



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA

Student Profiles

Development Studies

Graduate

Dr Nicola Vaughan

Graduate Profile: Dr Nicola Vaughan

Nicola knew she wanted to work in social or community services but she didn't foresee that Development Studies would lead her to a career focussed on housing and homelessness. Nicola completed a Bachelor of Development Studies in 2004, followed by Honours and PhD. Nicola is now the Assistant Manager Social Housing and Homelessness Services for the ACT Government.

"It's not what I thought would have happened when I started studying. I majored in Urban and Regional Studies, I started it in the first year that it was offered. The focus on the sociology of housing has really helped in my career."

After completing a Bachelor of Development Studies, Nicola decided to go on and complete Honours. Her Honours project explored representations of Aboriginal people in urban spaces. Nicola considered narratives created by and about Bangarra dance theatre and NAISDA (National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association) dance college to explore Aboriginal belonging and identity.

Nicola started applying for jobs when she completed her Honours project, knowing that she wanted to work in community or social services. She soon received an offer to work as a Housing Manager with Housing Victoria.

"I was working with public housing tenants, assessing applications, managing tenancies and linking at-risk people into appropriate support channels. Public housing is a limited resource so I needed to focus on those most in need and working alongside support workers to ensure they were allocated an appropriate house. Here I became interested in the intersections between policy and practice, particularly when they impact on meaningful places for people like 'home'."

In 2007, Nicola felt that she missed studying and research which was her main driver for deciding return to academia and taking on a PhD.

"My PhD studies helped me to further develop my writing, teamwork and project management skills. The opportunities that you get while doing a PhD like tutoring and research assistant work were really complimentary and helped me in moving to the public service afterwards."





In her PhD research, Nicola looked at stories about public housing that aren't typically considered when shaping policy.

"I did a case study of gardens in public housing, understanding the everyday practices and stories at home and in communities. I wanted to learn how these construct places. I took this path with my research to broaden the lens with which policy looks at and tries to understand people. Looking at these spaces with a less prescriptive, policy-driven lens has the potential to add some important, missing elements current policy."

After completing her PhD, she began working for the ACT Government in the Policy and Participation team. Here Nicola worked on the policy around public housing in the ACT as well as working to encourage community participation through initiatives such as gardening competitions and newsletters.

Now Nicola is now the Assistant Manager Social Housing and Homelessness Services at the ACT Government. She is working to improve policy around homelessness and community housing managing \$20 million worth of homelessness sector contracts and business relationships.

To students considering Development Studies, Nicola highly recommends valuing the flexibility in the degree which allowed her to pick subjects that accommodated for her interests with the number of different majors offered.

"I loved the breadth of topics and diversity of ideas that you get exposed to. It challenged my ways of thinking and introduced me to different ways to analyse topics. The passion and supportiveness of the academic staff was really important to my experience studying too."

Nicola's advice to students currently undertaking a Bachelor of Development Studies is to start looking into the types of jobs you may be interested applying for early in your degree.

"Think about where you want your career to go. It will really help you to look at the ways you'll be able to respond to selection criteria and consider areas that you might still want to build on. Figure out how you might be able to address those gaps and use the resources university has to offer. When I was applying for my first job in the ACT, the Careers Service looked over my job application and the interview practice was so practical and helpful."

Nicola is not sure what the future holds but she'd love to continue learning within her field - *"It's really important for me to stay in a field that is community services oriented. I am focussed on the opportunity to make lives better somehow."*



CONTACT

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