

DEVELOPMENT STUDIES GRADUATE

CRAIG ROBINSON



**CURRENT ROLE: ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, FIJI SECTION
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE**

**PAST ROLE: SENIOR POLICY OFFICER, MULTILATERAL AID FOR TRADE
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE**

**DEGREE: BACHELOR OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE**

It was great to get in touch with Craig to see how his impressive career has progressed since our last profile. Craig has been mindful and attentive about his work experiences, and how these experiences are relevant to his next career goal.

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO SINCE WE LAST SPOKE?

Since our last interview with Craig, he has been promoted to second in command, as Assistant Director in the Fiji Section with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Within this role Craig manages the bilateral trade and investment relationship between Australia and Fiji. He also provides advice on Australia's private sector and economic growth aid investments as well as engaging with economic specialists' agencies such as the World Bank, the International Finance Corporation and the Asian Development Bank.

Craig noted that Fiji is coming under major pressure due to the COVID-19 crisis. Before COVID-19, Fiji had recorded ten years of consecutive economic growth. Fiji has one of the most diversified economies in the Pacific. Not only does Fiji have a tourism industry but it has also established manufacturing and construction industries. However, the challenges and opportunities in the future remain unprecedented with tourism making up 39% of Fiji's gross domestic product (GDP) and 35% of total employment. Without the presence of tourism, Fiji is essentially going through one of the largest, if not the largest, economic contractions in their history.

"I think for the Development Studies students, COVID-19 will be the challenge for the next ten years."

At present Craig is talking to a host of networks including people within the private sector and major multilateral and international finance corporations; the World Bank Group and the Asian Development Bank. He is asking, and also trying to answer questions such as, 'What will a post COVID-19 world look like?'

"We can't fully predict what it's going to look like."

HOW RELEVANT HAS YOUR DEGREE BEEN SINCE YOU GRADUATED?

Craig found his niche somewhere between his second and third year of his undergraduate. He completed a major in Globalisation and Economic Development and realised he had a

keen interest in understanding development from a systems based perspective, as well as understanding global and regional trends and what they might mean for development. This major was incredibly helpful in understanding the interdependencies between countries, how countries have come to depend upon each other and what opportunities exist for global collaboration. The interconnected nature of the Development Studies degree allows you to understand the economic, social and environmental factors which underpin development.



Image: Craig Robinson.

"Development Studies essentially gave me the framework."

Craig could not stress enough, the importance of gaining work experience. For Craig, he began the foundations of his career during the [Work Integrated Learning in Development Studies and Human Geography](#) course. Initially struggling to find a placement that offered what Craig was looking for, he reached out to [Jesmond Neighbourhood Centre](#), explained what he was looking for and asked if they had anything they could offer him. His work involved community integration programs, in collaboration with the local Regal Cinema, that were targeted towards migrant families, young mothers and families from

disadvantaged backgrounds. At the end of his two-month placement Craig delivered a report that highlighted the different target groups based on the demographics of the local community, as well as giving a presentation to the executive committee of the initiative. This work experience was what Craig used when he first began to branch out and look for jobs in development.

After graduation, Craig landed a graduate role with the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). In the interview he was clear on what skills he had developed during his work university work placement and why those skills were relevant for gaining his first graduate role.

“I simply based my application on two-months work of experience at the neighbourhood centre. It was enough experience to get me through the door.”

ADVICE: GAIN EXPERIENCE AND ENJOY YOURSELF

For Craig, the advice that he wants to pass on to current students is that you should expose yourself to as much experience as you can. Even if it is for two weeks or three months, you will have gained skills, perspective and knowledge which you can then take with you and apply in your next job. Craig highlighted that when applying for jobs, employers will look for work experience, from the placement course, volunteering and employment while you studied. Something Craig did not do in his undergraduate degree, but wishes he had, is overseas travel. Craig found that he learnt so much during his first work trip to Timor-Leste.

“If you find yourself with the opportunity to go overseas, do it, you will not regret it.”

The Development Studies degree can be so broad and so full of potential, many students can find it overwhelming at times. It took Craig a good two and a half years into his degree to work out the direction he wanted to go in. He sees his undergraduate and career as pieces of a jigsaw, and he took his time to understand and figure out how it all fits together. Craig never imagined he would go into trade, but he has been there for seven years now and really enjoys his work.

“Try to understand where your passion is. Underneath everything you’re learning there will be things that you gravitate towards.”

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

For the last three years Craig has also been working on his PhD, in which he has developed a crisis diplomacy framework for non-traditional security issues. Craig has been applying his framework to the 2007-08 food price crisis which saw 130 million people pushed into poverty. The food price crisis was handled by countries very differently. Due to a lack of trust between countries there was a stark lack of cooperation. Craig is aiming to outline what key diplomatic agreements are necessary between countries when facing non-traditional security issues. Craig presented his work to [The Chicago Council on Global Affairs](#) during their Annual Food Security Symposium in 2018. You can read the piece that Craig wrote about his work [here](#).

Moving forward Craig wishes to remain working in trade and development, and his PhD will certainly open up a number of career opportunities for him. At the moment Craig says he is enjoying the work and issues he is working on, and it will be interesting which pathway he will end up taking next.

“I think you need to enjoy what you’re doing in the present. If you keep trying to find the next best thing you might not actually be enjoying the now.”

For more information about the [Bachelor of Development Studies](#) you can contact:

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