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Associate is the newsletter of the Ustinov Association, for alumni and friends of Ustinov College and the Graduate Society.

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Behind the Scenes at the Ustinov Seminar
Penny Wilson

As Ustinovians will be aware, three or four times a term a message goes out to all postgraduate students in Durham warmly inviting them to attend a Ustinov Seminar at the end of the week. What is the seminar and how does it happen?

As far as the contents go, every seminar is a unique, interdisciplinary, mini-colloquium of its own, a social as well as an academic event that takes its character not just from its speakers but from its audience, and from its link with the Durham Institute of Advanced Study (IAS). This year, in two seminars held jointly with the IAS on the current theme of ‘Futures’, we were highly privileged to welcome as speakers five visiting IAS Fellows: Professors Russell Jacoby from UCLA and Andy Pickering from Exeter for a November seminar on utopias and dystopias, and Professor Stephen Taylor from Reading, Andrew Crumey (novelist and critic), and Jonathon Porritt (former Director of Friends of the Earth and co-Founder of Forum for the Future) for a February seminar on ‘risk’.

On 12th March the University’s Vice-Chancellor Professor Chris Higgins joined us for the fifth anniversary of the Seminar, fittingly celebrated with presentations and a panel related to the values of the College itself and the man for whom it was named: ‘Sir Peter Ustinov: Strength in Diversity and Intercultural Understanding’. Other thematic seminars during the year have featured sparkling and varied presentations on histories, festivals, and sport, with two seminars including some spell-binding live musical performances. As always there have been regular multi-disciplinary smorgåsbord seminars where speakers and audience can enjoy the opportunity of thinking about differences and connections with areas of research well outside their own. Typically for an ever-developing institution, the last seminar of the year in June struck out in an important new direction, recognising the importance of research at all stages of a Durham education with the inclusion alongside postgraduate presentations of a stunningly impressive session devoted to showcasing undergraduate research.

But this doesn’t all just happen by itself. After five years, much of it runs more or less like clockwork – the venue (the café), the timing (Saturday morning), the format (three to four papers, with statutory coffee break), the publicity and the free lunch. Fisher House is spruced up after the party the night before (essential, and thanks to Margaret Hall for her heroic efforts in this area); the porter turns off the Fisher House fan (too noisy); the lunch is ordered and appears (Sheila Seal, and now Carol Knaggs from the café). There is a committed and enthusiastic committee sharing out tasks and facing a multitude of mini-crises from uncertainty of supplies or technology – ask them how to mull wine in Fisher House – to ill-timed televising of international sports fixtures in the bar next door.

I am immensely grateful to all the people who have been responsible over the past years for setting the seminar on its current strong foundations, too many to number, but at this point would like to pay special tribute to Jan Graf, who over two years transformed seminar documentation and procedures with exemplary efficiency, and Zilia Iskoujina, for four years the moving spirit for the seminar, cajoling speakers into their themes and computers and data projectors into compliance. I know that Nee Nee Chan (who writes elsewhere in this issue about the seminar) and the rest of the enthusiastic and ever-expanding seminar group will ensure that its future – in these years of ‘Futures’ – is secure for a long time to come.

e: Ustinov.Seminar@durham.ac.uk
w: www.dur.ac.uk/ustinov.college/collegelife/seminars
or find us on Facebook: The Ustinov Seminar 2010/2011
The Ustinov Seminar was created five years ago under the auspice of college principal Dr Penny Wilson so there could be regular and sustained discussion of postgraduate research for Durham students. On three or four Saturday mornings each term, in the cozy intimacy of Fisher House’s Café@Ustinov, postgraduates from different disciplines and different colleges meet to hear presentations from their peers with titles as diverse as Music as a Reconciliation Tool, Renaissance Dream Narratives, Hypertension and Islamic Finance.

From 10.15 on the morning of a seminar, you can turn up to talk with fellow researchers over coffee and biscuits before presentations begin on that week’s theme. Presentations tend to be given by three or four postgraduates, who can be starting their research, in the middle of it, or just completing their theses. What presenters want is feedback on their work and the opportunity for debate and cross-fertilisation between disciplines, entirely in the spirit of our Seminar patron, Bill Bryson, and the late Sir Peter Ustinov, the former University chancellor for whom the series is named.

With 60+ successful sessions organised since 2006, a real sense of a postgraduate research community has sprung up around the Ustinov Seminar. It attracts a regular crowd of around 30 postgraduates and staff, and often more – the combination of interesting subjects and free lunch is something of a winner. In its successful collaborations with the Institute of Advanced Study (IAS), the Seminar has also generated insightful discussions that have stimulated the thinking of participants and the audience. The postgraduates’ diverse backgrounds, disciplines and research interests raise the potential for interdisciplinary discussion and research.

This year’s seminars have been on a fascinating range of themes; January’s, on Academic Value, prompted a discussion on the merits of academic research that was surprisingly lively considering how late the Burns Night formal had run the previous evening. Presentations from the fields of pest resistance in agriculture, literature of the American presidency and online gaming communities were drawn together in a fascinating panel on the factors that motivate and reward postgraduate researchers. February presentations were on the subject of risk, covering areas as varied as legislating against terrorism, medical risks during pregnancy and Cold War political strategies, before visiting fellows from the IAS offered their own fascinating take on the nature of risk and chance from the perspectives of historian, environmentalist, scientist and novelist. Celebrating the essential multidisciplinary nature of the series, a session in March featured engaging presentations on the Italian jewellery industry, gamma-ray astronomy, the role of art in education and British propaganda cinema of the Second World War.

