Q&A with Jeremy Paxman

Focus on research

Graduate Student Association

A newsletter created by postgraduates for postgraduates
Editorial

It was a winter of discontent with cuts and protests for students across the country. The occupation of the Senate building was a symbolical gesture of the concern of students and staff at our Canterbury campus. It’s a shame that education is becoming more expensive and research is being threatened.

I arrived from Zimbabwe to start my PhD in 2008, and for all the years I have been here the postgraduate community has been steadily growing. Woolf College came to life in the same year and has become the exclusive residential hub for postgraduates who represent many countries of the world. The community is diverse and as such provides us with a strong cultural, social, political and intellectual interface to relate with the world.

The Graduate School, in association with the other various schools within the University, has been responsible for making Kent a vibrant intellectual community. The training workshops equip us with skills for coping with our studies and prepare us for life after Kent. And students (both research and taught) have been at the heart of organising conferences, seminars and colloquia. A university is only as good (both research and taught) have been at the University Challenge. Tinase Mushakavanhu, Chief GradPost Editor, did a short Q&A with him.

I would like to thank all the readers of The GradPost for your support and encouragement. The editorial team has been delighted with the feedback and suggestions from you all. Keep the emails coming because every issue gets better with your involvement and enthusiasm!

Tinashe Mushakavanhu
Chief GradPost Editor

Q&A with Jeremy Paxman

Jeremy Paxman is a journalist, author and television presenter.

He has worked for the BBC since 1977. He is noted for a forthright and abrasive interviewing style, particularly when interrogating politicians on the BBC2’s Newsnight programme. He is also noted as the question master of the revived University Challenge. Tinase Mushakavanhu, Chief GradPost Editor, did a short Q&A with him.

How did you get into journalism?
I applied for all sorts of jobs in my last year at university and was turned down for all of them (including several journalistic ones.) But, looking back on it, I think journalism was a square hole for a square peg for me. I was lucky. I love words and I love finding things out.

As a Newsnight anchor, what would you say is the role of news in our everyday lives?
The thing about news that all we journalists need to recognise is that we’re witnesses, not actors. Every citizen ought to be interested in the news. But we should also recognise that the things that matter are the things we can influence ourselves – the dealings we have with the people around us.

You are a much-travelled journalist who has reported from some of the world’s most troubled spots. What are your views about the state of the world today?
There are huge problems looming – not the least of them being overpopulation. But it’s characteristic of journalists to predict an apocalypse. So very many things are better now than they have ever been – medicine, labour-saving devices like washing machines, and so on. We live in an amazing age.

Balancing family and student life

I am jealous! Jealous of the time non-mature students seem to have. I am doing a Master’s in Science, Communication and Society. This term, on paper, the timetable looks relatively manageable, with four contact hours per week.

However, one of the modules involves undertaking a practical campaign to raise awareness of science in the student population, including a poster campaign on the UniBus (that is, if our poster designs pass muster). This seems to be taking an inordinate amount of time to sort out and most of the marks will go on the evaluation of the campaign. My other module is called Deformed, Deranged and Deviant, and no, it is not about students, mature or otherwise. It is completely fascinating; did you know that boys are castrated before puberty grow to be unusually tall?

When I am not at university, I live in West Kent, a 72-mile round trip, I am mother to five children and devoted wife to a very patient self-employed husband, who is happy to do school runs, parents’ evenings, football training, hockey training and any other number of runs. My eldest is also at university and I think we are both very happy that he is not at Kent. It is quite useful for me though: if Kent does not subscribe to a...
Focus on research: OCT and microangiography

What is OCT?
Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) is the process of acquiring images of structures that lie below the surface of a material, at a resolution equivalent to a low-power microscope. OCT shares similarities with ultrasound technology: we reflect light off of structures beneath the surface of a sample and register reflected light as part of an image. The main advantage of OCT is that it offers high resolution imaging in vivo, meaning images can be acquired non-invasively without the requirement for biopsy (that is, cutting a small section of skin to examine under a microscope).

How does it work?
Light is transmitted from a laser source through a set of optical components and focused onto a sample. This beam will contact and illuminate the surface of a sample, at which point some of the light will be reflected back to a detector. The remainder of the light will penetrate more deeply and, at each point along its vector, more light will be scattered back to the detectors until the beam is fully attenuated (absorbed or scattered) by the sample.

