Graduation special report: Staff and student in one

Many University staff are among this year's cohort of graduates. Monitor investigates...

Among the graduating staff are educational technologist, Matt Bacon, who worked full-time, helped run a business and saw the birth of his first child while he was studying.

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July Graduations special edition

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Special report: Staff and student in one

Among those proudly clutching testamurs at this year’s graduations were a number of the University’s staff. In this special feature, Jessica Rodgers, meets some of the staff who’ve chosen to study where they work.

19 December 2005: Matt Bacon has had a lot on his plate over the past three years. Like many professionals he embarked on a program of part time postgraduate study towards a master’s degree that will advance his career. Mr Bacon, an educational technologist in Technology and Educational Design Services (TEDS), is one of a number of staff to choose to study at the University of Canberra, although he added the pressures of running a family business and the birth of his first child to an already cramped schedule of work and study.

Mr Bacon fitted a degree, a new baby and a business in around his full-time job at the University

He admitted looking after 19-month-old son Jack and helping his wife Caroline run a sports podiatry clinic, while studying towards his Master of New Media was “at times, quite hectic”.

“I always try to find a balance and have some fun, otherwise you burn out. Our families have been a great support as well. It’s been a real team effort,” he said.

He said he had gained new skills from the course, which relates very closely to his work, as well as consolidating his current skills and knowledge.

“Everyday I utilise skills and implement knowledge from my studies,” he said

“I consider this course of study to have been a positive driver for my future work directions.”

Mr Bacon was able to take advantage of the University’s commitment to helping staff meet their professional development goals.

“The Vice-Chancellor, Roger Dean, said it was pleasing to see so many staff graduating and for the University to be able to support its staff in their careers.

“I’m proud that our staff are choosing to undertake further study and choosing this University as the place for that study,” Professor Dean added.

As students of the University, staff can access all of the same facilities that other students do, although director of student services, Bruce Lines, said staff generally required less support than other students.

“There are outside study programs for academic staff, which allow for sabbaticals and professional development programs for general staff.

Options available to help staff study include financial support and time release to study. Those without an undergraduate degree can have their fees waived.

The director of human resources, Karl Dubravs, said the University was committed to the professional development of its staff.

“We’re putting this notion of continuous learning into the market place. It should also be open to our staff. The University’s support for its staff is presented to the world at the graduation ceremonies in the Great Hall of Parliament House.”

Mr Bacon fitted a degree, a new baby and a business in around his full-time job at the University

Photo: Kimberly Douglas

Other staff who graduated include*:
Linda Bolton
Patricia Carpenter
Monica Casaca
Serena Chong
Lachlan de Haan
John Dodd
Monitor interns Ben Brillante and Gabby McMillan
Kerry McCallum
Gaye Morrison
Amanda Pasfield
Kristen Raroe
Paramjeet Singh
Matt Sutherland
David Tattersall
Karyn Ward

*This is not an exhaustive list.

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Entrepreneurs unfazed by honours error

Edward O’Daly

21 December 2005: While their classmates are relaxing after several years’ hard study, the workload is increasing for entrepreneurial Bachelor of Engineering in Software Engineering graduates Michael Hazilias and Scott Samuels.

The pair were among a group of students (listed opposite) who due to an administrative error were not recognised for their honours success at Monday evening’s graduation ceremony. Their names were read out at the ceremony and their testamurs were correctly inscribed, but their honours were omitted from the graduation booklet and therefore not announced.

This setback has not affected their determination to get a business commercialising an idea they developed during their studies off the ground - even if it means they miss out on a well-earned post-study rest.

"It's in our nature. We're hard workers, you don't get anywhere by slacking off," Mr Hazilias said.

Together with ‘silent partner’ and fellow Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers ACT Prize-winner Adam Pollard, the duo have developed an innovative online human resource management system.

"We don't want to reveal too much at this stage, but it will help small-to-medium-sized businesses and their employees manage rosters and timesheets," Mr Samuels said.

"It's an idea that's been around in our heads for a few years, but now it's coming to fruition."

Mr Samuels worked on security aspects of the system as part of his studies, while Mr Hazilias looked at ways to integrate the system with mobile phones.

Mr Samuels said it was a “bit of a let down” not to have his honours acknowledged as part of the formal graduation proceedings, but said personal apologies immediately after the ceremony from Chancellor Wendy McCarthy and Vice-Chancellor Roger Dean were “some consolation”.

Professor Dean has initiated a review of graduation procedures to avoid a repeat of the error.

"The University is sorry to have to have made this mistake and we are grateful for the understanding shown by the students concerned," Professor Dean said.