### Research impact

Pondering the theme of Academic Value, what, I wondered, do people see being the value of the Seminar itself? I posed this question to the presenters and audience at the 26 February seminar, and the following quotations give a sense of what appeals to them.

I really enjoy my subject and wish to share it. The Ustinov Seminar is an excellent resource to generate interest in my subject.
Dean Rowell (PhD, History), presenter on Anthony Asquith : British Wartime Cinema and Propaganda in the Second World War

Well, I first came as part of the audience. Now as a presenter, I want to put my work out, so that members of the audience can relate their work to mine. And I want to practise my presentation skills.
Jon Harris (PhD, Astronomy), presenter on Gamma-Ray Astronomy

(cont on next page)
Academic Values: the Ustinov Seminar
Nee Nee Chan

It's to share what I've researched, especially as my topic is the visual arts is not a common topic. The Ustinov Seminar is a fine platform to share my work with fellow scholars.
Kay Kok (EdD, Education), presenter on Development of ‘extended logic’ and ‘self-confidence’ through arts education: A lack and a need for Singapore’s creative economy

I come because I’m interested in the science stuff—I’m from History, and it’s easy to get stuff from my own department! It’s also good to see that the ideas and problems I’m thinking about are in most disciplines. And more generally, there are lots of people from different disciplines to meet.
Nicki Kindersley (MA, History)

It’s a friendly environment to show some of your research and get more confidence from participation.
Michele F. Fontefrancesco (PhD, Anthropology), presenter on Jewellery and crisis: exploring economy beyond economics

This is my first time here. I came to support my friend who is one of the presenters. It’s really informative and good for social life as postgraduate study can be really isolating. Doing academic work is not being in an ivory tower. The seminar helps broaden my views.
Judy Wu (EdD, Education)

It’s a platform for exchange of knowledge in various fields. It’s also a social and motivating environment.
Deepthi Swamy (MSc, Corporate & International Finance)

I come for the interesting topics and because they come from various departments and are interdisciplinary in nature. I think interdisciplinary research is very popular in Durham.
Jie Zhang (PhD, Geography)

Hearing about people’s research, new approaches, is really useful; it helps my own research. It’s nice as a social thing and being a PhD student, doing my own work, it’s good to be reminded that academia is also a social thing.
Zoe Cormack (PhD, History)

What I like, as an anthropology student, is to hear a wide range of interests. I like to take a broader view of others’ research. When I get the emails about the seminars, I usually come as there is often something that interests me.
Jim Coxon (MA, Anthropology)

It’s mind-broadening to see other subjects and think out of the box. We’re observers and it’s interesting to see other people’s universes.
Max (BSc, Physics)

I think the seminars broaden our horizons and add knowledge of other subjects. I get to meet other people as well. I enjoy coming along.
Chen Jingyi (MA, Education)

It’s to meet new people ... it’s a good opportunity to find out new ideas from people’s presentations for your own research. In short, it’s like building bridges across disciplines.
Vera Smirnova, Presenter and Ustinov Seminar Committee

Clearly, the Ustinov Seminar has made an impact on the postgraduate research community in Durham University. Here’s wishing it many more successful years!
Why did you decide to start New Walk?
The best thing, of course, is feeling as though you have discovered something special - this does happen occasionally - and it is a pleasure to be in a position to publish fascinating but little-known writers and artists alongside more famous ones we admire. I wanted to set up a magazine that could be pretty much all-embracing, open to rigid formalism and the boldest experimentalism and everything in between, so I'm glad to be co-editing: if Nick Everett (the other general editor) or I like something enough, it goes in, and we have complimentary but different tastes. There are several fine poetry magazines in this country already, but of course none of them quite do things the way I would.

The first issue features new work from Andrew Motion, Mark Ford and Alison Brackenbury, among others - how did you go about soliciting/securing submissions from these well-known poets?
It depends. Some submit, others we approach. Alison Brackenbury emailed us some poems and we liked them. I asked her if she wanted to write some prose for us - we like to publish critical prose and poetry from a few of the same people in the same issue - and she immediately sent a quirky, idiosyncratic and perceptive piece on Wilfred Owen. We had to take it. I'd been in touch with Andrew Motion about something else, and thought I might as well mention the magazine and invite a submission. The poem of his we published is actually one of my favourites in issue 1. For the first issue we also approached and subsequently published Tom Leonard, Grevel Lindop and a few others. But we really do care primarily about the quality of the work, as we see it. I'm not very interested in names, and we've rejected work from poets who might have made your initial list of famous names. At least three quarters of the poetry we publish comes in the form of unsolicited submissions, which is how it should be.

How is the magazine funded?
We are not funded. The School of English at the University of Leicester helped with some of the printing costs for the first issue, which was generous, and we have a very small amount of suitable advertising in each issue. We're looking for more funding, of course. Almost all of our funds come from subscriptions and sales - these are the lifeblood of the magazine, and without them we simply couldn't exist. To get them, we need to be full of entertaining and intelligent articles, the finest poetry and fiction, stunning artwork, etc, which is one reason why we're so concerned to get the balance right.

Can people submit their own work to New Walk or contribute in other ways?
Yes! We welcome submissions of poetry and fiction, and ideas for poetry-related articles (with samples of previous work). We want to publish articles that are prescient, original, witty, opinionated, edifying. Our email address for submissions is newwalkmagazine@gmail.com. We recommend that people read the magazine before submitting poems, artwork or fiction. We do like people who take an interest in us as well as expecting us to take an interest in them, and for people thus inclined subscriptions can be ordered here: www.newwalkmagazine.bigcartel.com. Or send a cheque for £15 (annual subscription, inc. p&p) with your name and address to Nick Everett, New Walk Magazine, School of English, University of Leicester, University Road, Leicester LE1 7RH.

