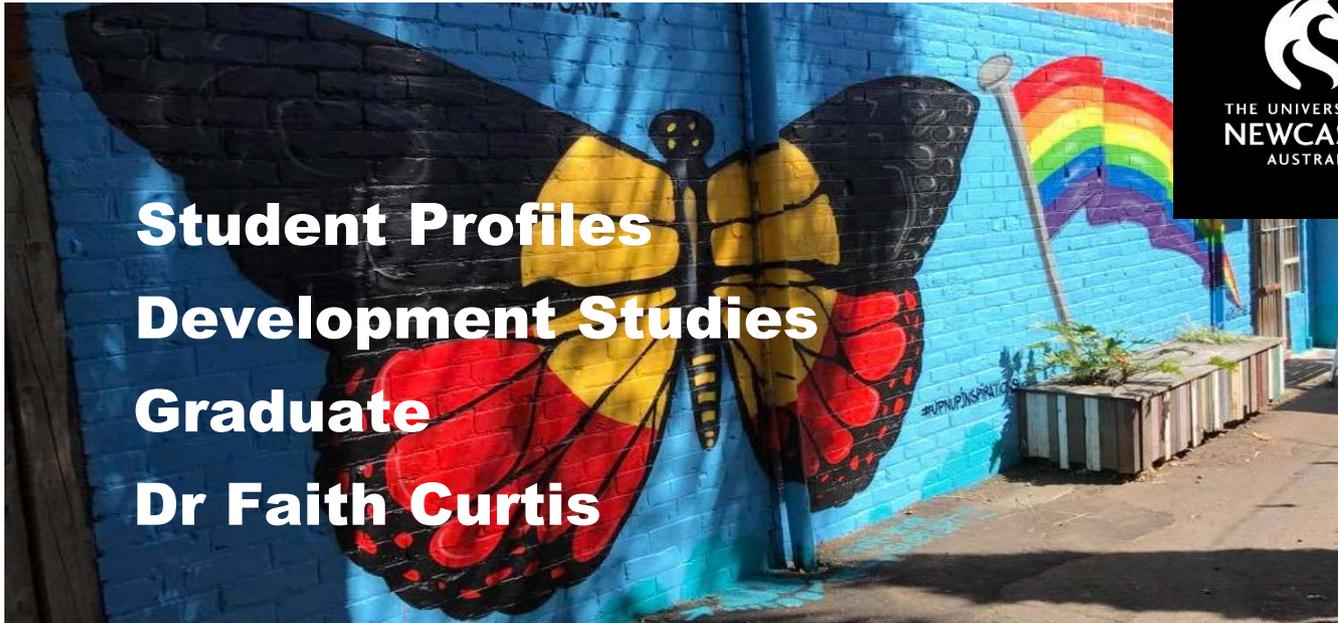




THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA



Student Profiles Development Studies Graduate Dr Faith Curtis

Graduate Profile: Dr Faith Curtis

Graduating from a Bachelor of Development Studies followed by Honours and PhD has inspired Faith to co-create a business UP&UP while working in academia at the University of Newcastle (UON).

Faith started at UON as a mature-aged student enrolled in a Bachelor of Business which she was studying at night while working full-time. This all changed once Faith started studying an elective found in the Development Studies degree and found what she was passionate about. Faith quickly decided to apply for admission into Development Studies feeling like it was what she needed to do.

"My first semester in Development Studies completely changed my world-view. It gave me a drive for social justice, community engagement and development which I know I've always cared about but the degree gave me the practical skills to act on it."

Faith loved being at university and felt that there was still more to do after graduating from a Bachelor of Development Studies and decided to do an Honours year.

"I was looking for a way to stay. I'd attended a great Honours Information Session and talked to some of the academics about the process and ideas for my topic. Honours taught me how to do my own research and me more self-sufficient."

For her project, Faith was interested in the plight of refugees and asylum seekers in Australia and based her thesis on an Alternative Place of Detention (APOD) in Adelaide.

"My main interest was in the outcry that came from that community near the APOD and the fear it seemed to cause within the community. However when I investigated this, I found there was a groundswell of support and care from the community for the effected refugees and asylum seekers. The community supporting them would bring toys for the children or offer to help teach them English. There was only a small vocal group in opposition that the media had emphasized."

Faith received first-class Honours in 2011 for her thesis. Deciding to go on with a PhD, Faith focused her research focus on refugee and non-refugee encounters in Newcastle focusing on the positive experiences that many refugees experience of social inclusion, belonging, happiness and hope. She graduated in 2017.





While studying her PhD, Faith and her partner, Shane Kennedy also co-created their own community arts business UP&UP. UP&UP is an acronym for 'Unique People. Unique Promise' promoting their philosophy that everyone is unique and holds their own talents and potential. As a business team, they work with different organisations, community groups and schools on youth programs, public art projects and wellness activities.

"Through my studies, I developed a number of transferable skills that are imperative to the running of UP&UP especially communication skills at different levels, writing successful grant applications and funding proposals. I also learned about asset-based community development to see that communities have their own strengths and assets and to tap into those. We see this as a really important way to build more inclusive communities as a top-down approach doesn't work."

Faith has seen change on the ground with communities they work with - it brings people together to talk, be creative and support one another. Through Development Studies, she learned about the benefit of public art to place and that gave her the confidence in their business, knowing that behind the art - it's about community development and engagement.

"We received some funding to do a great project in Hamilton South to paint around 20 apartment-style letterboxes down a street. We organised community meetings to decide what people wanted to see - designs, colours and how people wanted to help. We facilitated the project and held BBQs at the same time. It wasn't necessarily just about the finished product - it's about the process of bringing the community together. We saw heaps of talented, supportive people and when we go back, we feel that we are part of that community and people still talk to us about what they remember of the project."

CONTACT

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For more information visit: www.newcastle.edu.au/degrees/bachelor-of-development-studies

Now Faith also works part-time as a senior research assistant and lecturer at UON. In 2017, she lectured for courses including Introduction to Human Geography, Global Poverty and Development, and Society and Space.

As a senior research assistant, she works on two projects at the moment. Faith is working with Associate Professor Kathy Mee's work looking at urban regeneration and Indigenous presence and absence in Newcastle and with Future Fellow Associate Professor Sarah Wright on her research into weather cultures, including their expression through songs, songlines and stories, in order to better understand how people relate to anomalous weather.

Faith's advice to current students is to "soak it in and enjoy it. The Development Studies cohort are fairly like-minded, interested in social justice issues and it's a great time to make friends, build networks and volunteer."

At the moment, Faith is enjoying working UON and building UP&UP. She hopes to register UP&UP as a not-for-profit organisation one day.

"I never came to university for career development, I wanted to know about the world – but in the process, I found my passion for social development and inclusion and developed my career in the end too."

