



## GRADUATE RESEARCH NEWS

March 2009

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Issue 1

### Welcome

This Graduate Research News arrives at a special time of the year when early autumn's cool breezes caress the earth and the land dons new colours. These lovely images are what we look forward to after a hot summer. With great enthusiasm and excitement just like the land welcoming a new season, the Rural Health Graduate Research program would like to greet you with our best wishes and warmest welcome. We love to share with you inspiring developments and events along the promising graduate research journey into 2009.

### Greetings from Acting Co-Director - Dr Erica Bell

It is a delight to be working with Quynh to support her efforts to continue to deliver a strong support program for postgraduate studies in the UDRH. As Acting Co-Director I will concentrate on research capacity-building within and beyond the UDRH. My role in relation to postgraduate research promises to be one of the best parts of this job, because we have such an active and dedicated coordinator and such a vibrant postgraduate community. The extent of publishing and presentation of conference papers that has been recorded for 2008 from our postgraduate community is testimony to that. So too is the deep searching that goes on at the postgraduate seminars which I've always enjoyed attending - that's where I learn the most about research.

When I look back at my own postgraduate studies there is one thing that I probably would have done differently: enjoy my study more! What I wish for all our postgraduate students is a program of study that is deeply rewarding, not just in a career sense but also in terms of intellectual engagement and growth. Most importantly, learning is meant to be fun. A postgraduate degree can sometimes seem like walking through an endless field of thorns with very little time to smell the intellectual roses. Many of you are balancing jobs and families with your postgraduate studies. Yet I hope that



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you will take the time this year, as I will, to participate in the program of seminars and other activities that Quynh organises for you. Like many of our students and their supervisors, I always come away from such events feeling replenished and encouraged through that sense of connection with an intellectual community.

I look forward to seeing you at these events this year and talking more with you about your work.

## Our new candidates and supervisors

The University Department of Rural Health (UDRH) has been further enriched by the arrival of new students. Warmest welcome goes to **Chau Tran**, a new PhD student, and **Ha Hoang**, who continues her research journey after having completed a Master of Medical Science degree. **Winifred Vanderploeg** has also successfully transferred from Master of Medical Science (MMedSc) to Doctor of Philosophy (PhD).

We would like to express our congratulations to Ha Hoang (supervised by Drs **Quynh Lê** and **Rosa McManamey**) and Winifred Vanderploeg (supervised by Professor **Judith Walker** and Dr **Ali Maginness** from RCS) for winning the Tasmanian Graduate Research Scholarships that permit them to undertake research higher degrees with us. We wish you both well in your research journey.

Dr **Bruce Williams** (UDRH) and Prof **Michael Ashby** (School of Medicine) have applied to be registered supervisors. We look forward to working with you.

Professor **Sue Kilpatrick** has taken up an appointment as Pro Vice Chancellor (Rural and Regional) at the Warrnambool campus of Deakin University in Victoria. However, Sue will remain with the UDRH as Honorary Research Associate and will continue to supervise her current students.

## Good news from GR Students

I would like to share with you the success stories of our students. Please join me in our congratulations to the following students:

- **Martin Harris** has submitted his PhD thesis – congratulations to Martin and his supervisors Professor **Judith Walker** and Dr **Marion Myhill**.
- **Shandell Elmer, Shelagh Lowe, Peter Mulholland, and Anna Spinaze** have their papers accepted at the 10th National Rural Health Conference on 17 – 20 May 2009 in Cairns.
- **Shelagh Lowe** is also a co-author on a paper published in Rural and Remote Health entitled “The Rural Allied Health Workforce Study (RAHWS): Background, Rationale and Questionnaire Development”.

- **Susan Johns** has had an abstract “Enhancing Early Childhood Collaborations in Small Rural Communities” accepted for presentation at the WA Childcare and Early Childhood Education Conference in Perth on 3 – 5 April.

## Images of yesterday - the 2008 Collaborative Graduate Research Symposium

The end of an academic year is a time for reflection and celebration. The celebration started with the Collaborative Graduate Research Symposium on 13 November 2008 in the Hobart Dechaineux Theatre, where our research students, supervisors, and other colleagues shared insightful stories of their research journeys in a collaborative spirit.

The symposium was a joint event among the UDRH, Rural Clinical School, School of Nursing and Midwifery, School of Human Life Science and Launceston Clinical School. We were most fortunate to have A/Professor **Lisa Bourke**, School of Rural Health, University of Melbourne, as our keynote speaker. The topic of her keynote address was “*Challenges of doing multidisciplinary research*”. It was an inspiring delivery.