Lastly: What have you learned as you have taken New Walk from idea to reality?
That I hate sending rejection letters. And that a lot of people who write poems don't have the faintest interest in reading poems.
Since leaving Ustinov, I have three concerns: on the political front, I’m currently elected to the National Board of the Republican Liberty Caucus. On the non-profit front, I’m president of the local affiliate for Habitat for Humanity (Greater Nashua Habitat for Humanity). In the private sector, I’m doing Management and Public Relations consulting independently.

Republican Liberty Caucus (RLC)

I was elected to a two-year term on the organization’s national board during this year’s Annual Convention in Washington DC (last February). My responsibilities include helping the national leadership make decisions to grow and expand the organization, help it develop a strategic vision on how to better impact the Republican Party, Congressional and Presidential races. We also offer support to our state chapters to help them impact state-level politics.

The organization supports individual rights and liberty, limited government, and free enterprise within the Republican Party. I feel this translates into an effort to encourage the GOP to focus more on fiscal issues (fiscal responsibility) and less on social issues (we prefer to leave these issues up to the individual). Generally, the organization is regarded as representative of the “libertarian” wing of the GOP.

In recent years (it seems to me), the organization has spoken against any type of economic government intervention that enables “big-business” to become “big-government”: we opposed bail-outs under both Republicans and Democrats. We are also the wing of the GOP that has been most concerned with some of our interventions abroad in recent years. This is far too complicated to explain in such black-and-white terms here, but that’s the general idea.

As Reagan said, “I believe the heart and soul of conservatism is libertarianism.” We are a Republican organization that has been prodding some serious soul-searching within the Party in recent years. Given New Hampshire’s libertarian leanings, I feel I come from a state that has a uniquely strong libertarian culture – this gives a great deal of legitimacy to my voice on the national board.

I’ve been a member since 2000. I retained my membership while abroad, while studying at Durham University. In the past I worked for two US Senators: Hank Brown (CO) and John H. Chafee (RI). I also ran for a state-wide office when I was young (23). So this is not my first political responsibility, but I feel RLC’s mission has never been more important. I am also supporting Governor Tim Pawlenty’s presidential campaign in New Hampshire. The A-Grade he earned from the libertarian Cato Institute was a key reason for my choice.

Greater Nashua Habitat for Humanity

I was elected President of the Board of Directors in 2009. I’m approaching the end of my term as president and am not running for re-election to that position as I feel I squeezed in quite a bit of work into these two years. My responsibility in this organization has been to develop a strategic vision and plan to grow the organization: its capacity to deliver in its mission as well as to raise the funds necessary to do so. I began volunteering with the organization in 2008, as I began transitioning to the United States (from the United Kingdom) to finish my PhD work (writing the thesis). Given that it was a small organization when I came on board, I took what could be better defined as a Pro-Bono Executive Director role. Since I came on board we have hired one staff member (a Director of Resource Development) and we have expanded our structure and the amount of volunteer roles to provide a wider array of services. We want to continue building affordable housing but we also want to play a role in revitalizing communities. We are definitely having a much bigger impact on our service region than before.

Lastly...

I do independent work in PR and Management Consulting, outside politics and the non-profit efforts.

On Durham University

The time I spent at Durham University has given me incredibly valuable insight as to how the rest of the world approaches problems and how cultural boundaries can affect decision-making. It has made me more cognizant of the need to understand diverse perspectives. More than anything, the quality of education at Durham University and its international stature has given me strong confidence that in any leadership role I am fortunate enough to serve in I can tackle problems with unique analytical skills, knowing I can draw from both the academic and world experiences I was exposed to while studying there. I’m also proud of the calibre of the alumni community I am a part of as a result of my time at Durham University, and look forward to working with many of them in any current or future opportunities for public service. It’s great to be a part of such an outstanding global community.
I left a cushy assistant professorship in international studies at De La Salle University, Manila in May 2009 to spend a scorching summer in a small rural town in the Philippines, walking down dusty roads to talk to the farmers one by one. The Philippines has a democratic political system much like the United States, with three co-equal branches of government: executive, judicial and legislative.

My experience of this East Asian developing country is of a nation riddled with corruption and graft. The small town of Polangui, Albay for instance (located in the third district of the Bicol province in the Luzon island grouping of the Philippine archipelago), is under the influence of a powerful politician. In my opinion, ever since he has been in power people have experienced more poverty. I have first-hand experience of this, because my family is heavily rooted in Polangui; our clan makes up over 85% of the township’s population. Compelled to reform Polangui, it was under these circumstances that I volunteered as Campaign Manager for the Liberal Party of the Philippines (LP) Polangui mayoral candidate during the 2010 Philippine national elections.

Participating in a local grass-roots campaign under a multi-sector movement that advocated improved political, economic and social relations for the Polangui community was no easy task. Major responsibilities included developing administrative processes, managing election budgets, speech writing, auditing and accounting of total expenditure; hours were long, with countless sleepless nights; and available training was not always helpful. The job required total commitment, strong attention to detail, and very thick skin.

A campaign manager oversees all activities related to the campaign and deals with local as well as national representatives of various sectors, both public and private. In Polangui, this means dealing mostly with farmers on agricultural issues. But there are many other social concerns, such as battered women, sexually abused children, domestic violence, rampant drug addiction, alcoholism, and the deterioration of the physical landscape and environment.

