Welcome to the spring 2010 edition of The GradPost.

Well, here we are in a brand new decade, looking forward to what it will bring. Thanks for all the positive feedback from the winter edition of The GradPost – your comments and contributions are really valuable to us. As for this new edition, our team has worked as hard as ever and we hope you enjoy reading all the interesting articles, from the Copenhagen model conference to the regular PG Snapshot.

Many thanks to the Graduate School, the Design & Print Centre and the Publications team for their brilliant assistance as usual.

Happy reading!

Kate Rees
Chief GradPost Editor

Workshop reflections: getting a PhD in the UK

I am one of those people who find going to London an intimidating experience. I struggle to ‘read’ a map or keep up with the pace in which the city moves.

Then, there is the Underground. No eye contact. No encouragement to conversation. Magazines, novels, iPods, free newspapers, all weapons in the fight against human connection. To be fair, this is the same with trying to get a PhD. You have a destination, you have guides (books, journals, conferences etc), but you also have a lot of distractions.

I arrived early at Woburn House in Tavistock Square, a few yards from Euston Station, for a one-day workshop for international research students on ‘How to Get a PhD in the UK’ under the tutelage of Professor John Wakeford of the Missenden Centre for the Development of Higher Education. It was an insightful experience informed by the diversity of views and participants.

It can be a strange experience attending a workshop on how to get a PhD when the only way to do so is to get on with it. But such workshops do help. A PhD is daunting. It is a lonely affair at times. There is no need to crash into a brick wall when you can find your way round the wall. Academia is based on dialogue: dialogue with your subject matter, dialogue with your supervisor(s), dialogue with your peers, dialogue with people you meet at conferences and workshops, dialogue with your flatmates, and generally dialogue with your surrounding environment.

Time management is essential, too. Speed is not only for Formula One racing junkies. Never say I will take as long as it takes. Manage your time and resources. Organising your time well is the ingredient for completion. Never assume you will have more time in the future and put things off until then. Deadlines may seem distant but they aren’t. Other commitments should not take priority. A PhD is real work and we should care all of the time.

There is a moral to this tale. Never forget to be good to yourself. It is indeed a long way to go. Have a life outside of work and study. You can only go so long without seeing daylight before your mind and body rebel. Eat healthily (eg lots of omega 3 for the brain, ha ha!), exercise and give yourself time with your friends and family without feeling guilty. Make sure you get your sleep. Listen to your body and take breaks when you need to. Make sure you take holidays where you actually just relax and don’t think about work or research at all. I learnt through all this that getting a PhD is not just about acquiring a paper diploma or the ego-enhancing title of ‘Dr’, it’s a collection of experiences.

How to Get a PhD in the UK: Workshop for International Students took place on 2nd November 2009 at Woburn House, London.

Tinashe Mushakavanhu
PhD English
Focus on research

Mental health across a climate-challenged region: trans-Pacific service provision

I joined the School of Anthropology and Conservation as a Graduate Teaching Assistant at the end of September, so the recent ‘snow days’ are the first chance that I’ve had to reflect on the transition from part-time health worker to full-time researcher.

I think I’m lucky to be able to maintain a link between my research theme and my professional experience. Under Dr Michael Poltorak’s supervision, I’m looking at ‘culturally specific’ models of mental health service provision in Melanesia, with a focus on New Caledonia, a group of islands that are administratively part of France. Mental health service provision is a multidisciplinary endeavour and the School of Anthropology and Conservation’s double orientation towards people and their environments provides the sort of academic mix that will hopefully nudge my research in the direction of practical applications.

As a mature student, I hesitated for quite some time before taking the decision to continue with a research degree here at Kent. I even handed in the paperwork in person because I didn’t want to have the time to change my mind queuing to post the envelope! After ten years as a community mental health worker, the initial impetus behind returning to higher education had been to update my knowledge of current research and policy, giving me an option to move into case management. In the process of completing a BSc in Social Science at the Medway campus, I stumbled into a wild module in Social Anthropology, then half way through the second or third seminar, something just clicked into place.

On a day-to-day basis, I do still miss working with vulnerable people, especially those whose progress I’d followed through a series of care settings. Although I miss the sense of being involved in people’s lives and of making a difference, research in anthropology allows me to continue to be engaged with issues on a similar scale. My research project is still very much in the planning stages, but what I’ve learnt about the introduction of customary law and political devolution in New Caledonia encourages me to carry on exploring sometimes tense interactions between people and systems.

