Margate: A unique place to be a student

Key change for Kent music

Three minutes with David Miliband

A newsletter created by postgraduates for postgraduates
As the evenings are drawing in and Christmas approaches, it’s time for The GradPost to announce its new editorial team! Welcome to our first issue as Editors. We’re really happy with the great response we’ve had to our request for articles. This issue, our ‘Focus on research’ piece has been submitted by Emma Bastow (PhD Biosciences, Kent Fungal Group) and provides an intriguing insight into the modelling of motor neuron disease using yeast cells. We’ve also had one of our team investigate the new Colyer-Fergusson Music Building on campus. We’re very pleased to announce that Wei-Feng Xue’s shot of Keynes (one of the four winners in our photography competition) appears on this issue’s front cover, and three more winners will appear on front covers throughout the academic year. Thanks to all the entries we’ve had – they were of such a high standard, it was very difficult to pick our favourites.

If you missed out on this edition’s competition, fear not – we’re looking for another kind of talent this time. Do you feel that you have artistic talent and creativity? Think you can sum up the postgraduate experience at Kent in a more unorthodox way? We’re looking for cartoonists – someone that can draw us a depiction of life at Kent. We’d love you to get in touch at grad-editors@kent.ac.uk and look forward to showcasing your efforts in our next edition.

We hope you enjoy our first issue as Editors as much as we’ve enjoyed putting it together for you.

Best wishes,

Chris and Kasia
Editors

The Editorial Team
Chris Costa, PhD Biomedical Imaging (Biosciences) – Editor
Kasia Ladds, MA Creative Writing (English) – Editor
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Iana Seales, MA International Conflict Analysis (Politics and International Relations) – Reporter/Contributor
Melissa Tortorella, MA French and Comparative Literature (SECL) – Reporter/Contributor

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Contributors
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Margate: A unique place to be a student

Margate is an entirely different lifestyle compared to that of your average postgraduate. While it might not be the right location for full-time students, it suits my part-time MA in Creative Writing very well.

It seems that the number of students deciding to study part-time is on the increase, and for the most part it is not just a lifestyle choice. Studying is expensive, and part-time study can be a great way to learn while working, which is how I came to be living in Margate, working in Chatham and studying in Canterbury.

And while Margate is an unlikely student town given the social problems commonly associated with Thanet as a whole, it has many quirks and bonuses that may not be apparent at first. As you might expect from an out-of-the-way seaside town, Margate is extremely good value. Renting prices are around a quarter of what you would expect to pay in Canterbury based on four sharing, and local amenities are cheaper too. While the range of local shops and services is nowhere near as good as Canterbury, there are some gorgeous cafés, art galleries and vintage shops in Margate’s old town, including the Greedy Cow Deli, offering exceptional coffee, Paraphernalia, which sells just about every kind of second hand object, and Holbrey and Solway, a tiny gallery specialising in fine art and antiques. But probably the biggest tourist attraction of all is the Turner Contemporary gallery, which opened in April this year – a multimillion-pound project designed to help the regeneration of the local area. The art scene in Margate has blossomed as a result of the gallery, despite it being received with mixed feelings. Shortly after the gallery opened, I heard one local saying to another on the train from Canterbury, “What they really should have built there instead is a big Poundland.”

But the best things about Margate by far are the simplest. I will never tire of living by the sea. My summer was spent reading literary criticism and experimental novels on the beach, writing, swimming and watching beautiful sunsets, which could all be considered very student-esque past times despite the unconventional setting. Margate is far from perfect but it is an extraordinary place to be a student, and it can only get better in the coming months. If you haven’t done so already, I would urge you to take a visit.

Kasia Ladds
MA Creative Writing

Living in Margate offers an entirely different lifestyle compared to that of your average postgraduate. While it might not be the right location for full-time students, it suits my part-time MA in Creative Writing very well.
Key change for Kent music

While Kent musicians are extremely familiar with modal key changes, a more literal key will soon be handed over to lecturers and students alike: the key to a brand new performance centre.

What makes Kent’s music programme so unique and inspiring is the lack of a formal music degree; all the participating students have joined voluntarily, supplementing their chosen practical degree with a love for music. Aside from the traditional Orchestra, there is a Concert Band, a Big Band, Chorus and a smaller Chamber Choir – a different rehearsal every night of the week. “Good musicians make good students,” says Director of Music, Sue Wanless. Catharsis notwithstanding, many studies have been dedicated to pinpointing the links between music, IQ, logic and study skills.