Polangui has also experienced an influx of displaced persons from Muslim Mindanao, which is home to one of the two most violent movements in Southeast Asia—the other is the recent conflict between the Thai and Cambodia borders (www.irinnews.org). The predominantly Muslim island of Mindanao is a heavily contested region due to land ownership issues. This situation is a major but not the only cause of the armed independence movement in Mindanao, which has even attracted the Southeast Asian version of Al Qaeda based in Indonesia.

Volunteering to work for a political campaign is one of the best ways to get into politics, provided your candidate wins. Mind you, politics is a dirty game. Philippine politics in particular has coevolved alongside and in tandem with illegal prostitution, gambling and drugs. The way in which politics is run in the Philippines has undoubtedly left an indelible mark on Filipino society, destroying its social fabric. Nonetheless, as I have learned the hard way, should the opportunity to improve the daily lives of people for the common good comes one’s way, seize it with scholarly sensibility.

Perhaps the most interesting story I can relay from the experience is how babies got dropped on my family doorstep. With poverty so widespread in Polangui, many cannot afford the means to raise their offspring. And with Roman Catholicism dominant country wide, the use of contraception is scarce. Three babies were left outside our Polangui gate for my family to care for—the idea being that the children would have a better chance of life with us, rather than with their destitute parents. This new addition to my family provides a nice allegory towards the kind of things one has to do as politician with moral conscience in the Philippines.
Time flies very fast. In writing for this edition of Associate, George and I have just realised that we left Ustinov three years ago. It brings us back to the ‘home’—Howlands Farm—where we spent an unforgettable three years. Arriving in Britain in 2005 and knowing almost no-one, Ustinov gave us the support we needed to face the challenge of leaving our motherland for the first time. Our Principal and Vice-Principal (Penny and Theresa), the professional staff, the porters and the café staff made us feel incredibly welcome.

During our years at Ustinov, the best thing was the true sense of international community. Ustinov provides a platform for developing friendships with people from all over the world with their distinct and precious cultures, whom we would never have met otherwise. Working with the Ustinov Intercultural Forum, Ustinov Seminar, the Durham Chinese Students and Scholars Association and the Ustinov Table Tennis Society bring highly rewarding experience in terms of further deepening global understanding and adapting to multicultural societies. We are extremely grateful to Ustinov for giving us memories and friends that will last a lifetime, and has made us feel confident to take the next challenge in Australia.

George and I continue towards PhDs in Finance at the University of Melbourne, where we have been since February 2009. Given our experience in Ustinov, the decision to live in college was easy. Ormond College, our residence and the second oldest college of the University of Melbourne, has a magnificent main building (including the ‘Harry Potter’ Dining Hall) and beautiful gardens. More importantly, just as we are very thankful to Penny, Theresa and all our Ustinov friends, we truly appreciate the moral support and encouragement of the Ormond community, which has inspired us throughout our gruelling journey through first-year PhD coursework. We have particularly enjoyed Monday-night problem solving tutorials, held by the master, Prof. Rufus Black. The tutorials, plus his works on ethics and public policy issues and nine-year experience at McKinsey & Company (Australia) as a partner, offer the best learning opportunities to deal with the complexity and uncertainty of the real business world.

We look forward to receiving updates from the college community and sharing our experience from time to time. Our warmest wishes to all staff, Ustinovians and alumni.

Photo: Chelsea Yaqiong Yao
As society continues to use the Earth’s resources, we should expect tomorrow’s mines to be sited in increasingly remote locations. This is one reason geologists are finding themselves working in hard-to-pronounce places all over the world. Postgraduates in the Department of Earth Sciences at Durham attest to the jet-set lifestyle of geologists with projects based in Bolivia, Iceland, Borneo and even the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.

My PhD project, in Tanzania, is not as obscure as others in the department. Hundreds of thousands of tourists flock to Tanzania to get up close and personal to some of the outstanding animals that roam the East African savannahs. Unfortunately, geological travel rarely takes you to the prettiest places that a country has to offer. I work in the area surrounding Mkwajuni village in south-west Tanzania. This area is particularly well endowed with gold but is far off the beaten track for most tourists. What Mkwajuni lacks in sights, however, it makes up for in character and a different Tanzanian experience than most mzungu (a popular Kiswahili word for ‘foreigner’) will encounter. The only people that come to visit Mkwajuni are missionaries and the international mineral exploration companies looking for gold. As a result, a mzungu is an instant celebrity. It is nearly impossible to for me to walk down the streets of Mkwajuni without a parade of children calling out to me. This completely undeserved but universal reaction has taken some time to get accustomed to.

A typical field day involves finding a company truck and driving out to the start (or as close as possible) of my traverse. With map, compass, notebook and hammer in hand, I head out while making notes, collecting samples and taking geologic measurements. Artisanal miners are quite active in the area, and I commonly come across a handful of locals digging a trench in the hope of striking it rich. The miners make a small hole by hammering the pointed end of a steel rod into the rock. This hole is then filled with dynamite and ignited with a fuse and a nine-volt battery. Any rock broken loose during the blast is then sorted and broken into smaller bits using little circular stones as hammers. The crushed rock is then placed in a large drum filled with metal balls and rotated until the rock is milled into a fine powder. The powder is separated with water into heavy and light minerals, after which mercury is used to separate the gold from the rest of the heavy minerals. This mining process has remained unchanged for many years. With my research, I’m particularly interested in the rocks exposed in such trenches and I have found myself in dozens of these mines over my three-month field season.

My research focuses on determining the ages of the rocks that host gold and the geologic traps that control gold deposition, which helps the exploration companies looking for gold in the area. The samples I collect during my field season are analysed back in the De-
partment of Earth Sciences at Durham. This has been my second trip to Tanzania during my PhD, and depending on the results I gather this year I may need to return for a third season.

