a Gender Outlaw’ in the international refereed journal Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise.

Tanya Bunsell
PhD Sociology

News from SSPSSR

Congratulations to Toni Wright, who was recently awarded a PhD for her thesis on Transnational Feminism and the Resettlement of Iraqi Kurdish Women. Concerned with the migration experiences of Iraqi Kurdish Muslim women migrants who have settled mainly in the southeastern portion of the UK, it illuminates these women’s very specific and unique set of circumstances and consequent resettlement experiences. Supervised by Professor Larry Ray and Dr Charles Watters, Toni’s research makes innovative contributions to conceptions of power, interlocking subjectivities and ‘close’ and ‘distant’ encounters in the analysis of transnational feminisms.

If you would like to submit news about success stories within your school, please contact grad-editors@kent.ac.uk

Question time: Binyavanga Wainaina

Congratulations to Binyavanga Wainaina and Brian Chikwava, who recently featured in the Caine Prize 10th Anniversary Tour.

Why do you write?
Because I have been reading a book a day since I was six… was addicted to fiction, and I believe fiction is better than the real world.

What are the thematic concerns in your writing?
I am interested in how human beings find ways to be stable and search for goodness in a chaotic world. How we arrange ourselves and relate to each other fascinates me.

How often do you revise or redraft your stories?
Ten, twelve times or more.

What was your initial response when you won the Caine Prize?
When the prize was announced, Wangui wa Goro, a writer and a translator of Ngugi’s work, stood up and started singing a praise song, there in [the University of Oxford’s] Bodleian library. I started to cry.

Apart from writing, what else do you do and why?
I run the Chinua Achebe Center at Bard College, where I am going to start an online Master’s programme for creative writers. I love creating opportunity for new talent.

What is your vision?
I shall spend my life answering that.

What do you read most and why?

Could you list your favourite five books?
1) Search Sweet Country by B Kojo Laing
2) The Story of Crocodiles by Bruno Schultz
3) Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote by Ahmadou Kourouma
4) A Way in the World by V S Naipaul

The Caine Prize plays a vital role in discovering new writing from Africa.

For further information about the Caine Prize, please visit www.caineprize.com

Lynn Gray: In competitive condition, doing a side chest pose
Photo: Rebecca Andrews

Doctoral research might often be portrayed as a gruelling undertaking but Tanya’s experiences have given a whole new meaning to this description. Immersion in the field involved getting up at 5am each morning to train for up to three hours a day with female bodybuilders, taking nutritional supplements and eating a protein-rich diet every two-to-three hours, and learning to live with the constant aches, pains and tiredness associated with the lifestyle. Combining this with interviewing, note-taking and working backstage at major national competitions have made this study hard work in more ways than one.

Mapping the lives and experiences of 26 female bodybuilders illuminated the struggles that these women contended with on a daily basis. While time spent in the gym provided a partial refuge from the gendered norms and expectations of daily life, Tanya’s research highlights how female bodybuilders are stigmatised in relation to their sexuality, their masculinity, their appearance and their rejection of the normal pathways open to women in contemporary society.

Carmen Knights in the gym
Photo: Fivos Averkiou

Focus on research
Underground Art

At first sight, the British Cartoon Archive (BCA) looks like any other office in the Templeman Library. However, hidden under the Library, there is a whole new world. Dr Nicholas Hiley, grants the GradPost a tour of the underground world of the BCA.

Before I recount what went down in the BCA, a few facts should be put out first. The BCA is the largest and oldest cartoon archive in the country, so much so that one is able to see the earlier and later works of an artist, providing an evolution of the artist’s work through time. More importantly, one can see social changes happening in the UK through a series of cartoons.

A large part of the cartoon archive has yet to be digitised, and even though the website contains over 120,000 cartoons, there are many racks of cartoons still to be catalogued.

The underground world of the BCA not only contains cartoons, it also holds artists’ memorabilia, such as handcuffs and a wax figure of an artist’s hands (both pictured). When an artist has passed on, like David Low, for instance, material pleasures of the artist’s life can be kept in the BCA. The handcuffs and the wax figure are just the beginning. I was led to a room in the back that contained policeman hats, wood figures and more. The list goes on and on.