True to Kent’s ‘UK’s European university’ motto, the music programme boasts a number of British, European, international, undergraduate and postgraduate students. Heading this team is Director Sue Wanless, Deputy Director Daniel Harding, and the deceased yet still influential Sir James Colyer-Fergusson, the late music enthusiast whose legacy spurred the longtime dream of a new performance centre. Thanks to government ‘match funding’, a philanthropic promotion, the University of Kent will soon lay claim to an impressive new performance space that will include a social foyer, offices, practice rooms or students (who currently travel to the depths of Rutherford or Eliot for a hidden-away broom closet) and, most importantly, the concert hall.

The real beauty of such a performance space is its versatility: the hall can hold a 200-member choir and 80-piece orchestra (plus an audience of 300 or more), and sustain crashing symphonic works, hot jazz charts, or a quiet chamber choir requiem. In layman’s terms, the acoustics of a good performance venue will support and display an ensemble to its full potential. And with its prime location next to the Gulbekian Theatre, the close proximity will form a type of artistic corridor on campus.

As anyone knows, the performance is the culminating hedonistic moment following long months of rehearsal. Despite the lack of a proper concert space, the music programme nonetheless puts on a variety of concerts each term: the winter performances traditionally taking place in Eliot Hall, and the spring concerts in the enviable Canterbury Cathedral.

Many universities across England have used Kent as a model and recognise the importance of music (and arts) in education as a whole. Extracurricular activities are especially relevant for postgraduate students, who are always looking for ways to break up the heavy burden of coursework and research.

The start of 2012 will offer to a new generation of lucky student musicians a brand new performance hall – that just may hold the key to their success.

Melissa Tortorella
MA French and Comparative Literature
Focus on research

Using yeast to study motor neuron disease

Research student Emma Bastow provides an intriguing insight into the modelling of motor neuron disease using yeast cells.

In medical research, many different organisms have been used as ‘models’ to study human diseases. Some of these living models include mice, yeast and fruit flies. As part of the Kent Fungal Group (KFG) in the School of Biosciences, I am using the Baker’s yeast, Saccharomyces cerevisiae, to study how a particular form of motor neuron disease develops. To do this, we have to genetically engineer the yeast cell to make certain human proteins associated with the disease and then analyse the effects these proteins have on the normal behaviour of a yeast cell.

A single human cell is very similar to a single yeast cell, both in terms of its composition and behaviour. Consequently, yeast is used extensively as a model in modern bioscience as it is safe, has a short life cycle that lasts around two hours and there are many tools for its efficient genetic manipulation. A number of studies have recapitulated the key features of various human diseases in yeast and these can facilitate an understanding of the mechanisms that lead to a particular disease. In my project, I am using yeast to model genetic alterations (mutations) in the superoxide dismutase 1 (SOD1) enzyme, which is associated with the motor neuron disease amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). ALS causes the irreversible loss of motor neurons which normally control muscle movements, subsequently leading to difficulty walking, speaking, swallowing and ultimately death due to respiratory failure. ALS affects approximately 3,500 people in the UK, including the famous physicist Stephen Hawking.

Mutations in the human SOD1 gene that encodes the SOD1 protein occur in approximately 20 per cent of inherited ALS cases. SOD1 normally functions to protect cells against dangerous molecules known as free radicals that cause long-lasting damage to cells. However, certain mutations in SOD1 cause the protein to itself become toxic to the cell and this can lead to aggregation of the mutant SOD1 protein. Little is known about the progression of ALS and I am using yeast to better understand the mechanisms involved in this toxic ‘gain-of-function’ associated with mutations in human SOD1.

Emma Bastow
PhD Biosciences

My thoughts on my ‘international experience’ away from India

I am Jun Sunyal and I come from Kolkata (Calcutta), India. Kolkata is one of India’s largest metropolitan cities (with over 15 million inhabitants). It has world-renowned schools, universities and multinational companies, and while it is crowded, it is truly multicultural, with a heterogeneous population from all different parts of India. Age-old cultures of music and art are deeply rooted in Kolkata and the river Ganges flows right through the heart of the city. I left all this behind to move to the UK to study for a Master’s degree at Kent Business School.

When we are confronted with new experiences, we are often so overwhelmed that we are unable to discern what exactly is so new about them. Arriving at the University of Kent, the first thing that struck me was the fresh air. I noticed the quietness, and the peaceful and soothing environment of the campus. Instead of pollution, traffic congestion and noisy cars, I found instead clear skies, birds, hopping rabbits: each contributing to the atmosphere of tranquility on campus. Canterbury city centre, with its cobbled streets, cheap food and high street musicians also contrasted greatly to home. I have noticed how polite people have been, and have appreciated how helpful people are in their interactions with me. In terms of the academic setting, students are provided with the best possible milieu to foster and augment their talents and interests.

