

DEVELOPMENT STUDIES GRADUATE

NIKIETA HESSE



**CURRENT ROLE: GRADUATE PROJECT OFFICER, DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES WESTERN AUSTRALIA
PERTH**

**PAST ROLE: INTERN, UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
TIMOR-LESTE**

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

FUTURE PLANS: POST-GRADUATE STUDIES

Nikieta was eager to share her experiences with current Development Studies students, and give some insight into how she earned her place in an incredibly competitive graduate program. Nikieta is currently based in Perth working for the WA Department of Communities.

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO SINCE GRADUATING?

Nikieta has been making the most of her time since graduating. Nikieta took on a three-month [internship](#) with the United Nations Development Programme in Timor-Leste, working on the final phase of the Justice System Programme (JSP). Nikieta had a diverse range of roles during her internship. These included engagement with internal and external stakeholders including writing and developing periodic newsletters, minutes, social media posts and subtitles for a television commercial, assisting with the drafting of the Country Office Gender Equality Strategy, JSP final programme evaluation and reports as well as assisting the facilitation of workshops in the city and in other municipalities.



Image: Nikieta (front row, left) with her United Nations Development Programme team in Timor-Leste.

This internship, along with other experiences during her undergraduate degree allowed Nikieta to stand out when applying for the [Graduate Development Program](#) within the Department of Communities in Western Australia. Nikieta's current role as a Graduate Project Officer involves developing a monitoring and evaluation plan for the [Essential and Municipal Services Upgrade Program](#) (EMSUP) team as her main piece of

work for this rotation. The long-term program aims to set and ensure a minimum standard for the delivery of essential and municipal services to remote Aboriginal communities beginning with ten remote communities in the Kimberly and Pilbara regions.

Although certain elements of the role, such as travel, are currently restricted by COVID-19, the work that Nikieta is involved in is actually highlighting how COVID-19 is affecting these remote communities, showing a number of disparities between the metropolitan and remote regions. By contacting the communities and stakeholders such as local councils and health professionals Nikieta's team are able to determine whether supplies and services are being affected and if assistance is needed.

Nikieta is currently three-months into the 1.5 year long program and says it has so far been a great opportunity. The graduate program is building on the theory she learnt in the Bachelor of Development Studies, and developing her practical skills in the workforce.

Nikieta first heard about the graduate program as it was posted by another graduate on the [Development Studies at UON Facebook page](#). The program was incredibly competitive with only 15 successful applicants out of the 350 that applied. What made Nikieta stand out from the crowd of applicants, was the amount of experience she already had under her belt. During her undergraduate degree Nikieta completed three overseas short courses and volunteered at the Wilderness Society. After graduating she followed up with her internship in Timor-Leste. Nikieta is confident that these experiences set her apart from other applicants.

Her first overseas course involved studying immigration, human rights and society in Mexico City with [AIM Overseas](#). Her second was with [IndoGenius](#) in India studying contemporary India through experiential learning. Her third course in South Korea was studying disaster risk reduction and climate resilience with UoN.



Image: Nikieta and students in Mexico City.

“The Development Studies degree really promotes going overseas to study.”



Image: Nikieta (left) in India.

HOW RELEVANT HAS YOUR DEGREE BEEN SINCE YOU GRADUATED?

During her degree, Nikieta developed a broad understanding of social issues and how these can be addressed in the public, private and non-government sectors, as well as the dichotomy between needs-based and strengths-based community development approaches. Nikieta understands the importance of considering community perspectives and strengths, and building on these to work towards achieving successful outcomes for communities.

“I didn’t have a specific career in mind, I just knew I liked the topics discussed and explored in the Development Studies degree itself.”

When Nikieta entered the workforce, she realised she was applying the skills she had developed during her degree. Nikieta also values how the degree enhanced her ability to communicate her ideas cohesively in a number of different formats. This skill means she can express her ideas effectively to a broad range of stakeholders and colleagues in her work.

“Critical thinking is an important skill that you are going to use day-to-day in any project within this field.”

ADVICE: UTILISE THE ACADEMIC STAFF AND CHALLENGE YOURSELF

The academic staff within the Development Studies degree were a highlight for Nikieta. Nikieta was able to approach the staff at any time for advice when struggling with deciding what courses to enrol in, to discuss interests, pathways and career aspirations and even provide support and advice after she had graduated.

“We have some really amazing lecturers and tutors who helped me throughout my entire degree.”

Work experience, including volunteering is incredibly valuable once you graduate and are looking for work. Not only does experience give you that competitive edge, but you also enhance your confidence in the skills you have developed throughout your studies.

When you are choosing your courses, it is important to consider what your interests are and what kind of work you want to do in the future. Nikieta believes it is important to enrol in courses that you might find a bit more challenging, as well as some practical skills-based courses.

“I definitely recommend you incorporate more skills based technical courses in your degree.”

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

As Nikieta is in the infancy of her career, there is still so much for her to explore. Nikieta is considering additional studies at the end of the graduate program.

“Doing additional studies will set you apart from other people.”

There is no doubt that Nikieta will find more incredible opportunities and continue to progress in her career.

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

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