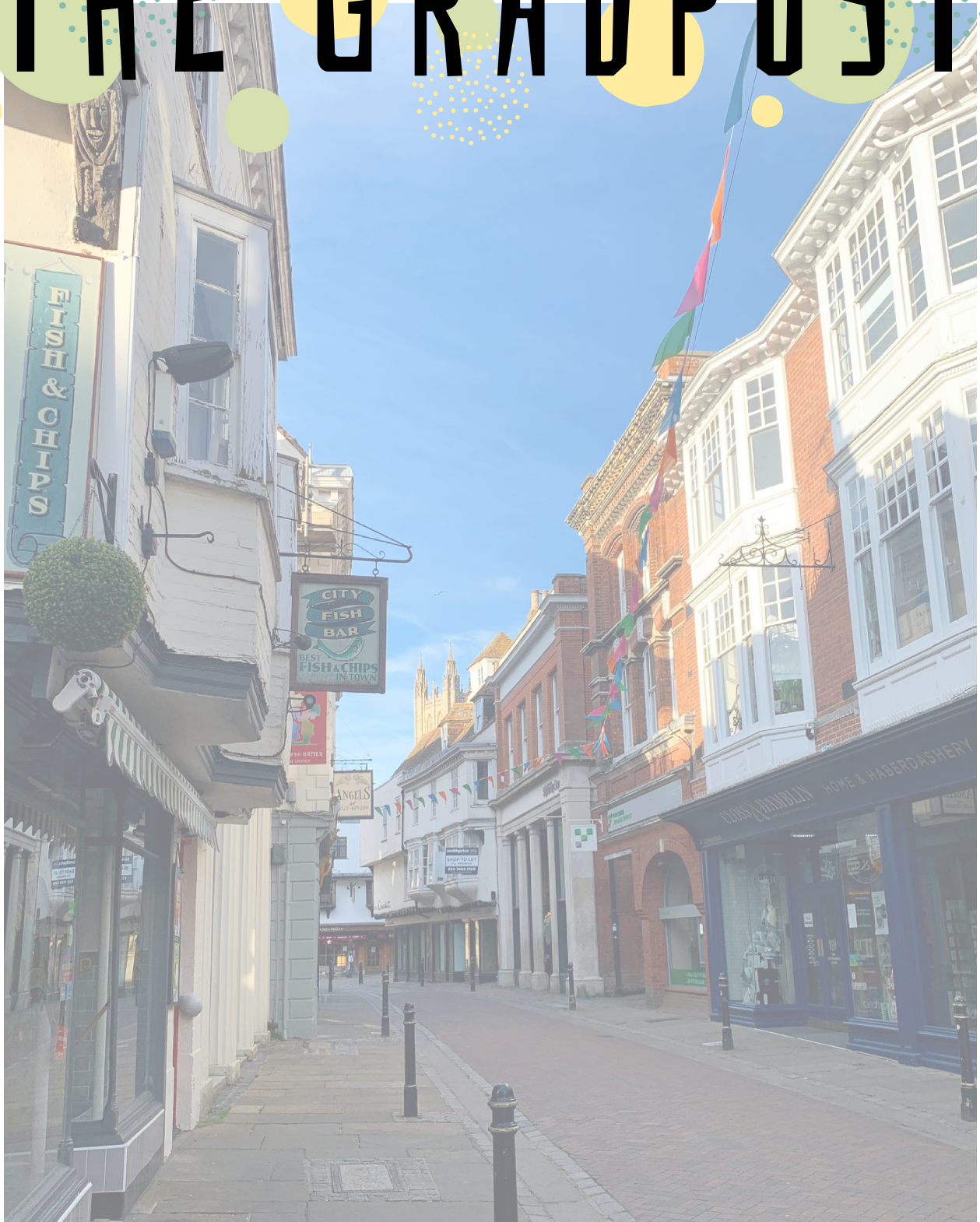


SUMMER EDITION 2021 | UNIVERSITY OF KENT

# THE GRADPOST



## Postgraduate Newsletter

COVID, STUDENT LIFE,  
JOB RESEARCH, EVENTS



THE GRADPOST

# EDITORIAL

Welcome to the summer 2021 edition of The GradPost!

This issue is all about reflection, resilience, and opportunity. It is an extremely tough time in the academic year where students are trying to balance their research, exams, and looming dissertations, while also trying to think about what the future might hold. If you are considering further education, hunting for a graduate job, or looking for ways to increase your employability, this issue has you covered.

To preface this section, Pat Stillman, Vice-president of Postgraduate Experience, instills a hopeful message for the future. Inspired by the resilience of Kent students, this edition will begin by taking a moment to acknowledge those who have experienced hardship this year. Here, we hope to provide an honest depiction of the year which responds directly to the challenges the Kent community has overcome.

Our 'Success and Resilience in the Workplace' section celebrates student success stories in job applications, where they share inside tips on how to navigate in the modern working world through platforms such as LinkedIn. Here, students discuss how they coped with rejection and demoralisation by changing their way of thinking.

Finally, the back of this edition sheds light on the importance nature has on mental health and wellbeing. Our editors have formulated a way for students to escape study stress and unwind with friends on day trips around the best locations in Kent, as well as a variety of free events on campus such as picnic and prosecco at Keynes Pond, cocktail and mocktail masterclasses, and much more.

The GradPost is always looking to offer students editorial opportunities, so if you are looking to become an editor, sub-editor, proofreader, or if you have an idea for the next edition of The GradPost, please email [gradpost@kent.ac.uk](mailto:gradpost@kent.ac.uk).

## Editing Team Summer 2021

**Jemma Gurr** - Editor-in-Chief,  
MA Postcolonial Studies

**Elizabeth Fraser** - News &  
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Studies

**Laura O'Callaghan** - Features  
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**Mathieu Boutry** - Content and  
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Property Law

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# KENT UNION'S MESSAGE

## VICE-PRESIDENT POSTGRADUATE EXPERIENCE

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When I was elected in February 2020, coronavirus was barely an afterthought in our daily lives. We had maybe noticed the slow creep of cases in Southern Europe, but the idea of a lockdown, let alone one that would be on and off for well over a year, was laughed out of the room. Well, here we are, just starting to see the lifting of the third national lockdown in fifteen months and the slow return to normality that accompanies it. The role I had run for and been elected to hold was almost unrecognisable from the job I ended up doing some six months later. But, nonetheless, in September last year I started work as the second ever VP Postgraduate Experience.

I wanted to try and avoid talking about Covid-19 as much as I could in this article, but realised that this simply wasn't possible. Since Christmas, events in person have been impossible to do and with hours on end spent in front of the screen during meetings or seminars, reading or teaching, researching or writing, the idea of spending social hours on Zoom or Teams has at times seemed too much to ask.

As such, I turned my attention inwards towards the Union and University to focus on what I could do internally to improve the PG experience. I worked with Aisha, VP Welfare and Community, to produce resources on wellbeing for the KU website, as well as to push the University to deliver rent rebates. I also worked with Vicky, VP Academic Experience, in forming the University's mitigation policies for the spring term and developing guidance and FAQs for online exams. I raised the concerns of the PG community around extensions and mitigations with the Graduate and Researcher College and pushed the newly formed Divisions to do more in terms of providing support at a local level and easing pressure on researchers who were teaching this term.

