



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA

Student Profiles

Development Studies

Graduate

Jane Rich

Graduate Profile: Dr Jane Rich

Completing a Bachelor of Development Studies (Honours) degree followed by a PhD paved the way for Jane's career in academia. Jane has gone on to investigate how psychological, social and environmental factors influence and are linked to wellbeing and public health.

For Jane, studying Development Studies and her working as a casual Research Assistant after graduating are pivotal to her success as an academic.

“Development Studies was the greatest foundation of research, theory and understanding of the world. It's showed me that we don't live in silos, everything impacts us. My background in Human Geography always influences my work, it's helped me to be critical of social and structural environments, organisations and governments that impact our day-to-day lives.”

Jane's interest in studying the environment and health together began while completing her Honours project. Her project focused on issues experienced by women living in rural and remote drought affected areas, using data collected from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health.

Her Honours research became a pilot for her PhD, which examined three cohorts of women – younger, middle-aged and older women – and explored their experiences of ongoing drought in Australia and specifically how these experiences affect mental health, aging and major life stages (such as child bearing).

Working with Dr Sarah Wright throughout her Honours project and PhD was influential to Jane's career, and she remembers this as the best part of studying Development Studies. Jane enjoyed accompanying Sarah to Arnhem Land, seeing her research working alongside Indigenous communities, and found this to be incredibly rewarding.



Figure 1 Jane at her PhD graduation ceremony, capturing her happy personality

Jane is now a qualitative health researcher in the Centre for Resources Health and Safety and the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health at the University of Newcastle.

“Mining or rural and remote communities are both reliant on resources and the state of these resources impacts their experiences or can cause communities to transition and change.”

Over the last few years, Jane’s research interests have expanded to look at male-dominated workplaces and industries, such as mining and the defence forces. This research is investigating how these industries deal with mental health. The aim of the research is to develop strategies to help remove the stigma of suffering from mental illness and, therefore, enable better access to support services.

Jane reflects that *“the workplace is just another environment, whether it is drought, the workplace or a rural community. My work is always observing how the environment sways our health and wellbeing, whether it’s built or natural, the environment has strong implications on us.”*

For current students interested in research, Jane recommends taking every opportunity that you can, whether it be volunteering, fieldwork, excursions, honours or conferences, these will all help you to build your network. If you want to work in research or as an academic, your lecturers, tutors and peers have so much knowledge to share.

Jane also states that academia can be very critical.

“You’re sharing your own writing, viewpoints and collaborating with others, so it’s important to see this as shared criticism that strengthens your own thinking and future work, rather than being disheartened.”

As cliché as it is, she notes it’s most important to find your research interests and enjoy yourself - if academia is your calling, this will make it much more fun!



Figure 2 Jane's serious photo from her graduation ceremony

CONTACT

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