

STUDENT STORY



Emma Barr

Graduating 2022 with First Class Honours.

University: University of Wollongong

Degree: Bachelor of International Studies (Honours)

International Relations Major,

Double Minor – Japanese and Psychology.

Emma's thesis looked at international responses to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

What's Next?

Emma has successfully applied to the Commonwealth Government of Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) graduate program and begins this exciting journey in January 2023. This highly sought after position includes multiple rotations (including one internationally) and exposes the graduates to a diverse cross section of the activities of the Department. The program also incorporates an element of further postgraduate study which Emma is looking forward to.

How important was CUC Southern Shoalhaven in your study journey?

VERY important, It's great to be surrounded by like-minded people and to have access to a Centre Manager who knows the uni space really well and who is so well connected. It's people like Adam who encouraged me to keep going and was able to point out the opportunities and the bigger picture that really assisted in me not only graduating, but to be able to graduate with first class honours. I love the sense of community that the CUC provides, it's been such a welcoming and friendly space from the get-go. It took the stress out of lots of aspects of study for me. It was a place where I could come and be productive, a community of smiley faces telling me "you can do this". It was also really helpful to have access to really good technology, I have a very old laptop that doesn't have word and it's pretty buggy at times, so to have access to computers with all the software and hardware I needed and a fast internet connection was great. It's also a place where I could go to get my social fix.

What other challenges has CUC helped you overcome?

For me one of the main things it helped me with was boosting my confidence –the self-belief that I could do this incredibly challenging thing and to see the bigger picture. Uni in the COVID era was an isolating experience for me, I found it hard to connect with people in the digital world and lock-down meant that I wasn't seeing the opportunities that were available to me. When you come to the Centre you're in one of those spaces where you can see the opportunities and the people in the CUC community (staff and students) made me believe I could do it. Also, the access to the tech and mental health supports were really valuable too.

What advice would you give to other regional and rural people who are considering higher education?

Take a risk! Uni can feel out of reach for non-metro people, and that's a terribly limiting experience. What you can see is what you can be – so position yourself in a place like your local CUC where you can see amazing people achieving great things. Be aware that there are so many opportunities out there and it's worth taking a risk to explore them. You don't need to have aced high school – passion and motivation can take you a long way and you're more capable than you might think.

Thanks Emma! Best of luck in the next phase of your journey!

Thanks Adam, I really appreciate your support.

STUDENT STORY

Simone Toldi

University: Curtin University

Degree: Bachelor of Education (Primary)



Why did you choose to study the degree you are completing?

I actually wanted to do teaching straight out of school but I didn't get the UAI I thought I needed to do it, so I put it on the back burner. Then I started working as a Student Learning Support Officer (SLSO) in one of the primary schools locally and I realised teaching was still something I wanted to do because of the difference I could make in the lives of so many kids, and also kids are fun!

Where do you see your degree taking you and what inspires you about what you are learning?

I'd love to be working full time as a teacher in our local community. I'm inspired to help primary school students become the people they are. I'm especially keen to ensure all kids get the love and care they deserve.

How important is having the CUC in your local region and why?

Very, very, very, very, very, very, very important. It gives me a study place away from home that has the facilities and community that I require. There's lots of encouragement here and everyone is really helpful. From you being there and being able to look over my assignments, to other students sharing the experience of uni together: It's what you would get at a university campus without having to go to a uni campus. It's the equipment that people don't have access to otherwise and a great community. I have found the community and the supports just incredible.

What advice would you give to other people in rural and regional contexts considering studying higher education?

Do it! It's both important and rewarding. Also, sign up to your local CUC to get instant community, learning resources, and supports.

Any achievements you would like to share?

That I am studying at all is a huge achievement. I didn't think I could, but I am seeing now that I can. For my first 3 subjects of this degree I received 2 Distinctions, and 1 High Distinction subject grades.

Your favourite thing about the CUC?

It's something that every rural area needs. Without this it makes study so much harder, but this levels the playing field. People who don't otherwise have access to the technology and other resources needed for uni now can access it here – amazing.

STUDENT STORY

Jordon Root

Graduating 2022

University: University of Wollongong

Degree: Bachelor of Business



What's Next?

Jordan has been involved with her family business for the last ten years. She completed her degree not just for her own future endeavours but to assist in the longevity of her family business and to improve and strengthen it. Unsure of her long-term vision at this stage she plans to spend the next 12 months either doing her Masters or immersed in the business and use her studies to create steadfast strategies re-evaluate KPIs and focus on the business's operations, systems and procedures that ensure more efficiency with workflows and staff productivity. By having more of a systematic and informed operations model the daily management can shift from a micro to a macro level allowing time for business development and securing its financial stability against future economic challenges. Working alongside her father who has 50 years experience in business will no doubt retire at some stage so Jordan will inevitably take over the business at some stage or make sure it is running optimally for sale.

How did you utilise the CUC Southern Shoalhaven in your study journey?

The CUC has been a social tool for me. I am fortunate enough to have a great study space at home which when I really need to get things done is probably my go to. I love campus life, but it is an hour away and most of my friends there have finished so it got a bit lonely. The covid lock downs made me feel very isolated in my studies so the CUC has connected me with other students again which is an important part of my education journey. The accessibility and being a part of an active community of students has been the central role of the CUC for me. Being on a journey with like-minded others even if they have different goals.