But enough of the underground world. Above, in front of the office, there is space to put on exhibitions – which allows students, researchers, and professors to choose a theme that interests them and exhibit it in the Library. However, contrary to popular belief, the exhibitions are not limited to political subjects. Interested students or researchers can put exhibitions on different themes, such as a boat/nautical theme, an emotive theme such as happiness, or on women’s fashion in the early 20th century.

The BCA is not just limited to its underground/overground world in the Library. The website contains over 120,000 cartoons (against the third of a million cartoons held in its archives). You can create groups of cartoons online and see comments about them, ie the royal family. You also have the ability to zoom into a cartoon to examine the details of the image. There is also the possibility of looking at different versions of the same cartoon. Lastly, you can see which cartoons were published on a specific day.

The BCA is not just limited to the University of Kent; newspapers, publishers and museums come to the archive to find cartoons for their own use. Similarly, the BCA lends cartoons to museums, such as Herne Bay and the London Cartoon Museum. Students are also able to find a cartoon online and send the reference number by email, and receive a digital form of the cartoon and put it on the front of their essays and dissertations.

The best part about using the BCA is that it is completely free and there are no restrictions. It is there for people to use and enjoy. Nick Hiley is ‘keen to have [the BCA] used in various ways’ because it is ‘very important for us’.

You can find more information on the BCA website at www.cartoons.ac.uk

Victoria Glenn
MA European Governance


(Mis)Adventures of a Postgrad: undergraduate blues

Well, the winter term is well underway. Hopefully, all you new postgraduate students out there have settled in OK. As for us old-timers, this term has meant only one thing: supervising undergraduate students. Most of my thoughts on this subject can be summed up in a single statement: ‘I am not your mum!’

A lot of time spent looking after project students involves tidying up and replacing lab essentials. Nothing is more frustrating than going to use something and discovering it has run out – the lab equivalent of putting an empty milk carton back in the fridge! Evidently, for disgruntled PhD students, patience can be in short supply.

Still, it is not all bad. It’s always a confidence boost to realise how much you know about your subject and lab. It helps to keep sight of the fact that, as a seasoned PhD student, lab etiquette and technique have become second nature, but are wholly alien to the fresh-faced undergraduates before you. It is quite gratifying when they gain a glimmer of understanding into what you have shown them/can use a pipette without stabbing themselves or you.

‘We were all like that once’ or so the saying goes.

Good luck!

Anonymous
The Canterbury City Museums actually consist of six institutions – the Roman Museum, Westgate Towers, Whitstable Museum, Herne Bay Museum, The Beaney and, of course, Canterbury Museum, which also includes the Rupert Bear Museum. There is a range of items and exhibits in the Museum, from thousands of years ago up to the 1960s, with, it seems, quite an emphasis on children's television, including (as you may already know) the original Bagpuss.

The decision to volunteer was based on a few factors – I had decided to stay at Kent doing a Research MA in Art Philosophy and, well, the fact no-one will pay me to work. So I needed an occupation that would look good on my CV, break up my week a bit and be something that I would enjoy. My decision to volunteer at Canterbury Museum was motivated by two factors – my friend is also volunteering there and, being a museum, it is ‘arts-related’. As it turns out, the company is hilarious, the work is interesting and it is much more fun than I expected.

Over the summer, Kent Union has improved the services it provides to postgraduate students.

We have recently appointed Daniel Carr as Representation and Postgraduate Student Co-ordinator to assist in this work, and he is very interested in finding out your opinions on the services and support Kent Union could provide to postgraduates.

Sarah Scanlon on Canterbury Museum’s unexpected delights

The work I’m doing at the Museum is mainly catalogue checking, such as locations and numbers, and has so far involved a couple boxes of their Egyptian collection, which I have been told includes a mumified cat – though I dread the day I ever have to see it! Recently, however, I have been going through some of their various Medieval and Roman coins, which is surprisingly very interesting considering they’re old coins! There is also new research to be done, which I will be involved with eventually, and there are new painting acquisitions that will need cataloguing.