"They each performed very well during their time here and we congratulate them and wish them every success in the future."

Left to right Andrew Purdon, Scott Samuels, Roger Dean, Michael Hazilias and Peter Manger

Photo: Elouise Calabria
The Force is with graduating rugby fan

Edward O'Daly

21 December 2005: A lifelong love of rugby will take communication graduate Matt Sutherland to Perth to work with new Super 14 side the Western Force.

Mr Sutherland, 27, has been playing the game since he was six and his work experience has included several years at Canberra's Wests Rugby Club and a season as a professional rugby player in Ireland - plus a recent stint with the University of Canberra's marketing team.

His previous jobs in rugby, love of the game and degree specialisations in advertising and marketing communication made Mr Sutherland an obvious choice for the role of inaugural sponsorship coordinator of Australian rugby's 'new force', where he'll be responsible for recruiting and retaining the club's sponsors.

"A move of this size does raise the stress levels a touch. However, I do consider this position to be a dream job and I am extremely lucky to be given an opportunity," he said.

"I am looking forward to the challenges associated to working as a member of the most eagerly anticipated professional rugby team in the world. The Western Force is a new team and I want to be able to share in the success and the excitement.

"Furthermore, rugby union is something that I have been extremely passionate about for over 20 years, and look forward to working in an environment that I have so much in common with.

"On a separate note, I am looking forward to the lifestyle change, the international travel, and living near the beach. "

Mr Sutherland, a fan of his new employer's Super 14 rivals, the ACT Brumbies, has identified one item that will be left out of the packing cases for the move west in the interests of a harmonious workplace.

"I have been a Brumbies fan since their inaugural season and that will never change," he said.

"However, I will probably leave my supporter's cap at home during in the first competition round against the Brumbies in February."
Drawing on web-based talent

Edward O'Daly

21 December 2005: Peter Edmunds has finished his Honours project, but the website he established as part of the course is proving so popular it's still keeping him busy.

swarmsketch.com is an experimental project that allows visitors to the site to contribute one short (up to 100 pixels) line to a drawing and its popularity is snowballing as word spreads through the "viral culture" of the internet.

Mr Edmunds has been surprised by the response to his website, which has tapped into "the weird sub-genre of participatory art".

"I had no idea whether people would be interested, but now it's getting 20,000 hits a month," he said.

The topic for each drawing is randomly chosen based on popular search engine terms.

For his honours, Mr Edmunds was judged on his technical ability in building a useable website and for his written evaluation of the project's impact.

"The interesting part is the idea of cooperation without communication. The sketches are never perfect. "It's only reason for being is to look cool."

Mr Edmunds graduated from University of Canberra in 2003 with a Bachelor of Communication in media production and went on to found Canberra multimedia firm Oxide Interactive with classmate Alexi Paschalidis.

He said while there was no direct commercial gain from the SwarmSketch site, the interest it generated had led to "a couple of professional opportunities" and he had developed new skills as he created the website.
Career starts at the deep end for journalist

Edward O'Daly

21 December 2005: When the 1997 landslide hit Thredbo, graduating communication student Kathleen Stewart was a waitress in the holiday town.

A former researcher on A Current Affair, she knew she was on the scene of a big story and put a call through to her former colleagues in Sydney. She soon found herself giving live televised reports over the phone.

"That's what made me decide to become a journalist. I thought, 'I can do this'," she said.

But being flung in at the deep end also showed her the value of professional journalism training.

"It was a complete shock and nobody told me what I needed to do. I went down and had a look, asked questions, talked to a few people. I had good contacts, but I didn't know how to use them," she said

"If somebody had told me what to do I could have done a much better job."

Ms Stewart, 39, was a full-time mature student. She said she hopes to work in journalism, but she is currently working on a series of children's books, inspired by her first career as a nanny, which began when she was 10-years-old.
Classmates come face to face for first time at grad

Edward O'Daly

21 December 2005: They've been studying together for two years or more in some cases, but Wednesday's graduation was the first time many classmates from the Master of Marketing Communication had met.

The course has several modes of delivery, including entirely online teaching, which was the method of study chosen by six of the course's graduates, who came from places including Canberra, Singapore and Sydney.

In the foreground: Felix Stravens. Behind from left to right: Janine Sherringham, Gaye Morrison, Karyn Ward, Lisa Donataccio, Vivian Juan-Vega, Ijiun Seow
Photo: David Southern

Vivian Juan-Vega from Sydney said she knew her classmates from email conversations and the course's online chat components, but she had never seen any of them face to face.