I’m looking forward to organising a pilot study of third sector service provision in the field in 2010 and presenting initial results at a conference in the summer. With the recent severe weather warnings in Kent, I don’t deny that New Caledonia’s location in the South Pacific has a definite appeal. The South Pacific as a whole is at the forefront of the predicted effects of climate change; any research that considers the economic implications of social and infrastructural change needs to take environmental impact into account. It’s a privilege to have to look no further than the next desk to catch up on groundbreaking work on marine conservation or small-island biodiversity. This is the time of year for taking stock and making resolutions. As I pencil in a task schedule for the next term, I’m confident that enrolling for a research degree, however daunting, has given me more material for resolutions than regrets.

Antonia Knifton
PhD Anthropology

Copenhagen Simulation

On Wednesday 2nd December 2009, students of the University of Kent gathered with a rather original objective in mind: to see if they could give a boost to the prospective Conference of the Parties (COP-15) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) by simulating negotiations and achieving a common agreement. The Copenhagen Simulation Project, initiated by Environmental Law postgraduates and titled ‘We can do it, why can’t they?’, was aimed at demonstrating that co-operation and concrete positive results are possible on climate change issues at the international level.

The Copenhagen Simulation was an easily replicable role-play event, which sought to reproduce, in essence, the dynamics and challenges that faced the international negotiation forum in Copenhagen in early December. Twenty highly motivated participants representing various countries and blocs were involved in the climate negotiations. In these negotiations, the group was divided into two committees, where the same ten countries or countries’ alliances were represented. One committee was confronted with the highly challenging task of settling on a number for emission cuts, while the other was involved in negotiating funding mechanisms aimed at tackling climate change uncertainties and consequences.

Within the course of a day, the participants reached a credible agreement, providing clear and equitable agreements on greenhouse gas emission cuts: 25 per cent compared to the 1990 emission level for developed countries and 15 per cent for developing countries. They also agreed upon means for funding and sharing knowledge about climate change issues relating to adaptation and research, which involved all countries committing to give one per cent of their GDP to a UN fund that benefitted developing countries. Through this project, the participants increased their understanding of the UNFCCC conciliation process while also being able to voice their belief in a concrete deal.

They achieved this at the University of Kent, so why can’t our political leaders?

Marine Destrez
LLM Environmental Law

Edited by Kylie Grant
MA Creative Writing
The Scream is possibly one of the most iconic images in modern culture. It has been known to grace the covers of magazines, sometimes connected to health issues, and its image reinvented into cufflinks and even inflatable dolls.

This image has gone far beyond the artist who created it, as I have often had to realise when drawing blank looks at the name ‘Edvard Munch’. His art is, and has been, the subject of my research and anyone who happens to mention art to me will inevitably hear about my fascination with the artist and his genius.

Edvard Munch has in fact created thousands of images, the majority of which are now held in the Munch Museum (in Tøyen, Norway), and consist of approximately 1,100 paintings, 4,500 drawings and 18,000 prints. This seems somewhat strange considering he is so closely associated with one painting, of which there are in fact four versions.

There are many interesting facets to Munch’s life, covering different themes in a long life that all come together in a harmonious, never-ending way, which make it hard to try and summarise someone I see as easily one of the most important artists of modern life.

Born on 12th December 1863 in Løten, north of Oslo (then known as Kristiania), Edvard Munch lived to the age of 81, passing away on 23rd January 1944. His artistic career started when he was just 17 and he became a student of Frits Thaulow and Christian Krohg, both artistic exponents in the Norwegian Naturalist style of painting. Munch was prompted from an early stage to seek a new, original way of expressing the emotions of the modern man, and he found this, in part, from the teachings of Hans Jaeger, the leader of the bohemian group in Oslo. Jaeger’s ethos of ‘free love’ and nihilism was sharply opposed to Munch’s Christian upbringing and the strong beliefs of his father – one of the many contradictions in Munch’s life he sought to resolve through his art.

During the 1890’s, Munch created his most renowned works, including The Scream, and worked on subjects such as anxiety, death, sickness, love and jealousy several times in different motifs and scenarios.

The turn of the century saw Munch have an emotional breakdown, after decades of heavy drinking, over exertion and paranoia as well as a disastrous encounter with an ex-lover, and so ended with a stay in a health clinic in Copenhagen. This saw a new phase in Munch’s art, with stronger emphasis on life, work and nature. A freer, brighter use of colour is also a distinct change in the artist’s style, as opposed to the sombre, more melancholic manner of before.