Travel has always been a passion for me, and I am fortunate to be in a position where I can earn money while doing something I love. Geological travel may not take you to the Eiffel Towers or Big Bens of a country, but it will provide an opportunity to interact with locals away from the commercial centres. For me, travel is all about the experience – and my experience with the artisanal miners and local residents of Mkwajuni has been unforgettable.

Photos: Chris Lawley
For many Ustinovians, the idea of conducting PhD research abroad is not a foreign concept. My particular research has taken me to Bastrop, Texas where I am looking at chimpanzee social learning. I decided on Texas because of the high standard of care the chimpanzees receive compared to some institutions in Europe, and also because it gives me access to more than 150 chimpanzees. America, of course, is English-speaking, so I have one less cultural challenge than many of you who have come from far and wide to study in Durham.

However, there are still huge differences between the Deep South and old Blighty that can be a shock to the system. Texas doesn’t do anything by halves, and so not only are the beefsteaks extreme but so are the cars, the mosquitoes and the weather. Not always the easiest combination for a fair-skinned vegetarian who can’t figure out how to drive on the other side of the road …

The research feels intense, leaving daily for the research centre (or rather, ‘center’) at 7am and returning at 5pm. I drive two hours in the ‘Golden Beast’ (that’s the SUV you can see in my picture) to the centre and spend most of my day outside with the chimpanzees. They are housed in groups in large enclosures, with both indoor and outdoor access, and receive a lot of enrichment. ‘Enrichment’ consists of giving the chimpanzees some really tasty food but making them work for it a little bit. This is very stimulating for the chimps as it’s closer to their natural way of obtaining food: rather than using a stick for ant-dipping they use a stick for dipping mustard out of a long tube – delicious! All these tasks reduce stress and fighting among the chimpanzees as well as making my research tasks easier – I am just one more person who wants to play with them. On the flip side, they can also always decide that they don’t want to play with you and would rather throw their faeces in your direction. At these times, good personal protective equipment (PPE) and patience are your friends.

Because so much of the work is practical – cutting up food treats, cleaning your equipment, putting on PPE and setting up a camcorder to video the experiments – you often find that the more theoretical aspect of your PhD gets pushed to one side. All that time I thought I would have to write the draft manuscript and finish the literature review seems to get swallowed up by seemingly menial but vital tasks. This makes the PhD aspect of the work seem more and more abstract — and not entirely missed. Maybe I’m more suited to playing chimp than playing academic ..?!

I am sure many of you will empathise when I say that spending a year (or longer) abroad gives you very mixed emotions; the highs of doing something you are passionate about mixed with the lows of the challenges you meet and the homesickness you often feel. I love being in America but I also miss Durham more than I thought I would. In particular, I miss Ustinov and the home it has provided for two years. For now, I will put up with 30°C sunshine but I dream of returning to snow, cloud and the steep hills!
The day I arrived in Durham it was raining. It was raining in that very British way: light, relentless, drizzle. The sort of rain that, as an unsuspecting foreigner – perhaps used to dramatic thunderstorms and the pelting rain that keeps you up at night – you might imagine won’t get you all that wet as you first step outside. So you decide against going back inside to get your umbrella. But to do that is to break the first rule of how to survive in Britain, ‘Never leave the house without your umbrella!’

Despite always expecting rain, I was still surprised that it was raining the day I got here. I must foolishly have hoped that the weather would reflect my excitement at finally starting my postgraduate studies. All the months of saving and planning were leading up to this day! And then: rain. But on the more positive side, it’s the only bad aspect of being in Durham, and starting my Masters, that I’ve experienced. Even the wind isn’t as bad as I’d feared, making the rain far more bearable.

I remember, after I got over worrying about weather, being worried about whether, at the ripe old age of 26, I would be too old to fit in. Would everyone have come straight from their undergraduate degree? Or, instead, would I be too young? Would everyone else have had amazing life experiences, working and travelling all over the world? In fact, I found the University, and Ustinov College in particular, to be a nice mix of both.

The College and GCR did a fantastic job of keeping us busy during induction week. It was a great way to meet people, and to try to ignore the fact that outside it was still raining. If you weren’t going to a brunch, there were walking tours of the city, matriculation or college photographs, and in the evenings we had everything from a pub quiz to a ceilidh to an open-mic night. By the time that week was over, I was exhausted to say the least.

Induction week feels like a dream, can’t believe I once had so much free time on my hands! Induction week was also a fantastic opportunity to meet people outside of your course. When I can’t take any more reading on Popper and Kuhn’s philosophy of science, I can talk to someone about their anthropology field work or American history.

One last point that has helped me to survive the weather: I’ve found that it usually only rains for a couple of days at a time here, and after that, it’s lovely and sunny for a couple of days. Or at least clear. And you really can’t appreciate the joy of a crisp clear morning; when the air is cold, the sun is out, and the puddles from the day before are already drying.

But then came the snow...!