While some online students came from far away, graduates Karyn Ward and Gaye Morrison are staff members with offices a few steps away from the course's teachers.
European travel maps out education

Edward O'Daly

21 December 2005. They say travel broadens the mind, but for graduating public relations student Lauren Kennelly, it defined her tertiary education.

Before embarking on a gap year in Europe, Ms Kennelly accepted a place studying arts at ANU, but months spent on the road, meeting new people, developing her independence and growing in confidence, awakened skills that had been dormant before the travel bug hit.

"Everyone told me I should work in a job that used my people skills," she said.

She browsed course materials in her flat in London before opting for a Bachelor of Communication in PR. Her choice of a major in Spanish was sparked by a visit to Spain as she toured Europe.

"I went to so many different countries where people didn't speak English and I met a lot of Europeans who could speak several languages. I loved Spain and I wanted to learn a language that was well used, so I chose Spanish."

Ms Kennelly said she eventually hopes to work overseas and her parents - fellow University of Canberra graduates Moya and Robert, who is also a researcher in the School of Government and Business - have offered a ticket to "any Spanish speaking country" as a 21st birthday present. But Ms Kennelly won’t be hitting the road just yet.

"I think I'll get some experience first - it's been a challenging few years and I don't need to uproot myself straight away," she said.
Community work plus study excellence wins top award

Jessica Rodgers

20 December 2005: There was a pause in proceedings at Elissa Morton's graduation ceremony as a list of the 24-year-old's awards was read out.

Ms Morton, winner of the Herbert Burton Medal - the University's most prestigious award - has won more than 15 prizes in her time at the University, with nine announced at Monday morning's ceremony.

Ms Morton said the Burton Medal was the "icing on the cake"

Photo: Kimberly Douglas

A Bachelor of Accounting/Law graduate, Ms Morton was given the Herbert Burton Medal for achieving outstanding academic results and making significant a contribution to the University and the wider community.

"I'm thrilled and very surprised. It was very unexpected, but it's awesome and I'm very grateful," she said.

She achieved high grades throughout her degree, won a number of awards, participated actively in the University community and enjoys fundraising and volunteer work.

Ms Morton chose the University of Canberra because it had a good reputation "particularly in corporate law", which is the area she is most interested in and decided to do accounting as it would complement her degree, and she has enjoyed her time here.

"It's a small and friendly uni. I especially like the one on one time with the lecturers," she said.

"That's helped me quite a bit. The law division is very friendly."

Ms Morton was able to pursue her interest in corporate law through a summer clerkship and time spent as a paralegal at law firm Blake Dawson Waldron.

Over the summer, Ms Morton is hoping to volunteer for the RSPCA.

"I love animals," she said. "Especially kittens. Apparently the RSPCA is having an influx of kittens at the moment."

She said she might also catch up on some reading or get a temporary summer job in a café.

"I like to keep a busy schedule."

At the end of February, Ms Morton starts her graduate position at Blake Dawson Waldron.

"We get to decide what area we want to specialise in after our first year, "she said.

"I really like corporate and litigation law. I'll see where that takes me."
Nurse signs up for career on the front line

Edward O'Daly

20 December 2005: Serena Lewis is on her way to the front line of nursing with a job in the Australian Army.

Ms Lewis, who has been a nurse for three years, received her graduate diploma in critical care nursing at Tuesday's ceremony and will start work as a nursing officer at the Army's Enoggera Barracks in Brisbane in January. She finished working in intensive care at the Canberra Hospital last week.

An army reservist, who returned from six months nursing as a civilian contractor in the Solomon Islands earlier this year, she hopes to be deployed to the field soon - so she's obviously someone with a taste for adventure.

"You only live one life and I think it's important to feel excited and stimulated by what you do," she said.

She explained she studied the course to enhance her knowledge and her career prospects.

"I completed this course specifically as it's what the army requires from its nursing officers," she said.

"I was a reservist and then decided to go full time. I do however have a particular interest in critical care nursing. It's the sharp pointy end - very interesting and thought provoking."

Her role at this pointy end will be in the 'tactical area' but back from the front line, where emergency first aid is administered. Ms Lewis's intensive care work will further stabilise patients before they are airlifted to safety.
Monitor interns leave to begin glittering careers

Jessica Rodgers


Ms McMillan graduated with a Bachelor of Communications (Journalism), majoring in creative writing and Mr Brillante graduated with a Bachelor of Graphic Design.

Ms McMillan and Mr Brillante will take the skills they learnt at Monitor into the workplace.