There are a lot of educational activities organised for schools and children, but there is a lot to see in the Museum – not just for young ones. I recommend a visit to any of Canterbury City’s museums: there is more than you would expect inside.

For more information on volunteering opportunities, please contact David Bolsover: Volunteer Projects Co-ordinator; email: d.bolsover@kent.ac.uk

Sarah Scanlon
MRes Art Philosophy

Kent Union

In addition, we’d like to point out the following postgraduate events (hosted by Kent Union and the Graduate School) taking place at the end of this term:

Postgraduate Forum
Wednesday 2 December 2009, 6pm
(Woolf Seminar Room 4)
Have your say on postgraduate issues! The event will be followed by an opportunity to enjoy some food and drinks in the Rutherford Bar.

Postgraduate Christmas Party
Wednesday 9 December 2009, 6pm
(Rutherford Bar)

Monthly Mingie
Monday 14 December 2009, 1pm
(Rutherford Bar)

Remember to keep an eye on all social activities at: www.kent.ac.uk/graduateschool as many more activities will be planned for the spring term.

Don’t forget that Kent Union is run for students by students! To find out more about the elected officers for 2009/10, visit www.kentunion.co.uk

The Woof College Student Committee

At the time of writing this, I am preparing to hand over to the new President of Woof College Student Committee for 2009/10 and reflecting on my time as President of the College.

The highlight of my time in this position has been organising Welcome Week back in September. I really enjoyed meeting so many of the new postgraduate students at Woof and getting to know some of the returning students a bit better. The majority of my time as Woolf President was spent planning this Welcome Week and I have been very pleased with the results and feedback that we have received from you all. Overall, the events organised by the Student Committee were well received and we now have plenty of ideas on how to make these even better for next year.

Other achievements in the last few months have included the establishment of the Woolf College football team. Few people know how hard the Committee has been fighting for a place in a college cup for Woolf College, but after an outstanding performance during the Welcome Week sports day and a great response from students interested in football, we have finally managed to get an official team. Many thanks to everyone who helped out with this, especially our Sports Officer, Anica, and the football captain, Andy – and good luck to the team this year.

Finally, I would like to say a massive THANK YOU to all the Committee this summer, who have been great to work with, and to all the dedicated Welcome Week helpers, who all volunteered their time to make students feel welcome. I would like to take this opportunity to wish the new committee all the best of luck for the rest of the year and all of you a very Merry Christmas.

Best wishes,

Danielle Tucker
Woof President 2008/09

Day at the museum
We’re a commercial success!

Congratulations to the winners of the competition that formed part of the skills workshop ‘Inspire to Perspire (IP): Making Your Research a Commercial Success’. Hosted as part of the Graduate School’s Transferable Skills training programme, the workshop took place at the Canterbury Cathedral Study Centre on 13-14 October 2009.

The two-day workshop, funded by the EPSRC and facilitated by Rosy Jones (FP Enterprises), was open to postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers and presented a fantastic opportunity for them to learn about the ups and downs of commercialising their research from experts in the field (Professor Peter Goodfellow, Dr Chris Wright and the University of Kent’s own Dr Gary Robinson).

The workshop was extremely interactive and culminated in a group task and presentation judged by the above panel of experts.

Milica Vasiljevic, PhD Psychology, said: ‘The workshop was a great success in demystifying how we could try and transform our research ideas into business ventures. Since the participants were all drawn from different disciplines across the University, the discussions and ideas generated during the workshop were very stimulating and interesting. In addition, the academics that have themselves been successful in making their research a business success were extremely inspiring and helpful during the two days of training.’

The winners, from left to right: Christone Nyondo, Fatma Salahioglu, Milicia Vasiljevic, Caroline Tolley, Joanne Beale with Professor Diane Houston, Dean of the Graduate School (far left).