What have been some highlights for you this year or times when the CUC have been central to your study journey?

Achieving a high distinction for an assignment I was expecting a low mark for. I also love the random late-night conversations with other students. It normalises the whole experience of hard work and study block and keeps you going, it's like having extended family. Also, being involved with BNI was a special experience for me as a business student. It was great to network with a room of business owners in a neutral space with so many present. Normally it's just me in my shop but to feel peer support and connection was a buzz. Also, the Wednesday Wellness Walks have been central to my week. An important opportunity to relax and have a proper break from my study. I would leave the phone and step out with whoever was coming with us and have a random conversation, allow myself some fresh air and new perspective. Connecting to the environment and the salt air helps me to feel refreshed and ready for a productive afternoon.

What words of wisdom would you like to impart on your fellow students?

An important thing to remind yourself is that deadlines and assignments are not the end of the world. Well, there is a fine line of course, but if you have things going on in your life that need your attention, you have to give yourself that space. Ask yourself, what is it that you truly value and honour that. Friends, family, whatever it is at the end of the day it's those things that actually motivate you to be your best so you can't turn your back on them.

STUDENT STORY



Kate Lynch

Graduating 2022

University: University of Sydney

Degree: Masters of Regional and Urban Planning

Why did you choose the area of study you are completing?

I wanted to up-skill. I have been in the industry for years but deciding to do my Masters was complimentary to my current career. It provides me a wider scope for employment opportunities and will give me more flexibility in where and how I work. I had previously felt nervous when presenting my work to review panels for approval as I had the experience and knowledge but was missing the accreditation. Now I can present with confidence and not be under potential scrutiny or doubt myself.

How has your study impacted your current career?

I wouldn't be working in my current role without it. I am working for the Shoalhaven City Council as a strategic planner and I was successful in my application due to the commitment of completing my Masters. So studying has been such an important part of my journey for the last 3 years. It was all consuming and I have had no time for anything else but definitely worth the commitment. I have so many more options now for both on-going employment and freelance opportunities and increased my earning capacity.

How important is having the CUC in your local region and why?

It was everything! I honestly don't know if I could have completed my study without it. The CUC is the reason I succeeded and have the job I do. As mentioned before, I only got it because of my education commitment so I am so thankful it was here to provide me with the support I needed. I was struggling to get to lectures on time due to travel distances/work commitments and would often be watching them on my phone in the car somewhere it was ridiculous and doomed from the start. The CUC has enabled me to achieve flexible and manageable time tabling between work and home to fit everything in.

In what ways did the CUC support you during your studies. What did it mean for you?

Space and technology. It really is a fantastic layout. Such a variety of work spaces means you can always find somewhere quiet to work away from everyone or work socially if you prefer. Quite often I would have my assignment open on my laptop, be watching a lecture on the wide screens provided and have a word doc open at the same time taking notes, can you imagine me achieving that in my car?! The technology has had an enormous impact on my efficiency and ability to multi-task which is important when you have limited time. It also forces you to commit for a duration and avoid the distractions of studying from home, so it has been essential for my productivity.

What advice would you give to other people considering study to up-skill that are hesitant about the lack of time or resources they have?

Do it! You will be surprised what you can achieve. Just apply and take it from there. Commit to the lowest course load and see how it goes, you can always take on more as you become comfortable. It is important to stay current in your career. Study and keeping your skills and knowledge up-to-date means greater job prospects. Just go for it!

STUDENT STORY

Kiara Astbury

Graduated 2022

University: University of Wollongong

Degree: Bachelor of Arts

Re-enrolled 2023

University: University of Wollongong

Degree: Honours in History



Congratulations Kiara, Its been a difficult few years to finish anything with the pandemic, how does it feel to graduate as an on-line student?

It's amazing, so rewarding. Studying on-line is very isolating and finding connection with yourself and your motives is a challenge at times when you are not surrounded by a student community. I was so happy to have the CUC for my final year. It made such a difference to my outcomes and made it easier to complete my Degree. Being surrounded by similar people and having study friends to support you is quite central to success. Being on campus is such a different experience to on-line learning. The first two years of my Degree were hard and lonely. I did it all on-line, you feel like you are missing out on something not being on campus but living regionally, this is the reality you face and until now there has been no alternative or support.

In what ways did the CUC facilitate better outcomes for you?

Not having to travel to access resources is a massive factor. The Centre has everything I need and having access to those facilities even at nights and weekends allows my studies the flexibility they need. I also found that my final year was the easiest to complete and I achieved the highest marks of my Degree. Having the Centre at my doorstep made me want to study more, having that student fellowship motivates me to go in, have a laugh with friends, sit down and get on with it.

Where do see your career heading?

At this stage I don't have anything set in stone. I love history and my immediate plan is keep studying and see where that journey takes me. I am currently doing my Honours in History through the University of Wollongong and once I have completed that I would like to do my Post Grad in Ancient History. I like the idea of working for a museum or in tertiary education.

What advice would you give to other people considering studying higher education?

Do it! That's another great part of my life now. Since graduating I am now working for the University of Wollongong as the Outreach Co-ordinator for the Batemans Bay campus. My role is to assist school age kids in that exact decision. I will be delivering programs to encourage and nurture education pathways to University. I am really enjoying helping kids to make choices that reflect their interests and improve possible career outcomes. I am also the Indigenous Student Support advisor which I love, it's such a rewarding role.