The symposium program included a wide range of students’ research inquiries on health issues that had emerged at different stages of their research. Together with the participation of their supervisors and colleagues, in various formats and activities – such as student discussion panel, posters, keynote speech, and ‘food for thoughts’ – the symposium created a dynamic research experience for all, intellectually and socially.

Professor **Judith Walker** in her opening address warmly welcomed 60 participants to the symposium. She applauded the collaborative spirit in research and interaction among the Schools and Centres in the Faculty of Health Science. The Dean of Graduate Research, Professor **Peter Frappell**, was also present at the opening session, despite his extremely busy schedule.



Student Discussion Panel

The symposium belonged to the participating students and they were the stars of the event. Fifteen students from the above schools individually presented their research in progress. Congratulations go to our rural health students (**Glenn Aslin, Dr Rosemary Cane, Deb Carnes, Sharon Hetherington, Chona Hannah, Ree Van Galen, Lorraine Smith, Anna Spinaze and Kate Squibb**) who presented at the event. We were greatly impressed and inspired by the quality of their research and the vitality of the presentations. What a wonderful treat for all!

For students, research is a personal journey but they are not alone. Their supervisors, support staff and caring others are there with them to share their research journeys. We would like to thank those who chaired the sessions which were undertaken with care, enthusiasm and motivation.

Generally, most symposiums tend to fade away towards the end just like the sun sets after a glorious summer day but it was the opposite at this symposium. Like magic, the discussion panel (Dr **Lisa Dalton**, **Cassie Saunders**, **Suzette Seaton** and chairperson Dr **Erica Bell**) in the final session enlightened the atmosphere of the symposium with lively stories to tell, fascinating research experiences to share, and a good sense of humour embedded in their reflections. It was like a fresh summer breeze rewarded to all the participants at the end of the symposium.

The symposium dinner was a time to share socially. The evening was filled with laughter, warm greetings, good chats, yummy food and romantic candle lights. All added an air of happiness and cheerfulness to the research atmosphere, to mark and celebrate the end of an unforgettable symposium.

We look forward to our upcoming Collaborative Graduate Research Symposium in Launceston on 16 June 2009.

## Student's reflection – The PhD journey of Chona Hannah

I cannot believe that I have actually reached this stage. All these things are made possible thanks to the support and encouragement of my family and supervisors. In the early months of my PhD study, I devoted as much time as I could to my study. I was busy preparing the preliminary plan, survey questionnaire, interview questions as well as meeting the requirements for my ethics application.

Since the acceptance of my enrolment, my life has changed. I am not only a student but also a mother, a housewife and an employee as well. A month before I decided to enrol in a PhD study, I got a casual job. I normally worked twice a week, on an on-call basis. After three months, I found myself stressed out. I lost myself and it was like a different me. I got upset with my kids easily, especially when I was doing some research and reading. I was not able to balance my study and my commitment to the family. As a result, early January last year, I and my husband had a good talk about what were, and what should be my priorities and we were able to come up with a mutual decision which we think is good for everyone. I gave up work and focussed on my kids and my study. Then I started feeling that I am back to my normal self.



*Chona presented her paper at the International Conference, 2008*

In February 2008, I presented a paper (which is part of my ongoing research) at the Iloilo international research conference in the Philippines. It was a good

experience. What I learned from the conference is that having a good paper to present is not good enough. What is more important is how you present your topic and that you are able to connect with the audience. During the year, I

was able to finish a few more chapters of my thesis, attended the graduate research student support workshops, piloted my questionnaire and started data collection.

Reflecting on what I have done in my first year as a PhD candidate, I ask myself the following questions:

### ***What is the hardest part of my study so far? How do I cope with it?***

The hardest part of my study is when I lose my focus. I cannot motivate myself to start again as there are many other things in my head. In addition, I have difficulty organising my thoughts or ideas. This is probably because I don't trust my ideas enough to keep me going. Sometimes I find it hard to allocate my time for studies and the kids. I think I lack time management skills and motivation.

I have tried to change my study time which I think will best suit me and the kids. I study at night when my kids are already in bed and if I am too tired that night, I go to sleep early and then get up early to study. This seems to work for me.

### ***What have I learned that will be useful throughout my candidature?***

In the past year, the important things I learned included: being able to make sure that I know my reason for taking this course and its importance to my personal and intellectual growth; being able to trust myself more in my thoughts and ideas; knowing the importance of time management; encouraging myself to participate more in conferences and reviewing my work very often.

### ***What have I realised?***

I have realised that the path I took in taking up this PhD course is just like my first year as a migrant in this new called home. I was in "stages of culture shock". In the first stage, I was very excited and full of enthusiasm. Later on, I encountered difficulties, experiencing "culture shocks", and then there was an adjustment period.

