Drug bioavailability -
synthetic polymers
that can beat the
digestive system

International
student is 'highly
commended'

A culture of my own

A newsletter created by postgraduates for postgraduates
Welcome to the summer 2010 edition of The GradPost.

Hello all and welcome to the summer edition of The GradPost. This edition marks our one year anniversary, how time flies! Hopefully you have enjoyed our offerings so far and I look forward to more good things to come. In this GradPost, you will find lots of lovely articles about research. We are always interested to hear about your work, from any subject area, so please feel free to email us on grad-editors@kent.ac.uk if you would like to contribute.

Finally, I would like to say a big thank you to Kate Mansfield (Graduate School Co-ordinator), who is sadly leaving the Graduate School for pastures new. She has been the driving force behind The GradPost since it began and hopefully we can survive without her valuable contributions. Good luck Kate!

Thanks, as always, to the Graduate School, the Design & Print Centre and the Publications team.

Happy reading and happy summer!

Kate Rees
Chief GradPost Editor

School of English MA Conference 2010

In the next session, it was the turn of Kim Simpson with a truly fascinating exploration into amatory fiction, which included an impassioned voice for its inclusion in literary studies. Then Jo Corcoran, whose paper, entitled The Subject Presumed not to Reproduce: Illness, Masculinity and American Modernism, captured the audience’s imagination about the connection between the recent health care reform bill and the history of America’s literary associations with health. Questions were asked of them both, which led to a discussion around the conference room. Lunch was then served, which helped us all fuel our brains for the next session of papers!

The following session began with Maureen Speller’s in-depth discussion of connection in Joseph Conrad’s Almayer’s Folly and An Outcast of the Islands, the postcolonial aspect of which was especially interesting. Continuing on from this was Claire Wallis, who discussed the stereotypes and identity in the art work of Kara Walker and the writings of Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, and whose discussion of humanising stereotypes made for an eye-opening discussion.

Lina Samawi took the reins at the beginning of the final session with a fantastic and heartfelt paper on Jackie Kay and identity, which made us all sit up and listen to the issues faced when the question of identity is raised. To follow was an engrossing and exceptional short story, entitled For Peter, read by Steve Edwards. He left us all on tenterhooks as he left his story half way through! I was next, feeling nervous even after my novel was a paper that urged the conference delegates to read and to feel, to learn and to question. A perfect note to end a conference – a conference in which reading, writing and discussion made the room feel alive throughout the day.

I would like to thank all the speakers and organisers, all of whom made the day an exciting showcase of MA work this year.

Kylie Grant
MA in Creative Writing
Focus on research

Drug bioavailability – synthetic polymers that can beat the digestive system

I joined the Medway School of Pharmacy in October 2008 on an Industrial CASE PhD studentship, working under the supervision of Dr Ali Nokhodchi, after completing my BSc in Pharmaceutical Sciences at the School of Science, University of Greenwich. My PhD is a research collaboration between Colorcon Limited and the Medway School of Pharmacy.

My research project entails investigation into different parameters that combine to determine a robust formulation of a drug, an essential aspect of proper drug delivery.

Food administration affects the bioavailability of oral dosage forms of a drug. This is as a result of interactions that may occur between the oral formulation of the drug and the food administered. After a meal, the gastric emptying rates for liquids and solids are much slower in comparison to fasting conditions. This is also true when a drug is taken after food consumption. This is evident by the reduction in plasma peak concentration which trends to occur at later times and also an increment in lag times in plasma concentration-time profiles. In cases where a rapid onset is required or high peaks are needed to reach a therapeutic effect, this reduction in the absorption of the drug could be critical or fatal. Other factors that may also affect the rate at which a drug is released may include GI fluids, the formulation composition, physiochemical properties of the drug and polymer, and the processing and compaction conditions. An ideal drug should therefore be an orally controlled release drug that is not affected or influenced by conditions of the GI tract or, if affected, be at a bare minimum.

