

DEVELOPMENT STUDIES GRADUATE

MICHAEL MCDONAGH

**CURRENT ROLE: JUNIOR TOWN PLANNER, BUILDCERT PLANNING
NEWCASTLE**

**PREVIOUS ROLE: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & SPECIAL PROJECTS INTERN, TOWNSHIP OF
HORNEPAYNE,
CANADA**

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

Michael's diverse set of professional and personal experiences in Australia and overseas has meant he has developed an extensive network. Michael followed his interests and that led him to a role in the urban planning sector.

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO SINCE GRADUATING?

Michael took a Goldilocks approach to his tertiary education. After dipping his toes into a few differing degrees, he discovered that the Bachelor of Development Studies hosted a range of courses that really interested him. During his undergraduate degree, Michael went on an [exchange year](#) to [McMaster University](#) in Hamilton, Canada. There Michael studied a range of interesting subjects including politics and indigenous studies which complimented his Aboriginal studies courses at part of his degree at University of Newcastle. Whilst on exchange Michael completed a work placement in his [Practise of Politics](#) course. Michael worked on the [100in1Day](#) project with [Evergreen](#) which was aimed at facilitating workshops to complete 100 events or 'urban interventions' in one day. They helped people instigate their ideas for positive change in the community, no matter the size. This was a wonderful opportunity for Michael to meet people and make new connections.



A hiccup in the paperwork meant that Michael was unable to work whilst in Canada during his exchange. Therefore, one quick bit of advice Michael has for students going on exchange,

“Make sure you have the right visa as an *exchange student*.”

After graduating Michael returned to Canada where he lived for a few years and completed an [Economic Development Internship](#) with the [Township of Hornepayne](#). Michael was involved in organising community events. With COVID-19 having an impact, event organising needed to get creative, for example individuals were asked to complete an activity such as ice fishing or participate in a photo competition.



Michael returned to Australia at the end of 2021 and has been employed as a Junior Town Planner with Buildcert Planning, a private consultancy based in Wickham. Clients approach the company seeking support with residential and commercial developments at various stages across NSW. The planners provide input and advice into the project from the first ideas or concept drawings right up to achieving Council approval. Michael has assisted with work on land feasibility studies, café development, granny flats, dwellings,



swimming pools, assisted living accommodation and more. The assessment process includes interpreting and applying legislation on environmental issues like koala protection and bushfire danger, heritage issues like alterations to dwellings in Hamilton's 'Garden Suburb' heritage area and Aboriginal heritage considerations when disturbing land around Lake Macquarie, interpreting Council's development controls on various issues, liaising with external bodies like Hunter Water & Ausgrid concerning setbacks, and much more.

Michael found the Junior Town Planner role as it had been exclusively advertised on the [Development Studies at UON](#) Facebook site, highlighting the importance of the connections you make whilst at university. If you haven't already, give the page a like and also join the new [Development Studies, University of Newcastle](#) LinkedIn site for ongoing updates, job opportunities and connections.

Michael reflects that his university knowledge paired with his broad range of life experiences, such as travelling and working in hospitality and community development overseas are what made him stand out to get the role.



HOW RELEVANT HAS YOUR DEGREE BEEN SINCE YOU GRADUATED?

Michael now works as a Junior Town Planner, and the transferrable skills that he developed during his undergraduate are essential to his work. Most importantly, are his communication skills. Michael's clear and concise writing skills are key as he and his team put together reports for their clients that are sent onto councils for approval. These reports need to contain appropriate formats and contain relevant jargon to the field. More than that, Michael needs to also be able to relay a summary to the client that they can follow and understand.

Whilst at UON Michael made a great number of meaningful connections with the staff from various area. These connections have led to interesting experiences including an amazing and spontaneous opportunity to be involved in research being conducted by [Associate Professor Sara Motta](#) in Columbia.

ADVICE: GET EXPERIENCED

As a Development Studies student, it is important that you immerse yourself in various experiences. Whether that is through volunteering, internships, or overseas travel, all of these will add to and build upon the foundations you are setting up at university. By placing yourself into new settings, you will organically widen your network as you meet new people in new places.



PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Michael is currently enjoying working in the urban planning sector and seeing how his work is applied in the real world. In the future Michael may pursue further study, or we may talk to him again overseas!

To find out more about Michael 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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