As data is collected by the detectors, we can construct a depth profile of a sample at a specific point. With the addition of a motorised mirror, we can raster the beam laterally across the face of the sample, allowing us to acquire data in depth across an area to build a 2D image. This image presents a cross-sectional slice of the sample along the length of the scan line. Adding a second motorised mirror allows us to scan in two perpendicular directions, collecting depth data from a square area on the sample. It is with these two mirrors that we can build a 3D image of the scan area, allowing us to view in depth at any point and also rotate the 3D model to view the scan area en-face.

Applications and research
OCT technology has already been used in clinical settings to image the retina, skin, teeth and various non-organic substances. There is a significant amount of research into using OCT to image blood vessels, by differentiating ‘static scatterers’ in the sample (such as skin) from ‘moving scatterers’ (cells moving through blood vessels). In any two given images taken from the same point on the sample, you would expect to see almost identical images. Areas that vary between images may indicate movement at that location, such as blood cells flowing through capillaries. Detection of these moving scatterers allows us to build 3D models of the blood vessels in the scan area and measure flow rate and direction. These advances could lead to a much broader spectrum of applications for OCT, such as imaging blood flow to suspicious skin moles (suggesting cancer) and a range of cardiological examinations.

Chris Costa
PhD Medical Imaging

Running for charity

A part-time PhD student with SSPSSR, Theresia Baumker, is running the Adidas Silverstone Half Marathon on 6th March 2011 to raise money for Mercy Ships, an international charity that provides free medical and humanitarian services to the people of Africa using its hospital ship, the Africa Mercy!

From February 2011, the Africa Mercy will serve in Sierra Leone for ten months. The Africa Mercy is the world’s largest non-governmental hospital ship – staffed with volunteer doctors, nurses, engineers and agriculturists – that visits ports in some of the world’s poorest countries. It will provides free medical services to many thousands of people, in desperate need of treatment. Sierra Leone is ranked 158 out of 169 countries on the Human Development Index, with areas of severe deprivation and no access to health care. Funds donated will help to bring healing where medical treatments would not otherwise be available:

- £15 helps deliver an eye examination
- £30 helps deliver dental treatment
- £40 helps provide a corrective cleft lip and palate surgery

More information about the charity, my run and how to easily donate online is available at: http://www.justgiving.com/theresiabaumker

Theresia Baumker
PhD Social Work and Health Economics

Speed Reading Workshop in Woolf. It was amazing. We started by finding the number of words we read per minute – mine was 216 words per minute. Incredibly, after a couple of hours of some theory and practice, this peaked at 612 words per minute. The pile of journal articles no longer seems like Everest. I love being a mature student. My multitasking skills have been finely honed and my time management is improving. As a result, I think there is just time for a cappuccino in the Gulbenkian before I sit in my car on Wincheap for at least half an hour with Radio 4.


Cathy Miles
MSc Science, Communication and Society

When I did my first degree, also as a mature student at Kent, I remember a friend of mine telling me that all her daughter’s friends at Durham hated mature students. They felt that if a lecturer mentioned a book for the following week, the mature students immediately went to the library and took them out, and when her daughter’s friends went to get them an hour before the seminar, there were none left. If I am honest, I was a bit like that but not in a competitive way. If I did not do it straight away I was liable to forget. Yesterday, I went to an all-day...
Reflections: being a book ambassador

Tinashe Mushakavanhu was born and cultured in story. Here, he tells of his influences and views on books. He is one of the selected book ambassadors for the inaugural World Book Night scheduled for 5th March 2011. As such, he will be distributing free copies of Chimamanda Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* throughout Canterbury in his drive to encourage the reading, and experience, of African writing. Tinashe will be keeping a video diary of his encounters and shared moments with readers.

**Falling in love with books**

Africa is a continent of story. Growing up in the townships of Zimbabwe, everybody had a different version of every story told, and a small event would become dramatised with each retelling until it had assumed epic proportions. You kept looking for the truth until you realised that it was not the events that mattered, but how the resulting story or poem was created.