My research work specifically focuses on Hydroxyl propyl methyl cellulose (HPMC), a synthetic modification of the polymer cellulose. It is a hydrophilic polymer carrier and is a free-flowing powder. This property is a determinant factor in its dominant use in the preparation of orally controlled drug delivery systems. Hydrophilic matrix tablets often work on extended-release formulation principles.

Attending external and internal seminars run by the University has helped immensely to broaden my knowledge about the research world. The all-rounded nature of the research work and environment I am involved here at the School has helped me greatly in developing as the researcher I want to be.

The friendly nature of both staff and students makes this place such a joy to study at. I have really enjoyed my time as a postgraduate student thus far and have made wonderful friends here on campus. I would highly recommend the Medway School of Pharmacy to anyone considering a PhD as I feel that the skills I have gained here, both educationally and socially, are setting me up for a bright future ahead.

Kofi Asare-Addo
PhD in Pharmaceutics

‘Trial by academics’

Waiting for your viva is like awaiting trial for any academic crimes you may have committed during your PhD. The jury; professors. The verdict: ‘Doctor’, or, ‘hot Doctor’. I have prepared a statement to use in my defence but, like all trials, the more knowledgeable party (the opposition) has been made more competent through years of experience; what chance do I have to argue and plead my case to such academic giants? If all else fails, I will throw myself at the feet of my accusers and beg for mercy.

The worst case scenario, and one I dare not entertain while I am at the dawn of my viva, is that I will be given the ultimate punishment: an academic death sentence. Oh why did I not stay in the safety of the real world? Was this quest for the academic ‘Holy Grail’ so special that I would put myself through so much stress that I feel weak when I stand up? I guess it was.

I sit in my office, ploughing back over my thesis for the umpteenth time, browsing through its pages, getting flashbacks of running my PhD experiments. Oh it’s always ‘fun and games’ until someone gets hurt, and that someone might be me...tomorrow. How cruel the academic world can be, but hopefully not to me, not now. Am I on academic death row? Suspended in a state of ‘student’ until I learn the error of my ways?

I repent I tell you! I will cross all my t’s, and dot my i’s, and I won’t play solitaire in between grand thoughts. All I want is my day in the court of ‘trial by academics’ – to be found ‘Doctor as charged’.


My day came and went. It was not the way I expected. The academic giants were nice and kind. I answered the questions put to me by professors that knew enough to understand my answers. Someone who understands me!

At first I was scared, but then I was not. I endured interrogation for over three hours. I left the room feeling excited, but shaky. I waited some 15 minutes for the verdict...it was ‘Doctor of Psychology’. I had passed my viva and the rest of the day was spent in vain glory; a deadly sin only if it is sustained over long periods of time, but for one day, it is a mild social ill that can be overlooked in view of the circumstances. I had the best evening of my life (excluding the days my children were born). I am very happy and it was all worthwhile.

Dr Sharon Money, 24th January, 2010.

The Graduate School has a viva training video on the website at www.kent.ac.uk/ graduateschool/skills/online/vivaguide/index.html
International relations and sport: a rather unique relationship

Over the winter holiday, I began to think about what I wanted to focus on for my dissertation topic. Being in the International Relations Master's programme for some time now, I realised there are many things that can be discussed, but I wanted to focus on something that was rare. That is when I thought about my love for sport.

With the many sporting events that happen every year and the number of international governing bodies for respective sports, I became more interested in whether there could be a link between the fields of sport and international relations. After further research, I found that there were others who had the same level of interest in this topic as I did.

