A CAPITOL NOTION | LAWYERS ABROAD | SOCIALLY INNOVATIVE COMMERCE
THE SCHOLAR AND THE MACHINE | SUPPORTING CANCER PATIENTS | JOINING STORIES
FATHER’S FOOTSTEPS POINT TO UOW | TEACHING THAILAND | RECOGNISING TALENT
This book is a chance for you to see what I see at the University of Wollongong. It's a chance to meet the staff and students of UOW, experience their diversity and see the opportunities UOW has given them. It also showcases the chance to go above and beyond, the ability to excel for people unafraid of challenges.

The university has certainly met every challenge set before it. What started 60 years ago as a regional college to train members of our community has become a comprehensive university of international standing.

UOW is now a university in the world’s top two per cent, a university attracting grants for research of international significance. National and international rankings show the University is held in high regard by our students—and the employers who hire them.

Importantly, it's also a university where students can enjoy a quality student experience. UOW has won national acclaim for student satisfaction and continues to excel in this area.

I welcome you to read on and see some of what makes UOW such an inspiration.

PROFESSOR JOE F CHICHARO
DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR (INTERNATIONAL)
UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG
Lawyers Abroad

Law graduates are finding their careers all over the world. Dean of Law Professor Luke McNamara helps explain what makes a UOW graduate particularly mobile.

A Capitol Notion

Lily Jade Frencham spent eight weeks in Washington DC, working as a congressional intern. This experience helped shape her future, and now she has her sights set on the United Nations.

The Scholar and the Machine

Chinese student Rui Yan was attracted by UOW’s reputation in the field of mechatronics. He explains what drew him here and why he’s optimistic for the future.

Socially Innovative Commerce

In an era of heightened concern for corporate responsibility, UOW has created a Commerce degree with a unique focus on doing the right thing.

Supporting Cancer Patients

PhD candidate Sheridan Gho never thought she would be a researcher. Now she is working to improve the lives of women living with cancer.

Joining Stories

Writer Merinda Bobis draws on her transnational experience to teach young Australian writers the value of leaving your comfort zone.

Father’s Footsteps Point to UOW

Ankita Raiyani’s father inspired her current work in materials science, where she’s making a big splash in the field of biogels.

Teaching Thailand

UOW Education students can go overseas for part of their teacher training. Emma Low went to Thailand and discovered how a new perspective helped make her a better teacher.

Student residences foster learning

A home away from home

Wollongong: A University City

Studying Medicine in Wollongong

Double degrees

Research opportunities at the University of Wollongong in Dubai

UOW gets SMART about Australia’s infrastructure

UOW PASS program world’s best

Improving Regional Health
As part of her undergraduate degree, Lily Jade Frencham spent eight weeks in Washington DC, working as an intern in the United States’ seat of government. The program opened many doors for Lily, and has helped give her a new direction for life after study.

The Uni-Capitol Washington Internship program places students in a US congressional office for eight weeks over the Australian summer. UOW is one of nine Australian universities participating in the program, which was founded and is managed by a former US congressional adviser living in Washington DC.

"The particular Congressional office I was in placed me as the ‘Press Intern’, meaning I worked mostly in media and communications. This tied in perfectly with my degree, combining politics and press!" Lily worked for Congressman John Tierney, who was then chair of the National Security and Foreign Affairs Subcommittee. She helped prepare briefing packets for a congressional delegation to the Middle East, a trip that would help shape US foreign strategy in the region.

"I was also asked by my supervisor to construct the Congressman’s response to President Obama’s first State of the Nation address," which she calls "the crowning achievement" of her time in Washington. By a fluke of good timing—Lily calls it fate—she was in Washington DC at the time of US President Barack Obama’s inauguration. Further, she also got her hands on the city’s hottest commodity: a ‘silver ticket’, an official pass to the inauguration ceremony.

She joined the Amnesty International Society at UOW in her second year. This fostered her interest in issues of social justice and change. Lily recently applied to work as a director for the Oaktree Foundation, a non-profit youth organisation working in development around the world, on a project in Papua New Guinea. She didn’t get the job.