It has been an undeniably tough year, but as the lockdown lifts, the days get longer and the weather gets warmer (surely at some point it has to get warmer) I think we all share a growing sense of optimism and a bit of second wind as we get ready for the summer. Unlike the undergraduates, who finish in June, we have the good fortune of being able to enjoy being students way into the summer – be that in Brussels, Canterbury, Medway or Paris – and a chance to salvage some sense of normalcy from this academic year. I've spent the last couple of weeks meeting with PG Reps, the University, the Graduate and Researcher College and the Divisions to start conversations around how we can make the most of our last two months at Kent, so keep your eyes peeled for more updates in the coming weeks and I'm sure that all of us will be able to finish what's been a difficult year on a high.



Pat Stillman.



**Vice-President Postgraduate Experience,  
Kent Union**

**Pat Stillman**  
MA Sociology

# REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST YEAR

*In this edition of GradPost, we hope to provide an honest picture of how members of the Kent community have been reflecting on and responding to the challenges of the past year. It has undeniably been a difficult time for all of us. Nonetheless, some students have also discovered new things about life and themselves that they otherwise might not have known.*

## 'A PLATEFUL OF ZOOM'

I submitted my PhD proposal ignorant of the ensuing Covid-19 pandemic. Leaning on knowledge gleaned from my Anthropology of Food masters (SOAS, UoL), my PhD explores commensality in the age of social media and Web 3.0. This is a computer-mediated time that became both complicated and illuminated by Covid-19. My original intention had been to make comparisons of physical and virtual relationships to one other while gathered to cook and eat together. However, in March 2020 the comparative element ebbed away. As I tried to make sense of my fieldwork year, it became clear that I was living through a pivotal moment that showed humans experiencing solidarity and inclusivity – and of course the opposites: solitude and exclusivity.



Image submitted by Farrell to accompany her PhD work.

Specific to my studies, I saw these narratives within food activity. The daily lives of my focus group revealed commensality to only be 'alive' on video conferencing platforms and social media accounts. Human entanglement with technology and computer-mediated communication constantly challenged the sensuality of cooking and eating. Essentially, I turned to exploring the workings of intimate, internal aspects of the sensorium (the bank of food memories, sensory response and cultural familiarity) as they make sense of virtual commensality. An odourless, flavourless 2D representation of a smelly, flavourful 3D existence – polar opposites in the human-digital experience of food.

Social media use is a space of online 'performance'. For the 56% of the world's population with access to the internet and a computer device, it accelerated by 9% in 2020 (three times more than in 2019), bringing the number of users to 3.4 billion (Kemp). And when it comes to eating – something that happens around three times a day if we are lucky – the activity and thus the amount of material I observe is vast. Not just vast, but frantic, evolving, and geographically and temporally boundless. Heaped upon this cacophony of virtualised voices, the monotony of everydayness revolves around highlights of frequent and ritualised interactions with food. The forays to bring food home became an event and kitchens felt the tensions of sadness or solace as divisions of human vulnerability or privilege became more apparent in our screen-based interaction with the outside world.

When I am not in my home kitchen, taking part in focus group online cooking lessons as a participant observer, or interviewing educator chefs and analysing their Instagram accounts, my daily walks consist of observations of shuttered restaurants/pubs and supermarket queues punctuated with two-metre gaps. I reflect on Dr Dawn Lyon's work and her contribution to a collaborative blog 'Covid-19 Chronicles' (Bailey et al.) that fits so well to my fieldwork. In kitchens, different temporalities butt up against each other. From the different time zones of the chefs I interview, to the 'groundhog' slowness of the repetitive day, and the speed of change of media news, to the meditative making of a meal. I knew the experience of fieldwork would change the way I observe and document, but I never dreamt it would feel so intensely disconnected, yet connected at the same time.

**Bee Farrell**

PhD student Social Anthropology

## 'LOSING MY DAD'

One of life's characters. That's how my dad was described by nearly everyone who met him. He was incredibly funny, charismatic, and loved to entertain. I remember clearly my sister talking about how she hoped he would still be here when she had children, so they could experience what a brilliant person he was. And I felt the same way. But that didn't happen.

On June 20th 2020, my dad died from a sudden and massive heart attack. For the last few years, my dad's health had been up and down, but he always survived, and even thrived. In fact, it became a joke in the family - someone up there didn't want him - he simply couldn't be beaten. I think this is why it was so hard to finally lose him the way we did, so suddenly and unexpectedly.

The only way to describe how I felt in the first few weeks after his death was lonely, lost and confused. My first real experience with grief was only just beginning. I had no idea what to do or how to make it through. The only thing I have learnt for certain is that you will never truly know the pain of losing a parent until it happens. I thought I had experienced grief before. I'd lost grandparents, uncles and even friends, so surely, I knew what it was about? But this was a whole new level of pain. I had only talked to him the night before. How could he be gone?

Over the last year, I've gone through every grief cliché in the book. I've had times of overwhelming sadness, times of unabated anger and times where I've felt like everything was fine. I've felt numb and confused and mentally exhausted. I've suffered frequent colds, random aches, headaches and even tonsillitis. Through all of this though, I rarely cried or complained, which made things difficult for others around me - I looked fine, so therefore I must be fine!



Lizzie Emilion and her Dad.

It took a while, but eventually I learnt that you have to ask for help. I also learnt that grief can affect you in so many different ways and it's a different experience for everyone. There is no special date where things will magically get better. It's a process and it's incredibly frustrating, but it makes you appreciate everything you had and still have. I've learnt to be kinder to myself and more patient with others and it's completely changed who I am, for better and for worse.

**Lizzie Emilion**  
MA Philanthropy

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## 'COPING WITH LOCKDOWN'

I've been feeling absolutely miserable. Over the past year, the world has spun onto its head. A global pandemic forced everyone inside their homes as countries around the world closed their borders and locked down their people.

At first, I thought it was the most exciting thing in the world, even if I didn't want to admit it. I had been getting exhausted with networking incessantly, leading a full social life, and keeping a calendar of dozens of meet-ups per month - a very strange situation for someone who, like me, would have described themselves as very introverted.

You misunderstand me. Not just very reclusive, but outright completely solitary. I had gone entire months speaking to nobody and had felt nothing. In 2019, a busy patch saw me not even contacting any person for almost three whole months. Truth be told, the only reason I was leading such an active life was due to my career aspirations and it was grinding.

So I enjoyed the first six to eight months of the lockdown. I finished writing a novel, took up exercise, spent whole days in deep meditative reflection.

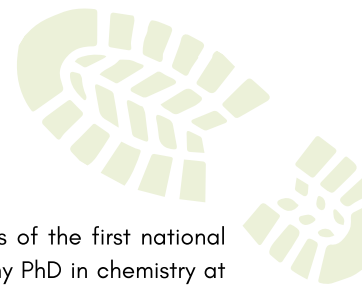
But time kept marching on. My imagination hit ruts as I couldn't test my ideas to see if they were any good. Drinking lost its appeal entirely as there was nobody to share the mirth with. Books were read, digested, and then forgotten without a single comment.

I hate it, but it has been a very valuable life lesson. At the end of the day, even I, the most solitary-natured creature thinkable, am a social animal.

But it's not all bad. Without the driver of ambition to keep me going, I've had to shift my reasons and methods of meeting people, focusing more on one-on-ones with friends and aiming to appreciate who they are instead of what they can do for me. Social groups dedicated to things like outdoor running are creeping into my inbox now, full of wonderful chatty people who, for once, I don't want to scout out for future opportunities.

Long may that feeling remain once Covid-19 drifts into ancient history.