Photos: Sophie Graetz, Tina Kover
When I first returned to Durham a day before my graduation ceremony, I was startled by how unfamiliar it felt. Partly because I didn’t see a familiar face every two steps I took, partly because I wasn’t making my way to my cosy flat with the stomach-churning maroon carpet—to which it takes a while to accustom yourself, but after which everything else feels bland. The taxi swept me from the station up to St Chad’s and after the checking in and the dragging of an inordinate amount of luggage two flights up narrow, winding stairs, I was left to examine the room feeling as if I were discovering Durham as a fresh visitor instead of a student who had spent the last 12 months in the city. It wasn’t until I decided to go out for a walk and (literally!) ran into the voluble, excited, loud group of friends who were also making their way down from the train station that Durham felt like home again. After immense hugs, unnecessary mussing of hair, eloquent arm-punching and a continuous stream of excited chatter—very little of which found the intended recipient—we grouped together to check in everyone at their respective residences, and with the last suitcase consigned to an anonymous hotel room, we settled down at Café Rouge. The evening was spent consuming ill-advised amounts of coffee and chocolate cake and hailing unsuspecting, remote acquaintances as they made their way past on the bridge on that grey evening.

My graduation ceremony was on Thursday afternoon. However, it didn’t feel like two hours. It seemed to span three days instead, three days of robed selves or robed friends; three days of staking out the Castle and the Cathedral so that we could share and affirm the moment of joy for our friends, our classmates, even those neighbours of ours who always left their garbage in the passage; three days of late nights (and early mornings) in the dimly lit Fisher bar with the gargantuan black sofas where you can find all the inner peace (and re-energising naps) you desire; three days of no sleep, bad TV, greasy takeout, philosophical debates about the ethics of professional wrestling and endless meandering walks from café to café in the city centre.

It felt like the universe had taken my entire year here, sieved out the original loneliness, the exam frustration, the deadline anxiety, the Days When Nothing Went Right, and packed all that remained, all that was wonderful and unique in Durham, into the space of three days so I could live it again briefly, gloriously. And amongst these three days, one moment stands out, imprinted in gold in my memory. Bill Bryson, shaking my hand and telling me, (I conveniently forget that he has said almost the same words to about a hundred other people), “Congratulations Hala.”

James Fenner (MA Museum & Artefact Studies, 2009–10)

On 13th January this year, I was lucky enough to attend my Masters graduation in the beautiful building that is Durham Cathedral. Although the ceremony was delayed by half an hour, the day went pretty smoothly overall. Understandably, it was a little hectic, what with queuing for tickets, gowns and hoods, photos and so on, but it was thoroughly worth the effort. As a bonus, I got to meet Chancellor Bill Bryson and shake his hand—and, in my case (I was feeling especially foolhardy), give him a one-arm hug! I can tell you now, he was not expecting it. The ceremony itself was fairly quick, about an hour or so, and Bill wrapped things up with a short but entertaining speech. Even the weather was fairly nice, but obviously it’s not always guaranteed so early in the year. If you’re not sure about whether to go or not, I urge to change your mind because it’s not every day you get to meet such a celeb—who knows who you’ll have as the new Chancellor next year!—in such a jaw-droppingly beautiful setting.

Congregation stories

The Graduand’s Tale

Hala Sabri (MA Education, 2009–10)
Graduation Stories

Paddy Nolan (MSc Elementary Particle Theory, 2009–10)
There are few experiences so familiar and yet still so exciting as arriving in Durham station and catching your first glimpse of the Cathedral. This time, my arrival was mixed with a certain sadness, though: my last official visit to the University. Having predicted a stale afternoon of monotonous speeches at the ceremony, I soon ditched my expectations at the surreal sight of 200 graduands doing a Mexican wave in the Castle courtyard. And at the ceremony itself, I have a brief memory of telling Bill Bryson he was my hero, but I must have been too pleased with myself after that to take anything more in!

That evening consisted of the usual dinner and drinks, but everyone’s sights were fixed firmly on the graduation party at Fisher House the following night. The last such event we’d have thrown for us, we were determined to make the most of it. Once we were in the bar, there was no need to wait for the usual signal (the DJ playing “Killing in the Name of”) for the adrenaline-fuelled madness to begin. I’m glad the photos are too dark to reprint here ... That night reminded me that being a Durham student was all very well—but being a Ustinovian is much better!

Maddy Mant (MSc Palaeopathology, 2009–10)
I have always been a sucker for a good ceremony. Half the reason I went to Brownies and piano examinations as a child was the promise of a ‘graduation’ service following the hours of badge-earning and scale-practising. So I never doubted I would return to Durham to cross the stage and sneak a quick peck onto Bill Bryson’s unsuspecting furry cheek. Revisiting Durham after my emotional departure last September was heartening; everything important about the town is still present—the treacherous cobblestones, raucous Ustinov parties, and the towering cathedral. I fervently hope that future alumni make the effort to don their robes and attend their own congregations. I will cherish the memory forever, particularly because my mother proudly bought the DVD!

Do you have memories of your graduation or your time in Durham, or what you’ve been doing since you graduated? To contribute to the next edition of Associate, write to Ustinov.Association@durham.ac.uk. And please send photos!
Long before I knew what I wanted my PhD topic to be, I knew I wanted to do a PhD. I felt that academia was where I belonged, I had so much more reading that I wanted to do, and at the end of it all I would get to be called ‘Doctor’. It also meant that I would be able to fulfil a lifelong ambition, and one that I’d coyly imagined myself incapable of when I did my undergrad and masters degrees. I’d always wanted to be on University Challenge.

When I lived in London, I’d tune in to BBC2 diligently every Monday night, firing answers back at the television between mouthfuls of dinner, shouting repeatedly when blankfaced teams couldn’t come up with an answer ... or, more often than not, hissing ‘Of course’ to myself when I’d missed the obvious by a mile. My flatmates looked at me with concern. And even more so when I promised them I would be on the show one day.