It may be difficult to imagine sport having any influence within international relations and it has often been overlooked. However, research suggests that it can play a role in the building of diplomatic relations between states. Probably the most famous sporting exchange that comes to most people's minds is the series of ping pong matches between the People's Republic of China and the United States in 1971. To most people, it just seemed like an ordinary ping pong match, but, if you looked underneath the surface, a number of things occurred. Firstly, this was the first time since 1949 that an American delegation had entered China. Secondly, these matches were seen as the beginning of the re-opening of relations between the two states. It all became official on February 1972 when US president Richard Nixon made his historic visit to China. This event, which would become known as Ping Pong Diplomacy, broke down a wall that almost seemed impossible to destroy.

Only recently has the world seen neighbours Turkey and Armenia try their own brand of sport diplomacy. On October 2009, President Serzh Sarkisian became the first Armenian leader to visit Turkey in order to watch a World Cup qualifying football match between the two national teams. "Football diplomacy" was seen as a strategy to break the ice between the two rivals. Both have a long history with one another and it can be said that it is a history filled with bitterness and bad blood. However, both leaders have taken the risk to foster improved relations between the two states. Going back even further to September 2008, both have tried when Turkish president Abdullah Gul visited Armenia, both sides have explored the possibility of re-opening their shared border and a re-establishment of embassies in the other's respective capital. It is still too early to tell whether this will work out for both, but using sport as a means of communication with another party can go a long way into making further progress on the political side.

Most of the time, we often read about the positives of sport, but the focus of my research will analyse the negative side of sport and international relations. Sport has always been put in a positive light, but the question I am hoping to investigate is whether sport can be a factor in the breakdown of diplomatic relations. In many situations, there have been international incidents in which rival states have taken a sporting event to a personal level and the results, in the end, have not been pretty. One of the more recent events I want to analyse is the relation between Algeria and Egypt. How could a World Cup qualifying match lead to the breakdown of diplomatic relations. Even though, through my research so far, there seems to have been no political problems between these states in the past?

Another case I am hoping to further analyse is the relationship between India and Pakistan. Though both states have arranged several rounds of 'cricket diplomacy', relations still seem very fragile. Like Armenia and Turkey, Pakistan and India have often had a strained relationship. This tension was heightened even further with the exclusion of Pakistani players from the lucrative and highly popular Indian Premier League. It is important to find out what is preventing these two states from getting over the hurdles that could possibly bring peace to a region that is always in conflict and improve relations between the two nuclear powers.

Sport may not be an overriding factor that decides the diplomatic relationship between states, but it can be an influence. Positive or negative, sport is the one common interest among all states. It brings out the best and the worst in us all. Through my research and interviews with experts, political leaders, sport officials and even the student body at the University of Kent, I hope I can get to the bottom of these questions.

Kenya Brown
MA in International Relations

International student is ‘highly commended’ for British Council Shine Award

A second-year research student from Zimbabwe, Tinashe Mushakavanhu, was ‘highly commended’ in the 2010 British Council’s International Student Awards. The panel of judges decided that his entry deserved a special mention and was one of just 36 letters awarded this recognition, just narrowly missing out on becoming a runner-up in the regional finals.

For his achievement, he is set to receive a commemorative certificate. The competition has been described as a tremendous success and attracted more than 1,300 entries from students representing 121 nationalities.

Tinashe is currently working towards a PhD in English. He is one of the editors of The GroadPost and has also been Comment Editor for InQuire, the University student newspaper. He is also a published poet with a poetry pamphlet published with a grant from Canterbury Arts Council.

Tinashe said: ‘Obviously, it’s a fulfilling reward to have your work recognised, but it is even greater to be an ambassador for the University of Kent. Last year, I entered the same competition and didn’t get far. This year, I made the long-list. Next year, the ultimate prize is for me to win.’

The British Council launched the awards to celebrate the achievements of students who come to the UK for a high-quality education and to enjoy new experiences and challenges. Entries received are then used to inform people around the world about the wealth of opportunities in the UK.
A culture of my own

Let me introduce you to my world: I build my immune system through people and travel is my method. Different cultures are what transformed me from a shy, shell-dwelling little girl to somebody with views and principles. After my humble experience in travel so far, I came up with two conclusions: people fascinate me in all ways, and I am Jordan and myself. Vague enough? Let me explain.