**Jorge Shaft**  
MA Multimedia Journalism



## 'THREE PEAKS CHALLENGE'

In the year of the pandemic, it has been difficult to stay motivated and to plan ahead. As restrictions of the first national lockdown were being lifted, I graduated with a master's from the University of St Andrews, accepted my PhD in chemistry at the School of Physical Sciences and moved from Bathgate, Scotland to Canterbury in time for beer garden weather. However, finding my feet in the South East and networking with other students, current and new, was always going to be challenging, with limited events permitted on campus and most society meetings being held virtually.



Creative Commons CC BY 2.0, Flickr : Scafell Pike, Cumbria by esage\_solar.

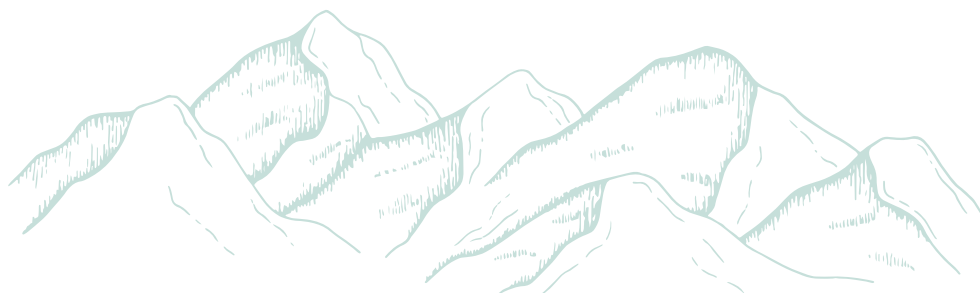
Despite these barriers, I signed up for the charity, UK Three Peaks Challenge, endorsed by the University's Raise and Give (RaG) society. The challenge is to summit three of the UK's highest peaks – Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Snowdon – in under 48 hours with a team of other Kent students this June. I saw this as an excellent opportunity to meet people in different subjects and to be a part of building morale in the Kent Challenge Team. More importantly, I had never fundraised before and appreciated the fact that the pandemic had massively transformed the dynamic of raising money for good causes. I was delighted that the nominated charity was the National Autistic Society (NAS) who support people on the autism spectrum and their families. Throughout my undergraduate degree, I had worked with school-aged children in different educational settings and saw first-hand the support young people with autism need to thrive. This has continued to be a huge motivation for my fundraising.

Raising money during a pandemic has been no easy feat, even with the reasonable fundraising target per person of £680. Subsequent national lockdowns and University regulations have halted in-person fundraising events. Nonetheless, I proudly reached my fundraising target in February, becoming one of the student fundraisers of that month, thanks to the generosity of family and friends and my creativity. I hosted two virtual events – a Robert Burns celebration and a Bingo game – and sold homemade resin earrings. Fundraising during these turbulent times has helped me to keep busy, engage with others and be creative in raising awareness of autism. I am also proud to be a part of the Kent Team who have raised £14,000, correct as of April 2021, which will help NAS continue to do incredible work in our communities during the pandemic and beyond.



Holly McPhillips.

**Holly McPhillips**  
PhD student Chemistry



## 'EXPERIENCES AS A MASTER'S STUDENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KENT DURING THE LOCKDOWN'

I was isolating at home in Nottingham during the lockdown. To stay happily active, I picked up painting as an old hobby and began re-exploring it once again. Art has been one of my favourite activities, as it is calm and mindful.

Within the months and months of the lockdown period, I felt like I could try to be creative and innovative. I would prefer a day with plenty of fun activities or learning something new rather than trying to be 'Sleeping Beauty' in my room. Therefore, I tried an array of indoor hobbies, with varied levels of success: I attempted cooking all types of delicacies from Chinese to Indian cuisine; enthusiastically built up knowledge of sewing, cross-stitching and knitting; constructed a database on MS Access; and learnt the use of Microsoft Office Tools.



Quarantine has been tough for us all, but I cope by staying busy and doing what makes me happy. I was less stressed because I was able to space out my work as I desired and I was also able to complete every assignment from the comfort of my own home. These ideas significantly helped with mental health during the time of the pandemic panic. I have mixed emotions about how well online research, seminars and assignments have kept me busy. Virtual teaching and assistance has been enriching and can transform numerous aspects of our lives.

**Dweetal Seetohul**

MSc Human Resource Management

## 'TRAVEL IN THE TIME OF COVID-19'

When the pandemic first hit, it was as though time had stopped and that seemed partly because travel had stopped. Travel is something that many humans aspire to do and so when we were told we could no longer do so, it felt very wrong. Travel and tourism will most likely suffer during or after Covid-19, as we saw people travel to foreign holidays in the midst of a pandemic and hop on planes just like any other year. Travel restrictions or quarantine rules still could not stop people from travelling – a year without a holiday was unthinkable and put into perspective what 'essential' travel really was. Perhaps future travel will be closer to home; we will become tourists of our own towns and cities, exploring the places we take for granted but that so many others come to see from all over the world. Hope is in sight for holidays once more as the vaccine programme continues, but we can only hope that the countries we all travel to are also vaccinated to prevent this virus travelling with us.

**Angel Robson**

MA Social Anthropology, Humanitarian and Environmental Crises



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## 'POST-LOCKDOWN REALISM: THE BLESSING OF LOW EXPECTATIONS'

The philosopher William James once defined self-esteem as the "ratio of our actualities to our supposed potentialities". He went on to say that "such a fraction may be increased as well by diminishing the denominator as by increasing the numerator" (James 296). This sentiment was captured in plainer terms by cartoon tiger Hobbes: "So the secret to good self-esteem is to lower your expectations to the point where they're already met?" (Watterson).

As we emerge from the coronavirus pandemic, this feels like an apt framework for managing our expectations. During these months in lockdown, cut off from experiences that normally bring us joy, our expectations for happiness in our day-to-day lives likely reached a low point. This may have resulted in an unexpected silver lining: experiences we once would have found insignificant – an afternoon walk, perhaps – may have gained an allure they previously lacked.

That may all change as "normal" life resumes. Since the beginning of the pandemic, talk of "when this is over" has been commonplace. Social media is full of people dreaming about their post-pandemic selves; a Twitter account whose sole purpose is to count down the days until June 21st has over 50,000 followers. Even talk of repeating the "roaring 20's" – the years following the 1918 influenza pandemic – has found its feet online.

**Jocelyn Chalmers**

PhD student Psychology

Needless to say, these are some intimidatingly high expectations. Particularly in this in-between time, when some restrictions are lifted and some are not, reconciling this uncanny-valley version of regular life with our sky-high expectations may be frustrating.

Psychologist E. Tory Higgins' Self-Discrepancy Theory outlines three representations of the self: the actual self (who you are), the ideal self (who you aspire to be), and the ought self (who you should be). Self-discrepancies arise when we notice a gap between our actual and ideal or ought selves, and can lead to emotional discomfort (Higgins 320-321).

Our expectations for post-pandemic life naturally may lead to a gap between our actual and ideal selves. However, some of us may have internalised the idea of post-Covid happiness so much that it also leads to a gap between our actual and ought selves – enjoyment may no longer just be a wish, but also an obligation. We should be out there enjoying ourselves to make up for all those months of despair.

In this confusing time of transition, perhaps it's best that we take Calvin's advice to heart. It's difficult to know what the near future will look like, but it almost certainly won't match our idealised version of it – and perhaps lowering our expectations just a bit will help us enjoy it that much more.