"Ben and Gabby have each made a distinctive and valuable contribution to Monitor and the wider University community, and I am sure they're destined for success in their careers," said Monitor editor, Edward O'Daly.

"One of the sad things about internships is that they come to an end and you have to say goodbye to good people."

Both interns said they found their time at Monitor beneficial.

Ms McMillan said: "I think Monitor will help me with my career. I gained stronger interviewing skills. I strengthened the art of listening, following up interesting news grabs, making contacts and involving them with future Monitor stories."

She also developed time management and organisational skills.

"While 2005 was the busiest year at university to date, it was, surprisingly, also the most organised. I was so busy with Monitor, university work became a priority and I became a sucker to deadlines and 'things to do' lists."

Ms McMillan has returned to her hometown of Wagga after a trip to Fiji with friends and is waiting to hear back from potential employers.

"It's pretty nerve-wracking," she said. "I'm trying to relax and enjoy the down time, which, by the way, isn't hard."

Mr Brillante said the opportunity for the Monitor internship presented itself in February 2004 so he "jumped right in."

The experience and knowledge he gained as a photographer for Monitor over the last two years had been very rewarding, he said.

"I started off not exactly knowing 'how' to take the pictures for Monitor, and now I'm getting paid doing photo gigs outside of Monitor."

Out of the internship Mr Brillante said he gained, "skills, skills, skills."

"I can now confidently take photos of any event and know that I have the skills to satisfy its requirements," Mr Brillante said.

Mr Brillante hopes for a full-time job in graphic design or photography.

"It doesn't matter to me which one," Mr Brillante said.

"I have a passion for both."
IT giant gives prizes to top graduates

Edward O'Daly

19 December 2005: Two highflying students from the School of Information Sciences and Engineering have had their achievements recognised by computing giant Microsoft.

The inaugural Microsoft Prize for Software Engineering was awarded to Brett Buckle, while Nathan Khiem Vu became the first ever recipient of the Microsoft Prize for Information Technology. Each student was recognised for their academic achievement in the two disciplines with the prizes, announced at Monday's graduation.

Mr Buckle and Mr Vu already have jobs in IT lined up for next year Photo: Edward O'Daly

Mr Buckle, who starts work with Centrelink in February, said it was a "genuine surprise" to win the award and praised the quality of teaching and the "help available" on the course.

"I liked playing around with computers and I chose the most computer orientated course I could find - but when I started I had no idea how to do any of it," he said.

Mr Vu, who also received a Chancellor's Commendation, has secured a job as a database administrator with the Department of Defence, having worked in IT throughout his studies.

"It's a nice feeling to get some recognition," he said of the prize.

Deeps De Silva, marketing manager at Microsoft, explained the firm was happy to reward students and felt the University of Canberra was the "logical" place to sponsor awards, as there were many projects using the company's .NET system in the capital.

"Students will drive the future of the IT industry and Microsoft consider them as the vital piece contributing to our knowledge economy," Mr De Silva added.

For further information about Monitor Online contact the editor: monitor@canberra.edu.au
Friendly staff persuade graduate to stay on

Edward O’Daly

19 December 2005: The encouragement of his lecturers has persuaded an Indian student to stay in Canberra to do honours in software engineering science.

Benson Babu, from Kerala, who graduated with a Bachelor of Software Engineering at Monday's ceremony, had not intended to do further study, but had enjoyed working with the "friendly lecturers" who taught his course.

Mr Babu will stay on to do honours in Canberra
Photo: Edward O’Daly

“I didn’t have any plans to study, but with the encouragement of my lecturers, I decided to apply to do honours,” he said.

Mr Babu came to the University through a bridging program, which involved a year of study in India before making the move to Canberra.
Exceptional honours students punch above weight

Edward O'Daly

19 December 2005: Two exceptional marks of 95 percent from British examiners sealed a first class honours degree for Rochelle Bright.

Ms Bright was one of eight students on the University's Bachelor of Philosophy (Honours) program and her supervisor, Mary Walsh, invited two overseas academics to review her thesis on gender theorist Judith Butler.

"They said they had never read such a high quality work," Dr Walsh said.

Ms Bright hopes to go on to study a PhD with Dr Walsh as do fellow first class honours graduates Vanessa Prail and Zoe Moses, who beat senior academics to have their work presented at the Australasian Political Studies Association annual conference in New Zealand earlier this year.

However, all the students are looking forward to a break after the uncompromising degree program.

"It was mentally, physically and emotionally challenging," said Ms Moses.

Ms Prail described the course as a full-time job and thanked Dr Walsh for her support during the program.