Instead, Oaktree contacted her to see if she wanted to lead a youth delegation to the United Nations summit in New York on the Millennium Development Goals in September 2010. "The job was pretty much everything I’d ever dreamed of doing,” she says. "And here they were asking me if I was interested!"

The Millennium Development Goals are eight targets set by the member states of the United Nations. Among these targets is the eradication of the worst of the world’s poverty by 2015. It’s an ambitious collaborative effort, and Lily seems a perfect match for it. "Since joining Amnesty, I’ve jumped at the chance to become involved in other social justice projects. I think it’s amazing that putting an end to injustices like extreme poverty is possible within my lifetime.” Lily chose her degree based on her strengths in high school, enrolling in a Bachelor of Communication and Media Studies (Journalism) – Bachelor of Laws double degree.

And now that she’s nearing the end of her studies? “After four-and-a-half years of my double degree, I have come to the confident conclusion that I’d like to work in a different area,” she explains. “I’d like to work in Aid and Development. That’s a pretty big area, and I’m not sure exactly where I fit into it yet. It could take the form of working in the public service via AusAID, working in policy for a not-for-profit, or even working for a charity in a developing country. If I’m dreaming big, my career goal would be to work with the United Nations.”

It seems that Lily’s well on her way, though, and already knows the value of aiming high. "The opportunities I’ve been given have inspired me to persist and to push further than I ever would have. I now know the only time you’re guaranteed to miss out on what you want is when you don’t try for it.”
Law graduates can expect to choose from a wide range of careers at the end of their degree—and many of these jobs can take them abroad. For UOW graduates, this has included law firms in London and Singapore, private sector organisations such as Macquarie Capital in the Middle East, and Google in Europe.

Dean of the UOW Faculty of Law Professor Luke McNamara says there are some distinctive features of the University’s LLB program that make international careers a genuine option for graduates.

“When I see the diverse career types and geographic spread of our graduates I am proud of the way our program equips them with the qualities employers value.”

Greg Hatfield is one example of a graduate whose law degree has launched an international career. Greg completed his Bachelor of Laws at UOW in 2003. He is currently living in the Netherlands, working for law firm Philips as Senior Legal Counsel. He credits the LLB for helping him find his way into his current role.

“The Faculty of Law at UOW focused on teaching through small groups, rather than through traditional lectures,” says Greg. “This teaching method helped me develop certain skills which are important in my current role, such as making an oral argument and listening to the viewpoints of others.”

“The use of seminar learning provided me with many useful skills, including the ability to work well in teams, which is very important in my role. UOW also offered the possibility to study abroad on exchange, and I was able to attend Uppsala University in Sweden, which allowed me to study in a diverse international environment.”

First-year law at UOW is an immersion experience where students get the benefit of careful guidance built around seminar-based teaching and learning. Students undertake professional skills training in three areas. Legal research and writing, communication skills and advocacy modules all help to prepare students for life after university, by building a foundation early in the degree.

A legal internship is also a core part of the program. “This reflects the Faculty’s strong view that practical experience is an important part of the training of future legal professionals,” says Professor McNamara.

“I love talking to students and future students about where a UOW law degree can take them,” explains Professor McNamara, “particularly those that aspire to work internationally. I tell them about the many countries around the world where UOW law graduates have found employment, and the different types of careers that they are pursuing.”

Lawyers abroad

One of the most common questions future students ask law schools is ‘where will a Law degree take me?’ It’s a hard question to respond to, since the honest answer is: anywhere.
STUDENT RESIDENCES
FOSTER LEARNING

Data collected by the University of Wollongong and its residences over the past five years shows that 91.3% of students living in UOW accommodation continued their studies, compared with an 84.7% retention rate for those not living in a university residence.

This is consistent with research from the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), that shows that residential students stay at university longer because of “greater levels of individually focused support”.

Accommodation Services General Manager Nigel Pennington said the social benefits of living on-campus are as important as the academic ones. “In addition to academic benefits students live in a supportive and diverse community that assists them to settle into a new environment,” he said.