# SUCCESS AND RESILIENCE IN THE JOB SEARCH



*Finding a job after our degree is probably the most intimidating thing out there. The years of studying are all leading up to it, but where to begin? How to stay motivated after rejections? These articles are aimed to inspire, advise and ultimately reassure you that you are not alone in this game of finding the perfect job.*

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## 'SELF-ESTEEM IN THE JOB HUNT'

It is 10.00am. Here I am, in my improvised study room, anxiously waiting for the computer to produce that terrifying sound of a Microsoft Teams meeting being started. I have managed to secure an interview. Not just an interview. It is the interview that will determine whether I will be selected for a position as a Work-Study associate in the Work-Study Scheme at the University of Kent. I have positioned my camera a gazillion times, trying to find the correct angle. I must look professional and confident as it has been a while since I succeeded in convincing a potential employer to select me. Believe me, I have applied for many jobs. Yet, every time I have received an email or phone call in response, stating, 'Dear applicant, there have been a great number of potential candidates for the role of... Unfortunately, you have not been selected for an interview', I have started questioning my ability to sell myself. Then I received an email from the Work-Study Scheme, stating, 'Do you need help with your CV? Feel free to schedule an appointment with one of our advisors'.

Money was running low; my husband could not bear our monthly costs any longer by himself. As a mature PhD student with previous experience as a lead social worker, I felt embarrassed to request help in something as basic as writing a CV. However, I refused to listen to that nagging voice of doubt and shame. I scheduled the appointment and the ball started rolling. It rolled in directions I would have never imagined. I met an amazing advisor named Hannah. She helped me gain back my confidence. Her advice was straightforward: change your approach, rearrange your CV, make it more about you – the person who is applying for the job. I learnt to give more details about my ambitions, my social media presence, and my ability to engage with modern technology. I then applied again, and guess what? I am a proud Diversity Mark officer, working with an amazing team, who are passionate, dedicated and determined to decolonise the curriculum of the University and make it inclusive for BME students and academics. Looking back, I am so proud of myself. Proud that I was willing to put aside my pride and dare myself to learn, listen and rediscover the world of the modern job search. The message to my fellow mature students: be open to new things, keep on discovering, do not hold on to your previous experiences. Sometimes a new experience is of much more value.



Rachel Gefferie.

**Rachel Gefferie**

PhD student Social Anthropology



## 'DEALING WITH REJECTION IN JOB SEARCH'

Nothing like two rejections on a Monday to start off the week. I know what they say: 'you might need to apply for dozens, no, even hundreds of jobs to succeed'. 'It's a tough market, more than ever because of the pandemic.' 'This rejection doesn't reflect your worth.'

Even knowing all that intellectually, it is hard to avoid the emotional pang. I am not good enough. I try to find an explanation. Sometimes I apply knowing I don't quite match all the criteria. However, it is when I really believe I have just the right experience for the role when rejection hurts the most. It's discouraging too. If I can't get this job – so perfect for me – how can I possibly get any other? Was my experience truly insufficient? Or did my application fail to convey clearly and accurately how well I matched the description? It doesn't help that my dream job is in publishing, which has a reputation of being notoriously hard to get into.



There are, however, some things which keep me going when my spirit falters.

**Find community.** It may be your fellow students. I also found a Facebook group specifically for publishing hopefuls, which is full of industry-specific advice and encouragement. It feels bittersweet to see someone announce they scored their dream job – but it took months or even years of trying. This puts my own rejections into perspective.

**Notice progress.** Writing multiple – tailored, of course – cover letters can get old really fast, but practice really makes perfect... or at least, better than before. Looking at my old CVs makes me blush with shame – uh, how could I think this formatting was acceptable? Writing applications is a skill in itself, so experience and tips gathered along the way make every attempt a little better.

**Make the most of the Zoom life.** Even if you miss in person events, take advantage of those happening online while you can. I attended a lot of publishing talks which would normally be happening in London. I got a wealth of advice, insight into pertinent conversations in the industry and even made a few connections!

**Use the Careers and Employability Service.** They offer online resources, employability events and one on one sessions. Talking to a careers advisor helped me clarify my plans earlier in the year. I know I will come back for more help with applications and interviews!

**Marta Klimkowicz**

MA English and American Literature

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*If you would like to find career-oriented events run by the University, visit the 'What's On' calendar here (<https://www.kent.ac.uk/whats-on/calendar>) and apply the filter 'Student Skills and Employability.'*

## 'HOW TO NETWORK WITHOUT LEAVING YOUR BEDROOM'

From the title, it should be of no surprise to you that as I am writing this article I am lying on my bed gazing at my laptop screen. Whether you are a student who has been adapting to distance learning or your job has encouraged you to work from home, this is the place where most of us have got used to working over the last eighteen months. You may have relished the opportunity to navigate the world while we have been in lockdown or you may have loathed it, but we have all adjusted to a new way of working. Networking can be extremely useful and enable you to open lines of communication, benefit your learning and expose you to job opportunities that may lead you to your dream company.

However, when it comes to growing your network, it can be difficult to know where to start. So, here is a selection of top tips that can help you network without leaving your house:

- **Attend Events and Join In**

Events are a fantastic way to network as they involve the gathering of people who hold a common interest. There are plenty of free online events where you can hear from speakers, participate in discussions and network with people who are already involved with the jobs and companies you are interested in. Ask questions, reach out... you never know if the person you've just spoken to could be your future co-worker or even employer.



- **Use Social Media**

LinkedIn can seem like a terrifying platform to begin with but it is one of the most useful social media sites to use when it comes to networking. Sending personalised connection requests can open lines of communication and help you get to know people as you build your network.

Success on LinkedIn is all relative and, like anything, you tend to get out of it what you put in. Through my own networking, I have been able to connect and converse with people that I look up to, secure an internship and discover/attend events that have helped me learn more about the industry into which I am about to graduate.

- **Show Up**

Make sure you show up for your network. Once you have connected with people or started discussions, make sure you maintain that relationship. Celebrate successes (someone else's success does not mean you have failed!), answer questions and offer help without demanding something in return - help because you want to, not because you want something.

Ultimately, networking is all about building professional relationships with other people. Connect with people and companies that inspire you, communicate with students and graduates that are going through similar experiences and build your own digital community.

**Amy Funnell**

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## 'THE EMPLOYABILITY POINTS SCHEME'

The Employability Points Scheme is completely unique to the University of Kent and is designed to help students develop work-ready skills and gain access to exclusive experiences of work. Students can earn 'Employability Points' by completing co-curricular activities. This can include: joining student groups, working part-time, attending conferences and workshops, completing the Global Skills Award and much more. Towards the end of the second term, if you have earned enough points, you can cash these in to apply for rewards. These include paid internships, student projects, work experience, training and much more!

