



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
NEWCASTLE  
AUSTRALIA

# Student Profiles Development Studies Graduate Samantha Orr

## Graduate profile: Samantha Orr

Graduating with a Bachelor of Development Studies at UON, Samantha has had the opportunity to follow her dream, to work for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), all the way to Bangkok. Samantha knew early on in her studies that she was interested in working for OCHA and shaped her career to follow that path.

“Doing the program [Development Studies] further identified what exactly I wanted to do and what I wanted to pursue as a career. It also afforded me the ability to access people who worked in the industry who I was able to speak with and ask their advice on how to get where I wanted to go. Many of those that I got to meet through doing the degree I still speak with”.

“The degree provided excellent foundation knowledge, but also trained me in research and how to read and digest lots of information in minimal time. Particularly through the honours program I made several good contacts that I have kept and that provided me with great advice about the best ways to get into the industry, learning from their early working experiences. That for me has been the most useful for my career, to learn how others did it”.

While studying, Samantha volunteered with an Australian NGO, Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA. This was essential in later getting her first position after graduating.

“After working for APHEDA for a year I was accepted into the AusAID graduate program, where I worked for nearly 4 years, mostly in their Humanitarian Division. I then moved to my current position as Humanitarian Affairs Office with the OCHA regional office in Bangkok where I have been working for 2 years. One of the reasons why I was successful with OCHA was that through my AusAID job I engaged with many members of the OCHA team in Bangkok and so they already knew me and I had worked with them through trainings and humanitarian deployments”.



***Samantha worked in Nepal in the Urban Search and Rescue Coordination cell, after the 2015 earthquake in Kathmandu***



***Samantha was part of OCHA's humanitarian aid response in Fiji after devastating Tropical Cyclone Winston swept through in February 2016. Winston was the strongest ever recorded tropical cyclone to make landfall in Fiji, affecting over 350,000 people.***

In order to further her career and achieve a position with the UN, Samantha undertook further studies.

“To work for the UN, a Master’s degree is basically an entry level qualification so straight after completing my undergrad I did Master’s degree which has been critical. I am also learning another language which I started pretty late. It’s always good to know what expectations potential employers in your chosen field want and what makes you competitive....you may find you have to study longer than you thought!”

Samantha received her Master of Arts (International Relations) at Deakin University. She has also completed the Humanitarian Leadership Programme which is a Deakin/Save the Children initiative and is now a recognised Post-Graduate Certificate in Humanitarian Leadership at Deakin University.

“Think about what you actually want to do and start investigating how you might get there. Depending on what it is, it may take several years and several jobs to do it. Always know where you want to go. Don't rely on things just falling into your lap - I was never that lucky! Also, getting contacts and being able to speak with people is really important. Particularly if you want to get into the humanitarian or aid sector as knowing people is often as important as what you know. These people can also tell you how they got into the industry, which is becoming ever more competitive, as there are multitudes of different ways to do it”.

For current students, Samantha recommends mixing up your subjects.

“make sure you are doing all those that you need to do but also picking subjects that interest you. Also look for opportunities to do practical things like internships that can be credited to your degree. During my undergrad I did the Australian National Internship Programme, through the Australian National University, which enabled me to write a research project while working with an NGO association. It was really helpful in further identifying what I wanted to do when I finished but gave me good contacts, while also bolstering my CV”



***Samantha with her team from Nepal in the Urban Search and Rescue Coordination Cell***

## **CONTACT**

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