The Templeman Library is one place that I like going from time to time. It has an array of books and facilities which help students to familiarise themselves with how to use the library. In addition, it has three study areas known as the quiet study area, open study lounge with café, and study carrels. Each section is tailored to meet the needs and comfort of each individual students. The Library also has a self-service system, and a laptop and netbook loan scheme. The Library support and IT desk is readily available to help students with book loans and all other services relating to library support and IT. I would recommend University of Kent to anyone looking to study in an environment with a multicultural atmosphere.

Without doubt, every aspect of my experience at University is helping me to develop my self-confidence.

Jun Sunyal
MSc Human Resource Management
Three minutes with David Miliband

On 12 October, Kent was the first university to welcome David Miliband (MP and former Foreign Secretary) as he takes part in a series of discussions organised by Politics and International Relations departments across Britain. I was lucky enough to have a chance to speak with him after the lecture.

It had already been decided that politics would be excluded from our brief chat after his Q&A session organised by the School of Politics and International Relations, so we had three minutes to ask him questions reflecting solely on his personal life and family.

Seemingly relaxed with his back against the projector screen in Keynes Lecture Theatre 1, he spoke of a young David full of ambition and verve who journeyed to the USA on a prestigious scholarship to complete his Master’s degree in Political Science at the esteemed Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

But what was it like?

"[An] interesting experience." He paused. "Hard work and bright students; quite daunting but quite fun as well." He reasoned the postgraduate experience might have been different had he continued on in the UK but observed, "Not necessarily worse." The US education system is designed for a Master’s degree to be completed in two years, but David only spent one year in the country, saying that as a result his experience was not the ‘full monty’ of a postgraduate degree programme.

He went on to talk about how the American approach to studies was a serious one, both for his peers and tutors. "I remember the seminars that were full of extremely bright students," he added.

The chat shifted to how his life had changed since quitting frontline politics last year. He went on to talk about how his days are less hectic now, and more family-focused: "I get to spend more time with my children." His sons are seven and four years old, and on a regular day, he gets the boys ready for school and then drives them in. David seemed happy to talk about his children. He was clearly enthused by the fact that he can spend more time with them.

He was communicating the importance of family as he discussed his boys so naturally the question about his relationship with his brother came up. What is their relationship like? "You are brothers for life," he said with a smile and that was it; our time had come to an end. Before he hurried off, David left these few words with the postgraduate community at Kent: "If you’ve come from abroad, enjoy it. I think it’s great that we are a country that welcomes people from abroad to study here."

Iana Seales
MA International Conflict Analysis

Your Postgraduate Student Support Officer

Hello everyone!
I am a postgraduate living in Woolf College, and currently studying an MA in Criminology. I am also your Postgraduate Student Support Officer. I am here to help create and maintain a safe residential environment both on and off campus, where students from diverse backgrounds can get to know, respect, learn and work with one another in ways that are compatible with academic pursuits.

Any problems you may have, you are welcome to visit me in my office during the hours listed below, email me at tn79@kent.ac.uk or call my phone extension on 4950. My office is located behind reception in the Woolf Lecture Theatre building and you are welcome to stop by during these times:

Mondays: 12–3pm
Wednesdays: 4–7pm
Thursdays: 4–7pm
Fridays: 12–3pm

Taylor Noj
MA Criminology

Kent Union
Housing Week – Postgraduate Housing Afternoon

On 23rd–27th January 2012, Kent Union will be running its annual Housing Week. Feedback from last year said that postgraduates wanted more information tailored for them. Therefore, we have decided to run a specific Postgraduate Housing Afternoon Surgery on Wednesday 25th January from 2-4pm in the Woolf College foyer.

Colum McGuire, Vice-President (Welfare) will be present alongside some of our trained advisors to give you any information you may need regarding housing and accommodation. So if you’re looking to find accommodation in the area, have any concerns regarding housing, or would just like to find out more, please come by and see us for some free information and advice.
Global Skills Award 2011-12

This year’s Global Skills Award kicked off on Monday 31st October with an introductory session led by the Dean of the Graduate School. Around 200 postgraduates attended this session, which was followed by a drinks reception and a ‘get to know each other’ speed meet in Woolf College foyer. Everyone had a good time and the Graduate School is looking forward to welcoming the new Global Skills Award students to the lectures and workshops.

The Global Skills Award is open to postgraduate taught Master’s students and participants are encouraged to follow lectures and subsequent discussions on Twitter via #kentgs

Photographic Competition

A big thank you to everyone who sent in photos for The GradPost Photographic Competition. The standard was extremely high and the editorial team had great difficulty choosing which pictures to feature on the cover of the magazine. We therefore decided to print the winning pictures on the front covers of the quarterly issues of The GradPost, and to print the runners-up on the back covers.

Winners

Wei-Feng Xue
Isabelle Schaefers
Sean Der Chang
Gina Maharaj

Runners-up

Chris Cain
Shiwei Zhang
Mengxiao Wang
Justine Lemoine

Image: Chris Cain