The EP Scheme partners with over 100 local and national employers to provide these exclusive experiences, which have benefited a huge number of postgraduate students. One example is Bethan Iley, who completed a postgraduate degree in Psychology. Bethan interned with local start-up Sustainability Monitor, who undertake sustainability research in relation to global industries. Bethan worked on a research project linked to the relationship between sustainability and social media content. Bethan commented: "I'm really enjoying the work and it has confirmed that I want to pursue a career linked to research and sustainability." For more information on the EP Scheme, please visit: [www.kent.ac.uk/employability-points](http://www.kent.ac.uk/employability-points)

**Matt Cook**

Employer Engagement Officer

# THE IMPORTANCE OF GREEN SPACE

*Whether you are job hunting or keeping up with your studies, it is very important we safeguard our mental health. Kate Allberry underlines the importance of seeking out green space while doing this.*

## ‘THE NATURE OF WELLBEING’

Nature. It provides us with raw materials and places to escape to, and surrounds our everyday lives, affecting our moods and senses. Yet we often see it as a separate entity to ourselves. As colder temperatures start to rise, and restrictions around our daily lives lift, both people and nature are cautiously waking up. Life is slowly returning to campus here in Canterbury; cafés and shops are reopening, and bicycles and scooters are physically zooming around the university, as people soak up the early summer sunshine. But all around us nature is also stirring; leaves are finally starting to sprout on trees, and bright blossoms are floating in the warm breeze. Swathes of bluebells have also appeared – some say a little later than usual, but no less of a welcome burst of colour after several very grey months inside.



The University of Kent's Canterbury campus is rich in wildlife and green space. Encompassing 300 acres of woodland, grassland, hay meadows and ponds, a host of wildlife shares this space with us, including hedgehogs, badgers, great crested newts and dormice – many of which are vulnerable and legally protected species. But what does all this mean for us when we are busy trying to make sense of life, while sitting in our offices and study space? Well, since the 80s and 90s, researchers have found that spending time in nature restores your ability to concentrate, focus your attention and improve your memory, while reducing mental exhaustion. Nature can be restorative and reduce stress; visiting blue areas such as the coast, for example, has been shown to significantly lower the risk of depression, while more biodiverse, natural environments, have been linked to enhanced mood. Even listening to birdsong has been associated with stress reduction, and evidence suggests that spending just a couple of hours in green space significantly improves your wellbeing.

To encourage people to step outside and absorb the green wellbeing right on the university's doorstep, the UKC Sustainability Working Group held a BioBlitz on the Canterbury campus on Saturday 29th May. A BioBlitz provides an exciting opportunity for people to come together to find as many species as possible in a day. Not only does this enable people to explore the wildlife which they share their space with, it can also foster a sense of connectedness – both with each other and the natural world. Throughout the day, over 200 participants recorded almost 250 species of plants, mammals, birds and bugs. And as people wandered through hazy woodlands and soft grass, the BioBlitz also brought about a contented curiosity in the search for wildlife. As we are all looking for ways to reconnect and feel normal again, nature is waiting for us, and our campus has a green world of its own to help. So when it comes to engaging with the natural world in your day-to-day life, all you need is a green space, your senses, and a little inquisitiveness for the wildlife around you.

You can check out green initiatives on campus by keeping an eye on the Sustainability Working Group social media: Facebook: @SACSWG / Instagram: @sac\_swg / Twitter: @SacWorking

**Kate Allberry**

PhD student Biodiversity Management

## 'DAY TRIPS BY TRAIN' - PART 1



Inspired to feel more sun on your face? Beyond the BioBlitz, there are plenty of opportunities for fresh air, green space and physical exercise around Kent. After all, it isn't called 'The Garden of England' for nothing!

Research work can be intense - we all deserve a break from it once in a while. Check out these 4 wonderful walks around Kent for when you need to unwind. No car? No worries! They are all completely accessible by cheap trains from Canterbury East and West stations.

### WHITSTABLE - HERNE BAY

*£8-9 adult return or £7-8 return with 16-25 railcard (from Canterbury East)*

Start in either town. Whitstable boasts seafood stalls by the harbour, artwork by the anonymous 'Catman' on the high street and its very own castle with a tea room and garden that blooms orange with roses in August. Herne Bay has a pier full of attractions and an amusement arcade. Walk between them on Tankerton Slopes past pebble beaches, groynes, salty marshland and colourful huts. Very flat and easy route. Takes a couple of hours.



### DOVER - ST. MARGARET'S BAY

*£9 adult return or £7 return with 16-25 railcard (from Canterbury East)*

Start in Dover at Dover Priory station. Walk north through the town to the base of the White Cliffs and follow the path up and over to St. Margaret's Bay, marked in the distance by a pretty white lighthouse. Enjoy stunning panoramas over the turquoise sea and, on sunny days, a view of France and the ferries that go back and forth (watch out for mobile phones shifting an hour ahead into French time!) In St. Margaret's Bay, feel the waves pound the shore and perhaps see some kite surfers. Can be quite rough and muddy on the cliff path if it has recently rained and there are sheer drops on some parts of it that might not be for everyone. Whole route takes 3-4 hours.



### FOLKESTONE

*£13-14 adult return or £9 return with 16-25 railcard (from Canterbury East or West)*

If you go left from Folkestone harbour, there is a concrete route along the bottom of the cliff that eventually makes way into steps to the top. Follow this to find a statue of a mysterious woman staring out to sea. Alternately, go right from the harbour to walk along the reddish stony beach to the area of Sandgate. Here you can find Enbrook Park - a little garden with a babbling brook and paths through a grove of trees. Very flat and easy route. Takes 1-2 hours.



## 'DAY TRIPS BY TRAIN' - PART 2

### RAMSGATE - BROADSTAIRS - MARGATE

*£6.50 adult return or £4 return with 16-25 railcard (from Canterbury West)*

The choice of route is up to you: Ramsgate to Broadstairs to Margate, Ramsgate to Broadstairs, Margate to Broadstairs, or Margate to Broadstairs to Ramsgate! Whichever way, you will be right next to the coast. Beside Margate is the famous Botany Bay. See Kingsgate Castle perched atop the cliffs at Broadstairs. Watch the boats come in and out in bustling Ramsgate. Fairly flat and easy routes. Takes 1-2 hours for each leg of the journey; 3-5 hours the whole way.



#### Top tip 1!

Make sure to buy a day return ticket, not two singles – it is much cheaper. If you are doing a walk where you start in one town and end in another (e.g. Whitstable to Herne Bay) OR one where you are not sure at which point you will want to go home (e.g. Ramsgate to Broadstairs to Margate), buy a return train ticket to the station that is furthest away on the line from Canterbury (e.g. Herne Bay in the first case, Margate in the second). That way it is all paid up and valid whichever station you end up getting on or off at on the line.

#### Top tip 2!

If you want to escape the crowds, whether for reduced risk of Covid-19 exposure or for some simple peace and quiet, go on a weekday after 9am to beat the weekend trippers and weekday rush hour.

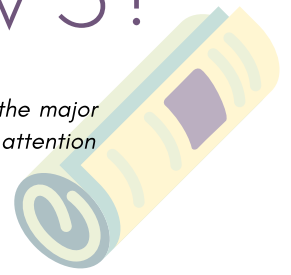
## CAMPUS WALKING BUDDY SCHEME

Stuck in your room and need to get out, but nobody is around to go for a walk with? We can put you in touch with a walking buddy. Walking buddies are opportunities to get out, meet another student and energise your mind! Find a reason to leave your accommodation or the library, get outside and enjoy the fresh air with someone else. Simply email [wellbeingevents@kent.ac.uk](mailto:wellbeingevents@kent.ac.uk) from your Kent email address giving your number and which campus you are on, and we'll randomly match you with another student who's looking for a walking buddy. We'll email you their contact details so you can get in touch and arrange when and where to meet, and perhaps even learn a new route around or near campus. Please ensure you follow the current government guidance.



# WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

*So many things have happened in this unusual year that it sometimes seems as though the major event of Brexit blends into the background. Journalism student Temple Asaju brings our attention back to it and what it will mean for Britain's trade relationships with countries in Africa.*



## 'PROSPECTS AND DRAGS OF AFRICA'S INTEGRATION PROGRAMME FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM POST-BREXIT'

The Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) initiative, which commenced on January 1, 2021, is the continent's economic integration project aiming to promote the world's largest free-trade area for a market estimated at \$3.4 trillion among a population of 1.3 billion people (Karanja et al.). The idea originated from the Organisation for African Unity's 'Lagos Plan of Action' in 1980 (AfCFTA: Africa is moving). The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa expects the agreement to boost intra-African trade by 52 percent by 2022 (Economic Development in Africa). However, this ambitious forecast may give rise to questions around the feasibility of AfCFTA targets, given the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic and more compellingly Brexit, which took effect the same day as the AfCFTA.

Indications in a report by Deutsche Welle (Hairsine) shows that the implementation of Brexit is at an advanced stage compared to AfCFTA. This is evident in the agreements already rolled over from the EU Economic Partnership Agreements between the UK and some 13 African countries. Nations under the Southern African Customs Union as well as Kenya from the East African bloc stand to benefit from duty-free access to the British market, despite African imported extractives and agriculture commodities constituting only 2.5 percent of UK's import (Hairsine).



Currently, 65 percent of African extractives are traded with the West, while only 35 percent are traded locally (ibid.). The question is: how well can Africans optimise these extractives even when they trade among each other? This is an issue caused by an absence of major plants to process some key mineral resources into finished products.

Africa's consciousness of optimising the value chain of its natural resources is however commendable, as some countries are now halting cocoa export European countries in a bid to manufacture chocolate locally and further strengthen their local currencies.

Nevertheless, the absence of a central currency, which now leaves governments at the beck and call of the West for foreign exchange, could further fuel preference for trading with the UK rather than trading with neighbouring countries.

36 of the member nations of the AfCFTA who have ratified the agreement are currently negotiating and developing protocols on trade in goods and services for a 90 percent liberalised tariff line (Karanja et al.). This is seen to be leading to a regulatory framework by the end of the year, indicating the beginning of a trade regime in the medium- to long-term.

**Temple Asaju**

MA International Multimedia Journalism

# SPOTLIGHT ON

## POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES



The University of Kent is distinctive among British universities in having attended to postcolonial literatures and British Black and Asian writing from its foundation in 1964. This semester, Kent's Centre for Colonial and Postcolonial Studies held some excellent virtual talks in partnership with the School of English.

Subhadra Das discussed curation at University College London and what can be done to decolonise museums in April, Dr Hannah Boast introduced us to Palestinian and Israeli swamps in March, and Professor Corinne Fowler gave a fascinating presentation about her new book *Green Unpleasant Land: Creative Responses to Rural England's Colonial Connections* (2020). Another notable event took place on Wednesday 2nd June – a conversation with author Tessa McWatt (UEA) about her book *'Shame on Me: A Memoir of Race and Belonging'* (2019). Whether you are a Postcolonial Studies student, an English Literature student or a student from another School entirely, such talks promise to be engaging. Look out for them in the 2021-22 academic year!

If you want to hear more about postcolonialism from outside the University, check out the AHRC-funded 'Culture, Things & Empire' project! Visit their website or follow them on Twitter @CTEseminars to register for their upcoming 'Remembering Empire' conference to be held online in July 2021.

## INDIGENOUS AND SETTLER COLONIAL STUDIES

If you are interested in finding out more about settler colonialism in particular, you can also do so through events within the University.

The Indigenous Literature Reading Group, part of the Centre for Indigenous and Settler Colonial Studies, aims to raise the critical profile of contemporary Indigenous literature in the U.K. The group meets every 4-6 weeks to discuss texts ranging from short stories to creative non-fiction and literary novels. Summaries of our previous meetings can be found on our blog and the next meeting will be held in Autumn 2021. To find out more or get involved, contact Holly May Treadwell ([h.m.treadwell@kent.ac.uk](mailto:h.m.treadwell@kent.ac.uk)) and Shelley Angelie Saggat ([sas86@kent.ac.uk](mailto:sas86@kent.ac.uk)).

Outside of the university, check out the program of events put on this summer by Border Crossings for their ORIGINS festival: <http://originsfestival.bordercrossings.org.uk/programme>. Watch free films from home such as 'Hidden Histories: Discovering Indigenous London' and 'Magnetic North: Voices from the Indigenous Arctic' or book tickets to online talks and theatre shows, including Mohegan theatre-maker Madeline Sayet's powerful performance 'Where We Belong'.

# ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

## 'TALKING TOGETHER: THE KENT BUSINESS SCHOOL RESEARCH COLLOQUIUM'

The Kent Business School Colloquium is a student-led, interdisciplinary forum for 'talking together' to share research achievements, thinking and challenges, and to support each other through the PhD journey.

We invite all KBS doctoral students to attend, support our presenters, learn something new, and share feedback. We typically begin with welcome chat, then four students present an aspect of their research (15 minutes each), before another student chairs questions and discussion, all in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. Presenters are welcome to share work in progress, or practice delivering a conference paper. We invite presenters to think about what – in particular – peers across different KBS disciplines will find interesting about their research. This could include particular topics, methods, challenges, learning, or something completely different they are doing.

This year, all four Colloquiums took place online. We moved them to earlier in the day to make it easier for our friends in the Middle East and Asia to join. Thirteen presenters showcased their work, with topics including blockchain technology, healthcare, stock price volatility, machine learning, decision support practice, political corruption, and research impact evaluation. Discussions have led to creation of an online community for qualitative researchers and there is interest in another School to initiate similar events there.

The Colloquium was the brainchild of Idorenyin Etokakpan. In a bid to foster a collaborative, interdisciplinary research culture at KBS, he brought together a team of students (Georgie Kemsley, Rasmi Meqbel and Sheri Radi) to deliver the first event in 2019. There were presentations and posters, with students gaining speaking experience, receiving feedback, and discussing different theoretical and analytical approaches.

In 2019-2020, Shashitha Jayakody, Arifa Jamil Syed, Claire Street and Idorenyin created Colloquiums with students at Christ Church Business School for sharing research and ideas, with refreshments! There was a particular focus on displaying the progress of doctoral students at different stages of their research. Team member Arifa went on to write a reflection on her experience of presenting her research with useful tips that we send to future presenters.

We would like to thank all our fellow students over the years for presenting their research, chairing events, and sharing their questions and ideas. Ahmed Tantawy has kindly volunteered to lead the next events in 2021-2022.

**Jane Christie** PhD student Operational Research, **Shashitha Jayakody** PhD student Finance, **Idorenyin Etokakpan** PhD student Management



Sibson building. Picture by Quintin Lake.

## 'THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY'

In February 2021, I set out on a life of purpose and made three major changes: I quit my job and started my own business, I moved from my homeland of Canada to Ecuador, and I started a master's degree in Advanced Child Protection online at the University of Kent. I grew up in the foster care system in British Columbia, Canada and after finishing a baccalaureate degree in Global Development studies from Queen's University, I had determined that my life should be about contributing to the service of child protection in international settings. In order to support this move, I needed work I could do remotely and took the most meaningful part of my salaried job and turned it into a contracted service. Immigration and online studies during the pandemic have been as challenging as much as they have provided opportunities for growth. They have shown me a new meaning and importance of community.



