

DEVELOPMENT STUDIES GRADUATE

SAMANTHA ORR



**CURRENT ROLE: HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS OFFICER,
UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF
HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS (OCHA),
TUNISIA**

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

Samantha knew early on that she wanted to work in the humanitarian sector, and specifically that she wanted to work with OCHA. All of the decisions Samantha made during and after her Development Studies degree were leading towards her securing her roles with OCHA.

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO SINCE WE LAST SPOKE?

Samantha works as a Humanitarian Affairs Officer with OCHA and is currently based in Tunisia working on Libya operation. As the reporting officer, her role involves briefing the Humanitarian Coordinator for Libya and providing inputs into various reports, such as speeches for the UN Security Council, writing reports for the Security General of the UN, as well as providing situation updates for external reports.

Prior to this position, Samantha was based in Bangkok for six years providing direct support to governments and humanitarian teams in countries throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Samantha was responsible for preparing for disasters, and then supporting government to coordinate international assistance during disaster events. Compared to her current role, which requires her to use highly efficient written communication skills, her time in Bangkok involved much more on the ground support work. Her field support deployments include Cox's Bazar for the Rohingya refugee crisis, Sulawesi for the 2018 earthquake and tsunami and most recently to Mozambique for Cyclone Idai where she worked on getting support for hard to reach or cut off communities.



Image: Mozambique Coordination Hub for the Cyclone Idai response, Beira 2019.



Image: Cox's Bazar Rohingya refugee camp, Kutupalong 2017.



Image: Samantha completing an aerial assessment for the Cyclone Idai response, Mozambique 2019.

Moving to Tunisia was important for Samantha to gain a different set of experiences that enabled her to build new skills. Samantha had gained years of experience addressing and preparing for natural disasters whilst in Bangkok and moving to Tunisia introduced her to complex emergencies which is majority of OCHA's work.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has not stopped the civil conflict in Libya. Years of conflict and a lack of a health system in the country means there is a lot of uncertainty around the countries' capacity to cope with the pandemic. Samantha anticipates that the health concerns and socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic on top of civil war, for Libya and surrounding countries, will lead to challenging circumstances for at least the next 12 months.



Image: Samantha at the demilitarized zone in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In the regional office, DPRK was one of the countries that Samantha was responsible for.

HOW RELEVANT HAS YOUR DEGREE BEEN SINCE YOU GRADUATED?

One of the challenges within the development and humanitarian sectors is that these areas are constantly evolving. However, the Development Studies degree is still relevant to her career. For Samantha, the relevance is less about the content within the courses, and more about habits, and methods of working. For example, Samantha is now responsible for taking in large amounts of information and turning them into something coherent and productive for OCHA. This work builds on skills from her university courses.

“I think that the critical thinking and writing skills that I developed over the degree have been really useful for this job.”

Gaining practical experience was important to Samantha and she sought out her own placement opportunity and completed the [Australian National Internships Program](#). Samantha completed her two-month internship with the [Australian Council for International Development](#). Samantha's project was to research how other countries and governments funded their non-government organisations (NGOs) and what were some of the lessons and recommendations that could be presented to the Australian government with the aim of better engaging with NGOs in Australia. This practical experience was invaluable to Samantha as it provided her with opportunities to network and develop her skills.

Samantha also started volunteering for [Union Aid Abroad- APHEDA](#) while she studied. After a year of volunteering, Samantha secured a paid Administration and Fundraising Officer position with the organisation, which bolstered her resume and increased her practical experience.

As Samantha progressed with her studies, she was able to focus and refine them towards the humanitarian area, particularly in her honours year. Knowing that Masters was an entry level requirement into the humanitarian sector and working within OCHA, Samantha then completed a [Master of Arts \(International Relations\)](#) and a [Graduate Certificate of Humanitarian Leadership](#).

ADVICE: TAKE ON DIFFERENT OPPORTUNITIES

Although an opportunity may not immediately appear relevant to your end goal, you should take on different types of opportunities because you never know how it is going to help you moving forward. You will always learn something from an experience, whether that be discovering a new interest, or you realising you dislike an area.

Volunteering and internships are incredibly valuable, particularly in the development and humanitarian sectors. Getting your foot in the door can sometimes be the hardest part of the process. Any previous experience that can complement your degree, whether that be paid or unpaid, will elevate you and make you a more appealing candidate for a role.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Samantha has achieved what she originally set out to when she first started her Development Studies degree. The 'next step' from here is unclear, however Samantha is happy with her role with OCHA. It may be, that the next time that we catch up with Samantha, she has a PhD under her belt.

To find out more about Samantha, and our other Development Studies graduates please visit; uonblogs.newcastle.edu.au/ges/graduate-profiles/ facebook.com/DevelopmentStudiesatUON/

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

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