I was living peacefully in my home country, Jordan, until the age of 13, when we had to move to Bahrain for my dad’s work. Staying there for three years, I spent the whole first year in libraries and read about 120 novels. Trust me, nothing can cause that except a combination of culture shock and hitting puberty. When I decided to leave my shell after a year, I was introduced to cultural newness. It was a bit hard at first to communicate with the locals even though we spoke the same language, Arabic, because the dialect was different. Having a talent in imitation, I succeeded in speaking their dialect, and that brought me closer to them. I also found out that not everyone knows about Christianity there, just as not everyone knows about the existence of Jordan on the world map when I lived in Idaho, USA last year. I took for granted that the whole world knows about Jordan being a Middle Eastern country and known for the Dead Sea, and Petra, which has become one of the new Seven Wonders of the World. My experience in the States was different: a different continent, a different language, new people, and I melted into the culture directly, which brought me closer to Americans faster. Although I had to deliver a couple of presentations to explain that in Jordan we live in nice houses not in tents, ride cars not camels, and Christians do exist there and co-live with Muslims in a friendly atmosphere. I found a positive response and acceptance to all the de-stereotyping I did. I also tried to live their culture to the maximum, wearing sweatpants, eating turkey and celebrating Thanksgiving!

Going back to Jordan, I never thought that I would experience a culture shock in my own country, which is defined as ‘reverse culture shock’. I thought it was strange because it was my home that I returned to, but things felt and sounded different. I started questioning whether it was me who had changed, or that time away had made me see what was there in a different way.

A couple of months later, I came here to the UK to pursue an MA degree. Again, I have experienced new people, a new ‘accent’ and a new culture. I am still in the process of unravelling the UK. I am trying to embrace the culture as best I can, though I still have not succeeded to stand in the face of cold weather in mini skirts or shorts, bare-legged. However, what I discovered so far is that people here are more aware of the East cultures, and truly know that Jordan exists. What I admire about people here is the organisation of their lives and the honesty and hard work they apply to their jobs. I bet there is more to discover – I haven’t finished my journey yet!

There is nothing that can make one understand another culture more than travelling. It opens up the eye of your mind and lets you experience things you had never thought of doing. Every day I am astonished by the thoughts and actions of people from all over the world, which result from their own culture and their own experiences.

In addition, I am more aware of my own culture, appreciate my country and find the flaws that stand in the face of its progress. I am an ambassador for my own country, for my country’s image is my responsibility as a holder of its citizenship and as a loyal daughter to its favours. I am Jordan as I said before, yes, but I am myself too, because after living in many cultures, I developed a new culture within me, a fifth culture that combines the hard work of the West and the generosity of the East; a culture of my own.

Lina Samawi
MA in English and American Literature
(Mis)Adventures of a postgraduate student: summer – a tumbleweed moment

Well summer is finally here, which for the undergraduates means epic time off, but for PhD students mostly means people in lab coats and shorts (just plain wrong!).

Time to breathe a sigh of relief: no more queuing for the essential caffeine fix, no more undergraduates to supervise (je tidy up after). Might be a chance to actually see your supervisor as they don’t have to hide from eager students anymore – this may or may not be a good thing!

But it is astounding how quickly the campus can go from full-on manic exam mode to desert. A glimpse of other people walking around campus is now a rarity and silence reigns (think Wild West: tumbleweed, dust etc, not that I’m being over dramatic at all). Nevertheless, this is when the postgraduates emerge from the dark confines of our offices/labs, squinting in the sunlight (hopefully). There should be some skiving off; everyone else is on holiday after all. Will be nice in all the quiet to get some work done... maybe!

No doubt all this peace will get boring soon and we will start to look forward to the Fresher onslaught in September. Enjoy the sunshine while it lasts!

Anonymous

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