Books became the friends that kept me away from the roughness of the streets and provided an escape to faraway places. I was often the lost and invisible buddy of the Famous Five and the Hardy Boys. Were they reliable friends? I learnt to read between the lines and take what I wanted from the relationship.

Literary classics were scarce. I got access to dog-eared copies of Mills & Boon and other fantasy fiction to whet my teenage curiosities but quickly outgrew them. I had a strong yearning for ‘hard’ literature. I sought it everywhere. Community libraries had none. Bookshops sold self-help manuals or religious pamphlets or flower gardening books – they never had Edith Wharton, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky or Henry James. The plunging Zimbabwean economy did not help matters. Book buying became a luxury when many had no bread.

When I went to study English literature at a Zimbabwean university, I cruised through my undergraduate years without having read some of the books on the reading lists. They were never available. Sometimes the university library had one or two copies for the whole campus. We relied on class notes from the lecturers, or sometimes the one student who had read the book would narrate the story to the rest of us and we had to fill the gaps with our imagination. For many Zimbabweans, reading was then, and still is, a communal experience – not by choice but by necessity.

**The changing book**

Books have been the cornerstone of our society for centuries, especially after the arrival of the printing press – perhaps the most important invention in human history. Digital technology has begun to transform the role of books in society. The e-book has exploded in popularity, especially since the launch of the Amazon Kindle. In the first quarter of 2011, Amazon announced that e-books were outselling printed books.

But I still favour a physical book; the crispness of fresh pages, the smell of paper, the often poetic covers. I can usually get them free by going to the library and, if I want, I can easily share them with anyone by handing it to them. It just seems like e-books are easily controlled by whoever you purchase them through.

**Tinashe Mushakavanhu**

PhD English

“World Book Night is a unique collaboration between publishers, booksellers, libraries, writers and individual members of the public, and one that I think is going to have an enormously positive impact on books and reading. There are few things more meaningful than a personal recommendation, and having one million books given to one million different people on one night in this way is both unprecedented and hugely exciting.”

Jamie Byng, Managing Director at Canongate and Chairman of World Book Night.

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**Celebrating research: a new Postgraduate Festival**

The GradPost celebrated research: a new Postgraduate Festival

The GradPost spoke to Hannah Cassidy, Kent Union’s Postgraduate and Representation Co-coordinator, to discuss exciting plans for a new Postgraduate Festival of Research. The event would be the first of its kind to be held at the University and it is hoped that it will take place in June 2011.

The Festival aims to give postgraduate research students at the University of Kent the opportunity to present their work in the form of an A3 poster, and to explain it to other postgraduate students, academics, industry experts and members of the wider community. The event would feature high-profile guest speakers, such as local politicians, and presenters would be judged by a panel and prizes awarded at the end.

Hannah stressed that the event aims to be “a celebration to promote postgraduate research at Kent” rather than just another ordinary conference. She hopes that it would “put some fun into the research experience” by giving students from different disciplines the chance to meet each other and talk about their research. The poster format will also challenge students to think about ways of condensing their research and communicating their findings to people who are not already experts in their field.

Any postgraduate researcher at Kent would be able to submit their work. The organisers are hoping for up to 75-100 submissions and Hannah believes that the event will give research students, who spend much of their time confined to labs or the library, an excellent opportunity to get involved and to showcase their work.

As Postgraduate Representative, Hannah is also on hand to represent the needs of all postgraduate students and tackle any concerns that they might have. She works with the Graduate Student Association, a dedicated team of postgraduate volunteers, who plan trips and events for postgraduates such as ‘movie and a meal’ socials. Hannah is located in the Student Activity Centre and can be contacted at h.cassidy@kent.ac.uk with any queries about the Festival or general issues relating to postgraduate study.
Two PhD students from SSPSSR, Dara Blumenthal and Michael Rees, have been awarded a grant from the prestigious British Sociological Association (BSA) to host a conference titled ‘The Body: Exploring Culture and Research’. The conference will take place in October 2011 at the University of Kent and is jointly organised with the University of Brighton.

The central theme of the conference is the dynamic and interdisciplinary field of body studies, which is seen as one of the fastest growing areas of interest within sociology. The keynote speaker is Professor Chris Shilling from SSPSSR at Kent, a pioneer in the developing field of body studies whose work seeks “to understand the social and cultural implications of what it is to be an embodied being”. Shilling’s work sees the lived experience of the body as fundamental to the study of history and society. He and others working in the field study the intrinsic relationships between the physical body and other key concepts such as identity, politics and religion.