The start of his new artistic ethos could be seen in the commission he won to decorate the new Oslo University Aula (the Hall). It is a series of paintings that include subjects on nature, new life and human’s search for knowledge. The main work, The Sun, is a personal favourite and embodies everything I admire in his art, from the strong colours to the ideology behind it.

Edvard Munch’s last years were spent as a relative recluse, surrounded by mainly close friends and his remaining family. He was, however, awarded the Royal Order of St Olav by Norway, and his works were becoming increasingly popular and sought after by galleries. Upon his death, his remaining works were left to the city of Oslo and this is possibly a reason why he is not as well known around the world, since the majority of his works have remained in Norway. However, he is, it seems, becoming increasingly popular in contemporary culture, as well with other artists, and so I may possibly not be drawing so many blank faces at the mention of his name in future.

Sarah Scanlon
MRes Art Philosophy

(Mis)Adventures of a postgraduate – the devil’s in the detail

One of my favourite things about being a PhD student is the fact that my research topic is incomprehensible to the vast majority. Sometimes, just for fun, I like to talk science at people until they lose the will to live. Being an expert on a tiny part of a field has to have its perks, besides the academic credit of course!

For some reason, people seem to find it really hard to understand what being a postgraduate in research means or entails. For the record, no we don’t have lectures, written exams or spend afternoons in the pub or watching daytime TV (more stereotypes – oops). The classic questions never fail to crop up: what will you do when you finish? And what does that mean in the real world? (Thanks to my Gran for that last one. She just doesn’t get it, bless her.)

I like to answer these questions by saying that my research is important for everything. I’m sure you feel the same about yours!

Happy pioneering!

Anonymous
My brother and I will be undertaking a unique charity challenge this year. We will be participating in the 2010 ABSA Cape Epic mountain bike race in South Africa on 21st-28th March. It is widely considered the toughest multi-stage mountain bike race in the world, covering 900km in distance and 16,000m of vertical climbing in eight days, starting in Cape Town in the Western Cape of South Africa.

For fundraising purposes, we have created a website www.teamfastforward.org.uk with information on the challenge, Martha Trust as our selected charity and our reasons for undertaking this charity challenge. We hope you will feel compelled to support us.

I have been a Research Officer at the Personal Social Services Research Unit (PSSRU) since 2006 and am also a postgraduate student, having been registered for a part-time PhD since January 2007.

Theresia Bäumker
PhD in Social Work

We will be completing the race in aid of the UK-based charity, Martha Trust, which provides residential and respite care for people with profound physical and learning disabilities. We have personal experience of the Trust’s care as our elder brother has severe learning disabilities and is a wheelchair user. Our fundraising efforts will allow Martha Trust to purchase specialist equipment and related services, which can aid the physical mobility or stimulate the senses of people with severe disabilities and thereby increase the range of activities they can participate in on a daily basis.
Name: Aaron Simon
Course: MA in Creative Writing
Supervisor: Todd McEwen
Campus: Canterbury
Academic interests: My project is looking to be a sort of coming-of-age thing called *The Adventures of Lloyd Blank*. It stars a man with an incredibly thick Tennessee accent and a talking apple named Apple.

Academic hero: I don’t know about hero, but I’ve had some really good and inspiring professors: Dr Michael Carniello, Dr Jenn Fishman, Margaret Lazarus Dean, all from the University of Tennessee, and Professor Peter Brown, who teaches here – he is really an all-around good guy!

Place of birth: Houston, Texas – the only city proud of its consistently losing sports teams.

Favourite cheese: Monterey Jack? I’ve heard that most people in this country don’t even consider that a cheese, though. Still, better than saying, “Yellow cheese from Kraft,” right?

Favourite colour: Black to wear, dark green to look at.

Favourite film: Ah, this one’s a tough question. I’ll cheat and say a tie between *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* and *The Empire Strikes Back*. (The former due to Clint Eastwood being… well, Clint Eastwood, and the latter due to its inevitable effect of glee and whistling ‘The Imperial March’ theme for hours afterwards.)

The best thing about being a postgraduate student at Kent is: The way the schedule allows me to pursue my own projects and, generally, churn out an inordinate amount of writing. (Seriously, you should see the amount of paper this rough draft business has added up to; it’s absurd.)

Favourite place to eat on campus: Origins. The Tex-Mex is just enough like the stuff I ate back home to give me a warm, tingly feeling inside.

Top tip for PG study: Space out your work. Ration it. Doing so saves you from having a near-nervous breakdown towards essay time.

If you would like to appear in next edition’s *PG Snapshot*, please email us at grad-editors@kent.ac.uk