Within a week of getting to Ustinov, I was asking how I could get on to the college team. I arranged to meet captain Jon Carter to go through the test questions, and there I was again, sitting on a sofa, firing off answers willy-nilly. Fortunately, I’d already eaten and wasn’t spitting mouthfuls of dinner over him; I think this is what secured me a place in the Ustinov line-up. But that was just the first of many challenges on the route to Manchester.

The inter-collegiate heats had plenty of drama: we had to abandon a first-round match in Butler bar halfway through because it was just so noisy and relocate to a claustrophobia-inducing seminar room, where we narrowly clinched victory against a strong St Mary’s team. So convincing was our win at Cuth’s in the next round, though, that we embarked on an extended celebration and had to reconvene the following afternoon to remind each other what the result had been. The semi against Trev’s was a down-to-the-wire game whose tension was heightened by having an eleventh-hour substitution of quizmaster. But we made it to the final, a rematch against Mary’s: only I couldn’t attend, because I was already going to London for a climate change demo! Pesky principles ... After I’d put the placards away and headed to a Bloomsbury bar with my fellow greenies, I was frantically texting Jon to find out the result. Ustinov: runners-up. So that, I thought, was that.

Evidently not, however. The DSU were recalling top performers from the tournament to sit a test (another one!) to determine the final team that would be sent to Manchester. We gathered. We answered questions. Our papers were collected. By this stage, I had convinced myself that I was going to have to try again for next year’s team. But I was stopped in the library a few days later by a member of one of the other teams: ‘Congratulations,’ he said. ‘You’ve made it.’ I checked my email, and so I had.

The Durham team – with Roger and Lucy from Mary’s; myself and our very own el presidente Matt Hann from Ustinov; and reserve Tudur from Chad’s – started to meet and begin training in earnest. I have to tell you, those long nights in the Dun Cow puzzling over the conundra of its pub quiz were some of the most gruelling hours of my life (apart from the hours the next morning when I realised how much Castle Eden I’d been drinking). Nevertheless, they clearly stood us in good stead for the last challenge before we got on the telly. One dreary February afternoon, the team trooped off to Newcastle to sit yet another test and be asked about what we were studying, while DSU
sab Ben Robertson paced up and down outside like an expectant father. ‘You’ll hear from us within a week,’ the Granada folk told us. We heard in a matter of days. We were going to be famous!

We thought there was only so much training we could do, but we did it all: more trips to the Dun Cow, the University Challenge board game and quiz book, plenty of buzzer practice. And suddenly it was one Saturday late in February and we were on a Manchester-bound train testing each other with my mouse mat of Roman emperors.

By five we were in reception at Granada Studios as the Newcastle team emerged. ‘Good luck,’ one of their number said resignedly. ‘You’re representing the North East, now.’ No pressure then. We went into the canteen for dinner, and there were our opponents. ‘Hi,’ we said, ‘we’re Durham.’ They nodded. ‘We’re Magdalen. Magdalen, Oxford,’ they replied. Over our curry and chips, we tersely discussed what this meant for our chances.

In the green room, things didn’t look so bad. We watched the match before ours being recorded and, leaning back in our chairs, we confidently gave the answers that neither team was getting right. Yeah. It’d be a doddle. Then we went to get made up, lightly, and were taken into the studio where we waited behind the set with the Magdalen team.

That set isn’t as substantial as it seems on screen: when we were led in to our places, we found they were at glass-topped wooden desks with a couple of monitors mounted beneath for the picture round. And the audience is much smaller than you’d expect. The studio’s also rather open and chilly. Or maybe it was just our nerves making us shudder. When our host – the national treasure that is Jeremy Paxman – entered the studio there were cheers; he calmly ran through the set-up, came and chatted amiably with both teams and had his photograph taken. Then he took his seat, the title music played, and we began.

The odd effect of being there after all that build-up was that time seemed both elongated and hurried. As a result, it felt as though it lasted exactly half an hour. That we were off the mark first certainly helped bolster our confidence, and even as we looked across to Magdalen’s rapidly mounting score we still felt sure we’d have plenty of time to catch up. You know those last-minute, despairing rallies you see on the show that get so frustrating? This is how they happen. The only truly frustrating thing you feel in the studio is when the other team lands a set of bonus questions they struggle with, while you’re struggling not to shout out the answer as you do at home. It was some relief when we were in there with the picture round on movie stills, even though when I watched it back on broadcast, I seem to have seized up before I can splutter out the names of the two actors who played the Joker in the Batman movies. At the end of the day, Magdalen were deserved victors. We couldn’t even nab a high-scoring runners-up position.

Paxman commiserated with us on air at the end of the show and later over a beer in the green room. He’s just as you’d expect him to be – he won’t suffer a fool, but he was happy to acknowledge we were unlucky – only, like the audience, he’s smaller in real life. We headed into Manchester for more drinks and more curry.

Keeping the result under wraps between the February recording and September broadcast was hard work, and resulted in no end of speculation around college. But on the night it went out, there were a heartening number of people in the TV room and bar at Ustinov to watch us divebomb out of the competition in the first round. And those were our 30 minutes of fame ... except I’ll still get people coming up to me saying ‘Well done on the Star Wars questions!’ (there was only the one), and ‘Poetry ... and climate change?!’ Matt, Roger and myself have also been able to exploit our residual fame/notoriety by playing Paxman on this term’s intercollegiate heats. Stumbling over questions on European history and the laws of electromagnetic induction makes you realise how easy Paxman makes it seem. Like I said: a pro.

It was worth it, though, achieving that ambition. I still sit in front of the telly most Monday nights shouting answers at the telly, though now I also think ‘We’ve got that,’ rather wistfully. Here’s to next year’s team ... wish you better luck and a better draw than we had, guys!