Research is a journey full of twists and turns, a fascinating mixture of happiness and anxiety. Luckily I have Quynh and Sue, my supervisors as good companions in this journey. The light is there for me in the horizon!

## Conference funding grants

A new initiative in 2009 is the conference funding grants. The Rural Health Graduate Research program is offering four Rural Health conference funding grants in 2009 (two in the first round and two in the second round). The grant will cover conference registration, travel and accommodation up to \$1,500 per award and is additional to the allowance for students during their candidatures.

These grants are designed to allow research-active students to attend a national or international conference in 2009. In awarding these grants, preference will be given to students who have been accepted for a full paper presentation (poster presentation excluded), in particular if the paper is peer-reviewed.

To be eligible for these conference funding grants, the applicant must be a research student currently enrolled with the University Department of Rural Health. Closing dates for applications are: **30 March 2009** (for the first round) and **19 October 2009** (for the second round). Further information is available at: <http://www.ruralhealth.utas.edu.au/gr/scholarships.php>

## Student's paper receives positive feedback

The UDRH received an email from Mrs Kristin McBain, a PhD student at the Mount Isa Centre for Rural and Remote Health, applauding a published article entitled "*Having a baby in the new land: a qualitative exploration of the experiences of Asian migrants in rural Tasmania*" of UDRH PhD candidate Ha Hoang, Dr Quynh Lê and Professor Sue Kilpatrick about pregnant migrant women in the Australian health system.

Currently 12 weeks pregnant with her first child, Kristin said: "I myself have felt uneasy about this step in my life, and parts of it I have found quite confusing to navigate. And as a white Australian, I am expected to understand the system...so I can only imagine how confusing it must be for those who are not able to communicate about their issues (whether held back by language or by belief)."

"I think these issues are particularly exacerbated in rural areas such as ours, due to added pressures of lack of choice in service provision, and often lack of required resources like interpreters. I applaud you and the rest of the team for performing this research - it is so valuable in making our health care systems more about care and understanding, and less about economics and administration."

The full text of the article is available at: <http://www.rrh.org.au/articles/showarticlenew.asp?ArticleID=1084>

## Administrative staff in 2009

I would like to welcome **Kim Izard**, Graduate Research Executive Assistant, who will work with us in the next six months. Kim can be contacted on Monday – Thursday from 9 – 1.30pm, Email: [Kim.Izard@utas.edu.au](mailto:Kim.Izard@utas.edu.au), Tel: (03) 6324 4048.

## Student support program 2009

Our Rural Health Graduate Research Student Support Program has been enriched by many contributions from students and staff members. We specially would like to thank all supervisors who volunteer to help with our graduate research workshop series in 2009.

The 2009 Graduate Research Student Support Program timetable is available at the Rural Health Graduate Research web site at: <http://www.ruralhealth.utas.edu.au/gr/support-program.php>. Please visit this URL regularly for up-to-date workshop information.

This year, we will offer three special workshops: Advanced Features in Word 2007 (conducted by NDA Training Consultancy); Statistics for Health Practitioners and Making Sense of Research Data using SPSS and Excel (conducted by Dr Tom Hartley), and NVivo (QSR International). Spaces for these workshops are limited. Please register your interest at your earliest convenience by contacting Kim Izard (contact details as above).

## Event calendar

- Constructing researchable questions from practice: Research design and choosing methods, 10 – 12 noon, 3 Mar, videoconferencing.
- Graduate Research Induction, 10:30 am -12: 30 pm, 5 Mar, Room 328 Anne O'Byrne Building, Launceston.
- Tips and tricks on using EndNote to manage your information, Session 1: 10 – 12 noon, session 2: 2– 4pm, 10 Mar, Anne O'Byrne Building, Launceston.
- Reviewing the evidence: literature reviewing, levels of evidence; identifying gaps; documenting a search strategy, 10am – 12 noon, 17 Mar, videoconferencing.
- Academic writing: designing and writing an 'auditable' research report/thesis, 1 – 3pm, 24 Mar, videoconferencing.
- Research methods 1 (methods used to elicit & analyse quantitative) data, 10am – 12 noon, 7 Apr, videoconferencing.
- Research methods 2 (methods used to elicit & analyse qualitative) data, 10am – 12 noon, 21 Apr, videoconferencing.
- Linking chapters and shaping up the thesis using advanced word features, 10.30am – 1.30pm, 23 Apr, Launceston.

I hope you have enjoyed reading this first issue of Graduate Research News in 2009. The items we shared with you here are, in a way, not simply news. They reflect the dynamic and collective spirit of our students and colleagues working together as participating members of a research journey. Any journey has its moments of triumphs and challenges. The important thing is how to turn challenges into triumphs. With this collective spirit, I strongly believe that we can!

Quynh Lê