I craved this kind of support at school. Completing all my studies online at the University of Kent, I missed sharing my learning experience with fellow students. I reached out to multiple students in my program, inviting them for a phone conversation, and received several responses. I had focused conversations with each of those people, getting to know their life stories, motivations for studying Advanced Child Protection, and hopes and dreams for the future. I am now in regular touch with most of them – my online community of student peers. Community means so much more to me these days, during a pandemic and a move to a new country, with a new business while balancing online graduate studies. I am so grateful for the new, creative and adaptable forms of community I have found.

**Robin Adams**

MA Advanced Child Protection



A group of women from Canada, the U.S., Iran and Ecuador have gone out of their way to make me feel included in their social circle. I have never witnessed such support among friends, with house moves, ailing spouses, injuries, cultural discussions and coaching, and support for the general logistics of living in a foreign country for most of the group who are expatriates. The intensity of the responsibility these women hold to the wellbeing of each other is heightened due to the group's immigration status and the pandemic. This special community is formed on a mutual need for support through a difficult time and space.



# ACADEMIC EVENTS

## CAREERS AND RESEARCH

*Fri 9 July, 9.30am–6pm* – **5th BME ECR Conference.** The conference hosted by the Open University aims to empower BME students and academics to stay in academia, hosting inspirational talks by BME academics at various levels as well as workshops giving guidance on mentoring, networking and wellbeing. Reserve your place: <https://mcusercontent.com/2b5896300d9316966ad0ca380/images/99f261ed-f245-4ab5-94f2-1251b63122f7.jpg>.

*Mon 12 July, 10–11am* – **Essential Elements of a Successful Grant Application.** Online webinar. Book online on the Graduate and Researcher College Training Portal or contact Alison Charles [acresdev@kent.ac.uk](mailto:acresdev@kent.ac.uk).

Kent's own **Advanced Journal of Professional Practice** is looking for submissions from all academic disciplines! The journal is dedicated to applications centring around applications of new knowledge, technology, discussion, research or practice-based innovation. Submission deadlines are currently flexible due to COVID-19, and entry is completely free. Find out more: <https://journals.kent.ac.uk/index.php/ajpp/index>.

## ENGLISH

Keep an eye out for the upcoming publication of *Litterae Mentis: A Journal of Literary Studies*. Volume 7 will focus upon the theme of 'Rebirth' and will be available online.

## HISTORY, CULTURES AND POLITICS

*Mon 21 June to Fri 2 July* – **Sociology Geocache Trail.** Caches along the trail are named after different sociological thinkers. Download the app to take part: <https://www.kent.ac.uk/whats-on/event/49346/sociological-geocache-trail>

*Mon 21 June to Thu 1 July* – **Canterbury History Tours.** Take part in either a Military History or scavenger hunt-style Mystery tour of Canterbury for free. Book now: <https://www.kent.ac.uk/whats-on/event/49571/canterbury-history-tours-military-and-mystery-tours>

*Mon 5 July, 2pm* – **The Economics with a Year in Industry Programme** with Dr Penélope Pacheco-López. Book now: <https://blogs.kent.ac.uk/polir-news/2021/06/25/hss-summer-bites-in-july/>

*Thu 15 July, 3pm* – **What the Covid Crisis has Taught Us about Economics and Vice-Versa?** With Dr Amanda Gosling.

*Mon 12 July, 3pm* – **Unsolicited Sexual Images: Who Sends Them and Why?** With Dr Sarah Johns.

*Mon 12 July, 4pm* – **Female Suicide Bombers: Is the Female of the Species More Deadly than the Male?** With Dr Margherita Belgioioso.

*Wed 21 July, 5pm* – **Housing or Poverty Trap for Women? The Case of the Low-Income Urban Settlements in the Global South.** With Dr Anika Haque.

Book these events now: <https://blogs.kent.ac.uk/polir-news/2021/06/25/hss-summer-bites-in-july/>

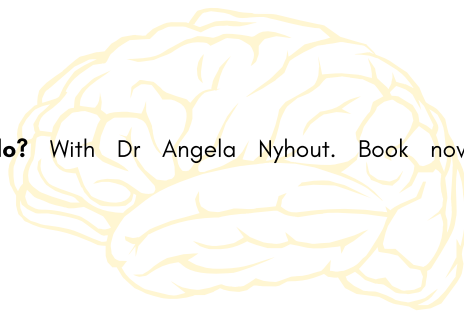
## LAW

*Thu 1 July, 5pm* – **Intellectual Property Law Scholarship and Pedagogy in Times of Covid-19.** Panel discussion on Zoom led by Dr Hyo Yoon Kang. Register in advance.

*Tue 6 and Wed 7 July* – **Kent Law School Graduate Conference 2021 'Crisis, Sustainability and Justice: The Road to Equity'.** This year's conference will take place online. Its focus will be on the role of law in defining, responding to, and sustaining crises (broadly conceived), and its related potential in securing sustainability and justice. The Keynote speaker will be Dr Sam Adelman, Reader in Law at School of Law, University of Warwick. Contact [lawgradconference@kent.ac.uk](mailto:lawgradconference@kent.ac.uk)

## PSYCHOLOGY

Thu 22 July, 4pm - **Do children test hypotheses like scientists do?** With Dr Angela Nyhout. Book now: <https://blogs.kent.ac.uk/polir-news/2021/06/25/hss-summer-bites-in-july/>



## CONSERVATION

Mon 26 July, 4pm - **iTrade Wildlife: Tackling Online Wildlife Trafficking.** With Dr David Roberts. Book now: <https://blogs.kent.ac.uk/polir-news/2021/06/25/hss-summer-bites-in-july/>

Thu 29 and Fri 30 July - **DICE Twitter Conference.** Showcase of the research of the students, academics and alumni of the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology. Follow @DICE\_Kent. Submit an abstract at <https://research.kent.ac.uk/dice/dice-twitter-conference/> if interested in participating

## SPORT

Mon 21 Jun to Fri 2 July, 9am to 5pm daily - **Free badminton, table tennis and pool.** Free games at The Deep End at Medway Campus. No need to book.

Tue 22 June to Thu 1 July, 10am to 3pm daily - **Mini golf.** 9 hole golf course as part of Kent Summer Fest. Book your team into a slot: <https://www.kent.ac.uk/whats-on/event/49811/mini-golf-1>

Fri 2 July, 12pm - **Social Outdoor Sports.** Kwik cricket, rounders, petanque and more. Prebook online: <https://www.kent.ac.uk/whats-on/event/49508/social-outdoor-sports-1>



# RECREATIONAL EVENTS

## RECREATION AND RELAXATION

*Mon 21 Jun to Fri 2 July, 9am to 5pm daily* - **Scavenger hunts at Drill Hall Library.** Win a £10 Amazon voucher for each team member. No need to book.

*Thu 1 July, 8pm* - **Mamma Mia Sing-a-Long. At Woody's Pub.** Groups of 6 maximum.

*Fri 2 July, 1pm* - **Free Art Supplies.** Create your own Bob Ross inspired masterpiece using the free art supplies provided to you by the College and Community Life team. Book in advance: <https://www.kent.ac.uk/whats-on/event/49772/free-art-supplies-2>

### Regular events:

*Mondays 3.30-4.30pm* - **Wellbeing Café.** Weekly mental health support, games and creative pursuits online with other students. Contact [wellbeingevents@kent.ac.uk](mailto:wellbeingevents@kent.ac.uk).