Given the rapidly increasing level of interest and research in body studies, Dara and Michael believed that it was high time that a conference solely dedicated to this topic took place. This year marks the 60th anniversary of the BSA, and the association is holding a number of special events in universities around the UK as well as a conference from 6th-8th April 2011 at LSE titled ‘60 Years of Sociology’. However, Dara and Michael noticed that there was no panel dedicated to body studies. The two contacted the BSA in order to address what they saw as a ‘glaring omission’, and were awarded one of only eight grants for postgraduate day events.

A call for papers will go out soon, and Dara and Michael are looking for a range of submissions in the field of body studies from academics and postgraduates in sociology and related disciplines. Postgraduate students are particularly encouraged to present and discuss their work alongside academics. The two contacted the BSA in order to address what they saw as a ‘glaring omission’, and were awarded one of only eight grants for postgraduate day events.

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Scientists who are interested in body studies are encouraged to submit papers for the conference. The call for papers is now open, and the deadline for submission is 1st August 2011. The conference will take place in October 2011 at the University of Kent.

Sophie Baldock
Graduate School Intern
Postgraduate Experience Awards 2011

The Graduate School has recently announced that it has extended the deadline for applications for the Postgraduate Experience Award to Friday 18th February 2011.

In the first round of applications, James Baker in the School of History led a successful team application for funding for a conference entitled “Cradled in Caricature”. If you would like to see this successful application, please go to the Graduate School website to download a copy: http://www.kent.ac.uk/graduateschool/.

Applications submitted for the award in the second round are now being considered by the Award Panel. Applicants will be advised of the outcome of their application by the end of March.

Graduate Student Association

We hope you are all enjoying your time here at Kent.

Kent Graduate Student Association has been created by Kent Union to ensure you are represented at the University, and to help deal with any issues you have, as well as providing you with events and sports clubs. We are a team of post-graduate students who volunteer our free time to represent you.

Student representation
In November, elections were held for your student representatives:

Siobhan Morgan, re-elected President
Sarah Newnham, Vice-President
Sophia Wanjiuru, International Student Representative
Marc Hibbert, Sports Officer
Claire Powell, Events Officer
Manu Bruggemann, Media Officer

Since November, we have held Christmas events and have begun working on a monthly events planner for postgraduate students. The Wolf football team has continued this year, and in addition to this, we have secured a Wolf Basketball team. Discussions about summer events are also on the table. In addition to this, we are working on other issues important to the postgraduate community, such as feedback about the Templeman Library to VP Education at Kent Union. We are also working with Kent Union’s postgraduate co-ordinator to organise a Postgraduate Festival of Research (see p4).

We still have a Welfare Officer position available so if you would like to be involved, or if you have any suggestions for us to work on please contact us at gsa@kent.ac.uk.

Events
Every Sunday at 4pm and 8pm, we will be holding movie nights in Wolf academic building.
Every Thursday at 8.20pm, we will meet in the Wolf Common Room to walk over to the support the Wolf Football team who play at 8.45pm at the Pavillion sports field.
We also held the following events in February and plan to hold similar events in the future – your feedback is appreciated:

Saturday 12th February
Night out in town
Meet by Wolf Common Room
8.30pm

Tuesday 15th February
Board Game Night
Wolf Academic building
7pm

Friday 18th February
Quiz Night for Charity
Wolf Academic building
7pm

Tuesday 22nd February
Games Night for Charity
Wolf Academic building
7pm

Hope to see you at future events!

Siobhan Morgan
Kent Graduate Student Association President

Postgraduate Student Surveys 2011

What is postgraduate study at Kent like?
Have your say and make your views count!

Whether you are studying on a taught postgraduate programme or working towards a research degree, the University needs your feedback.

Participate in the national Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) for postgraduate taught students or the national Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) for postgraduate research students and help us to enhance the postgraduate experience at Kent. All postgraduate students will receive an email inviting them to complete the survey.

Complete the survey and you can enter into the prize draw to win one of three iPod Nanos.