Photo: Matthew Griffiths
Clubs and Societies Updates...

Ustinov Basketball
Yannis Lignos

After a year of spoiling other colleges’ fun on the court, the Basketball society has once again brought home the honours for Ustinov!

The society has a multinational character, with the two teams showcasing players from all continents—we may be missing someone from Australia this year (and, all right, Antarctica), but diversity is still our fuel, because basketball needs the experience of people from all around the world. This has certainly stood us in good stead, with both A and B teams having very successful seasons.

The Ustinov A team are college Premiership champions for 2010–11. The Ustinov B team came second to St Mary’s A team in Division 1 on goal difference.

The society hopes to establish a regular women’s team in the near future.

Results summary:
Ustinov A: 5-0 win record, 216–122 point record (Off./Def.)
Ustinov B: 4–1 win record, 194–160 point record (Off./Def.)

For more details about the society, please contact Yannis at i.m.lignos@durham.ac.uk

Universities Pool Council 2010 National Women’s Championship
Winners Lara Wood

In March, Coventry played host to the Universities Pool Council 2010 National Women’s championship. Durham fielded one team of four players that consisted of one Trevelyan and three Ustinov students. Sekar Setiastuti, Jenny Ma, Amber Branch, and Lara Wood (captain) headed to the competition after securing funds from the Ustinov GCR and a fundraising event.

Day one started badly with Durham losing 4-2 to Manchester. The rest of the day was dedicated to the singles completion where Sekar and Jenny did well, getting to the quarter finals. A victory in our final group match meant that Durham made it through to quarter finals. Out of the eight remaining teams, we were seeded last so got put against Oxford 1sts again.

Now Durham loves nothing more than an upset, particularly if it is against an Oxbridge team. So, after a passionate team talk, we decided that we were not to be intimidated even though one of their players had just won the singles competition. To everyone’s surprise, we beat Oxford 1st, five-time title holders, 4-1, and Durham was through to the semis. After beating Oxford 2nds in the semis, we faced Manchester 1st, who we beat 4-1 to win the Championship.

It was a great experience for all four players and a fantastic reflection of the standard of pool at Ustinov College. It is particularly pleasing that there were three nationalities representing Ustinov and the university. These competitions are a great experience for the individuals, and the team is very grateful for the GCR’s contribution.

Above: The national winning pool team: Jenny Ma (Ustinov), Amber Branch (Trevelyan), Sekar Setiastuti (Ustinov), and Lara Wood, Captain (Ustinov). Photo: Lara Wood.
What’s going on in college

Alumni are welcome to all college events. To be added to the events mailing list, email ustinov.association@durham.ac.uk.

Café Scientifique @ Ustinov College

Professor Paul O’Brien
(Professor of Inorganic Materials at Manchester University, Vice President of the Royal Society of Chemistry and distinguished IAS fellow)

‘Of Chemistry, Chemicals and Chemists’

17th Feb 2011, 5.30pm-6.30pm Fisher House, Ustinov College

Ustinov Café Politique

Interpreting politics and conflict through an artistic lens

Tuesday, March 15th 2011
Ustinov College, Fisher House

Dr. Kathrin Horschellmann (University of Sabratha, Libya) Social and political landscapes of the Mediterranean

Richard Wilson
Director of Research
Ustinov College

BLOOMSDAY 2010 @ Ustinov College

An all-day marathon reading of James Joyce’s Ulysses

Tuesday, 15th June 2010
8am–midnight
Fisher House, Ustinov College

Are you in a band?

Please email Michelle

USTINOV SEMINAR

Multi-Disciplinary Seminar

Saturday, 11th June 10.30 am—1.00 pm Fisher House, Ustinov College

10.30 Shaping Experience and Meaning through the Dancing Body
Eleina Catelani (Department of Music)

Avshak Panal (Department of English Studies)

11.30 Coffee Break

11.45 Just Change – from Poverty to Power-lead?
Couraidee Aufrichter (Department of Anthropology)

12.15 Showcasing Undergraduate Research:
State Violence and Identity in A Clockwork Orange
Francesca Fletcher-Wilkins (Department of English Studies)

Information Theory and Neural Networks
Thorn Wright

A ‘Graduate Response’ to European Integration
Slofhan Foster

Tasty fried coffee from 10.15 and tea available for all participants
From the Graduate Society Archives

Dear Dr Wilson,

I noticed your piece in a Univ magazine about GradSoc/Ustinov marking 45 years and thought I might get in touch.

I was a founder member in Oct 1965, one of the half-dozen somehow picked to form the first house committee, and I was its chairman 1966-7.

Memories have faded but I do recall Prof Fish (or Fisher as he insisted) and the original house in Old Elvet. Then the opening of Kepier Court and the acquisition of Parson’s Field House, where the first bar was established. We rapidly learned bar-keeping and established a social programme and a cricket team (there’s probably some dusty snaps of us flannelled fools somewhere in the house).

Evidently things have moved on since then and I’ve been aware of developments only peripherally, via my own grad students.

Best wishes, Bob Johnson

Calling Ustinov & Graduate Society Alumni

Ustinov has begun planning for development of the SCR in Ustinov College, and we’re interested in getting in touch with alumni (both local and far away) who would like to get involved with Ustinov in a more practical way.

We’ll be hosting special SCR events, before and after collegiate events, such as the Café Politique, Café Scientifique, and the Ustinov Seminar, and SCR members can also join the legendary Thursday Pub Quiz, barbeque and sports challenges, in addition to being able to buy tickets for other college functions, such as formals and tutor dinners. Please get in touch with Ustinov.Association@durham.ac.uk