



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
NEWCASTLE  
AUSTRALIA



# Student Profiles Development Studies Graduate Mel Weston

## Graduate Profile: Mel Weston

After completing her Bachelor of Development Studies in 2014, Mel Weston is working in community development, engagement and planning in Victoria.

Following her graduation, Mel worked causally at a Humanitarian Settlement Service. She then travelled for 4 months through Nepal and India.

Once she returned to Australia Mel applied for a number of different roles across Australia. In the beginning, she had a challenging interview for an exciting opportunity and left unhappy with her performance. This motivated her to improve her interview technique and practice with the UON Careers Service. This proved to be an excellent decision as she was more successful in subsequent interviews, she receiving job offers in different areas – waste management, conservation and community development.

Mel based her decision on which job to choose on *“timing, gut feeling and potential for career development”*. She accepted a local government community planning role in Victoria

aimed at building the capacity of towns, localities and neighbourhoods within the municipality. Mel reflects *“it was a great crash course in working with diverse communities with a range of aspirations for their future... it was very rewarding”*. Mel’s job was located in a dry, inland area with a relatively low socioeconomic status. This shows that opportunities for Development Studies students exist in lots of different places. According to Mel *“it opens lots of doors for graduates willing to move”*.



Figure 1 Mel (left) at RiverConnect’s World Environment Day “Breakfast with the Birds” event at Reedy Swamp.

Mel is currently a Project Officer for *RiverConnect*, a community engagement and environmental partnership program. Mel notes that the professional networks were crucial to gaining her current position. She says *“the networks I made allowed a level of recognition of my passion and skills which worked in my favour”*.

Mel has been working for *RiverConnect* for more than 6 months on a range of projects including conservation and natural resource management, art and culture, health and wellbeing. She works with social and private enterprises to increase connection and appreciation of the river and wetlands for both the local community and visitors.

*“The role allows me to work with my varied passions including working with Aboriginal communities, multicultural communities, young people, hands-on conservation as well as anti-litter and illegal dumping projects. I facilitate regular community events and activities to connect the community to these fantastic assets in their back yard.”*

Her advice to students and graduates is to pursue a range of strategies to find your dream job including *“volunteering, networking, leadership roles and professional development courses which will build your skill base and make you more job ready. Project management experience has been invaluable to me and is the key to many roles. Networking and relationship building and showing strong commitment and work ethic... that was what got me noticed.”*

## CONTACT

Associate Professor Kathy Mee

Program Convenor

T + 61 2 4921 6451

For more information visit: [www.newcastle.edu.au/degrees/bachelor-of-development-studies](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/degrees/bachelor-of-development-studies)

Development Studies provided Mel knowledge and skills in community engagement, natural resource management, sustainable agriculture, sustainability, statistics, and working with Indigenous communities which has been crucial in her career thus far.

*“I thoroughly enjoyed my University experience. I loved the variety of subjects and the lecturers’ passion.”*

Not one to rest on her laurels, Mel is currently undertaking the Fairley Leadership Program which introduces participants to a regional leaders, considers the challenges of the regional setting and allows them to develop skills to steer change.



Figure 2 Mel (far right) and colleagues in the Fairley Leadership Program 2017.

Her advice to prospective students is—*“If you are passionate about these types of issues then definitely do it. Development Studies attracts talented and passionate people that go on to do great things. Get involved in as many parts of University life and professional development as you can. Just say yes and take opportunities that come your way!”*