*Tuesdays 2-3pm and Thursdays 3-4pm* - **Kent Union Coffee Breaks.** Weekly meets over MS Teams for weekly chats.

*Wednesdays 4-6pm* - **Autism Modelling Club.** Weekly social club for autistic students who enjoy making and painting models. Contact [autismsupport@kent.ac.uk](mailto:autismsupport@kent.ac.uk) for more information and materials. Taking place online.

## FOOD

**Just Coffee on Campus.** Be matched with another student for virtual coffee breaks, either on Canterbury and Medway. Contact [wellbeingevents@kent.ac.uk](mailto:wellbeingevents@kent.ac.uk).

*Tue 29 June, 12-2pm* - **Picnic and Prosecco. Boxed picnic at Keynes Pond.** Booking through Gulbenkian box office or Hannah Brazier [catering@kent.ac.uk](mailto:catering@kent.ac.uk).

*Thu 1 July, 3-5pm* - **Cocktail and Mocktail Masterclass.** Registry Lawn. In partnership with Wildbox events. Booking through Gulbenkian box office or Hannah Brazier [catering@kent.ac.uk](mailto:catering@kent.ac.uk).

*Fri 2 July, 11am* - **Snack and Chat.** The Snack and Chat meeting is a monthly event for students to come together to discuss books, films or documentaries. As part of Kent Summer Fest, we want to invite all Medway students to join us on campus for a showing of an episode of Scary Adult Things, followed by discussion and food. All welcomed - we are not short on opinions or indeed snacks! Meet at The Deep End. Sign up here: <https://www.kent.ac.uk/whats-on/event/49493/social-work-students-lunch-and-team-building>



## GULBENKIAN ARTS CENTRE



### Film tickets:

- Full Price: £8.95.
- Student & Under 25: £3 – 50% off until June 2021.
- University of Kent Staff: £6.95. Other concessions available.

*Wed 7 July, 7pm-10pm – **Romeo and Juliet: The Kenneth Branagh Theatre Company.** Film.*

*Thu 8 July, 8pm-10pm – **Harry Baker: I am 10,000.** From winning his school's Battle of the Bands competition with a Jay-Z maths homage, to his prime number poetry TED talk being watched by millions online, Harry's love of language and logic has got him through literal marathons, seen him rap battle in front of Ice Cube, and now has him analysing the technical accuracy of So Solid Crew's 21 seconds. He's got 99 problems but maths ain't one.*

*Fri 9 July, 7pm-10pm – **In the Heights.** Film. Repeated on Sat 10, Wed 14 and Thu 15 July.*

*Fri 16 July, 7.30pm-10pm – **Kendal Mountain Tour 2021.** Film.*

*Sat 17 July, 3pm-6pm – **Accessible Film Club: Sound of Metal.** Film. Gulbenkian, in association with Square Pegs, run a monthly film screening that is open to all, especially those with autism and learning disabilities. Films are screened in a relaxed, comfortable, safe, inclusive environment. Subtle changes to the cinema experience include:- The lights being kept on at a low level and lower than usual sound levels – No trailers or advertisements, just the film – Allowance for increased levels of movement and noise – People to help you find your seats – Captioned subtitles and Audio Description available.*

*Sat 11 September, 7.30pm-10pm – **Professor Brian Cox: Horizons With Robin Ince Work in Progress.** Professor Brian Cox is back with a brand-new show for 2021. Horizons takes audiences on a dazzling cinematic journey; a story of how we came to be and what we can become.*

### Regular events:

*Thursdays 6.30-9pm – **Online Play Readings.** Join each week to jump into parts of new plays. No acting experience needed. Free but booking required. Contact Gulbenkian Ticket Office at [boxoffice@kent.ac.uk](mailto:boxoffice@kent.ac.uk).*



## SKILLS AND SPORT

*Fri 2 Jul 12-1pm – **Social Outdoor Sports.** Kwik cricket, rounders, petanque and more! Pre-book on the Kent Sport website. £2 or free for premium card holders.*

### Regular events:

*Thursdays 4pm-5pm – **Social Badminton.** Play badminton in a fun and recreational environment. All equipment needed will be provided at the session. All abilities are welcome. Main Hall of Sports Centre. Book online through your Kent Sport account. £2 or free for premium card holders.*

*Thursdays 5.30-6.30pm – **Social Run.** A led run on campus. Meet at Pavilion, sign-in, meet your run leader and running partners and set-off. Runs may vary in distance and time but are typically around 5km. You can include these runs on our 'Travel To Tokyo' challenge. Booking is preferable but not essential. Kent Sport membership required. £2 or free for premium card holders.*

See all events: <https://www.kent.ac.uk/whats-on/calendar>

# FINAL REFLECTIONS AND MESSAGE OF HOPE

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## 'CATTLE, PECANS, RATTLESNAKES AND A DISSERTATION - OH MY! A RESEARCHER'S LIFE ON A MEXICAN RANCH'

Just another typical University of Kent postgraduate student... seventy-two years old and I live on a ranch in the desert of Chihuahua, Mexico. My office is in a converted (after all, I used to be a Mennonite minister) tool shed. I have a superb 32-inch computer monitor, of which 19 inches actually work – it tipped over and fell a while back. My keyboard is a terrific old (hey, so am I!) clickety-clackety cherry-brown mechanical model. The only problem is that it skips a space after the 'a', 'v', and 'g' keys. So, you will not find many words like 'average', 'vagabond', or 'vagaries' in my dissertation!

I own hundreds of books. Doesn't everyone? Did I mention I also own acres of land full of pecans, fruit trees, and cattle? Just two days ago, I was engrossed in reading John Sherman's book *The Mexican Right* (1997). It is a riveting read about Marxism in 1930s Mexico. I'm sure you have read it, hasn't everyone? One of my workers hollered at me to come quickly. I ran outside to observe a rather large rattlesnake in my wife's beautiful garden. . . oops, I mean my beautiful wife's garden! Now, that's better. . . after all, she might read this! We chased it out of the garden, or perhaps it chased us out of the garden, across the dirt road and into the neighbor's field. There, with a rattle of defiance (the snake, not me), we parted company. I went back to Dr. Sherman's Mexican Marxist musings. Just another typical day in paradise.



Phil and his dog.



Phil's Mexican ranch.

I write this missive as a word of encouragement to my fellow students. There most likely is no such thing as a typical Kent postgraduate student. So, if you are feeling a bit atypical today, join the club! If you think you might not belong, you are not alone. If you are worrying about finishing your degree, just be grateful you don't have rattlesnakes in your garden! The University of Kent is an incredible place, with many supportive and helpful people. Whether you work in a laundry room, on your kitchen table, or in an adobe tool shed, you will succeed. I promise you. On the days you feel like you are going nuts, just think of my pecans!

There is no other student just like you (or me). You are not average! You are no vagabond! If you are caught up in the vagaries of postgraduate work, you will navigate them well. I hope this little article gave you some hope! Best wishes from Mexico to each of you!

**Phil Stover**

PhD student Mexican History

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## 'POST-LOCKDOWN REALISM: THE BLESSING OF LOW EXPECTATIONS'

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Special thanks to

**Christopher Hill and Felicity Clifford from the Graduate and Researcher College.**

**Our contributors to this edition.**

**And our proofreading team: Juweena Appanah, Poppy Britcher, Bini Claringbold, Holly Cook, Lily Gibbs, Kiran Chandrakumar Jyothi, Olivia Lumley, Rozalinde Paul, Eve Stowe, Sarah Turner.**



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