More information on UOW residences can be found at accommodation.uow.edu.au

WOLLONGONG: A UNIVERSITY CITY

With a student population of 22,000 in a city of 350,000, life in Wollongong is shaped by UOW. The city is a vibrant, multicultural place that combines a relaxed coastal atmosphere with cosmopolitan dining, shopping and culture.

About 90 minutes by road or train from central Sydney, Wollongong is the primary city of the Illawarra region, and is Australia’s ninth-largest city. Historically, the city focused on farming, fishing, coal mining and steel making. However telecommunications and IT, education, manufacturing and tourism have emerged as the industries of the future.

Wollongong prides itself on welcoming students from a variety of regions, whether they are from Sydney, country areas or overseas, and joint initiatives between UOW and the City of Wollongong, such as the annual Welcome2Wollongong festival, work to integrate and welcome new students as they begin their studies.

The City of Wollongong is home to people drawn from more than 70 nationalities, including an international student population of nearly 6,000. The City’s multi-ethnic roots stretch all the way back to its origins as an industrial hub attracting migrant workers in the early twentieth century. The pristine environment and availability of work encouraged people from all over the world to make their homes in the City.

When UOW started attracting a diverse range of international students in the 1980s, Wollongong was already a place where a mix of different languages, cuisines, religions and customs was commonplace.

So no matter who you are or where you are from, Wollongong—and UOW—will make you feel at home and will give you the ultimate ‘university’ experience.

A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Looking for an alternative to campus accommodation? Australian Family Homestays (AFH), UOW’s exclusive provider of homestay accommodation. AFH is another option for students to consider when looking for somewhere to live in Wollongong and guarantees placements at any time during the year.

As a participant, you will be welcomed as part of the family and included in your host family’s routine and activities. This gives you the opportunity to make lasting friendships—and may also mean you have to take your turn doing the dishes!

Your host family is carefully chosen to make sure your stay is a wonderful experience. This includes thorough screening and police checks on families who provide guardianship for students under 18 years old.

Having worked with families and students from numerous countries for over a decade, AFH have collected a wealth of knowledge and understanding of people & cultures. This sets AFH apart as one of the leading organisations of its kind within Australia.

STAND UP & STAND OUT.

DEAN’S SCHOLAR AT UOW FOR ELITE STUDENTS.

High-achieving and academically gifted students are invited to apply for the Dean’s Scholar program in select degrees at the University of Wollongong. Successful candidates can access accelerated learning, academic mentors, special programs and dedicated study space.

Enquire now for more information. 1300 367 869 / uniadvice@uow.edu.au
The Graduate School of Medicine (GSM) at UOW offers a distinctive approach to medical education. The School was built around a mission to address Australia’s shortage of skilled doctors practising outside of major cities. Now, the GSM is committed to training world-class doctors who will use their skills to serve their communities, particularly in regional, rural and remote locations.

Students spend significant time during their training in long-term clinical placements in regional and rural facilities. They also work with regional and rural doctors to develop an understanding of what it means to practise medicine in these areas. These clinical experiences reflect the realities of medicine in regional, rural and remote communities, and the curriculum presents ‘problems’ that students must solve in the context of these places.

While the GSM focuses on training doctors to work in nonurban areas, graduates receive a broad-based training that ensures they can pursue any career in medicine, including all the medical specialisations.

UOW offers a truly unique and rewarding educational experience that provides the academic base for a lifetime of practising medicine in a rapidly changing and challenging health care environment.

A STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

I chose this program from among many schools in North America and Australia. I have already had a career in project management and have chosen to go into medicine to make a difference.

The focus on rural and remote medicine; the early exposure to patients; the one-year placement in community; and the case-based learning approach were all in line with my experience as the ideal way to train professionals. In my early days as a master carpenter, we had a saying: “there’s nothing like the doing, for the knowing”. I hope that southern vernacular translates!

I am now two years into the program and am very well satisfied that the school has delivered as promised. There has been a good balance between the theory and practice. The size of the program allows for direct interaction between professors and students. The hospital placements, especially in the smaller hospitals, have been brilliant. I have had direct training from senior consultants in both Bowral and the Shoalhaven.

PETER BRIGHT, CANADA
BACHELOR OF MEDICINE AND
BACHELOR OF SURGERY
PHASE 2 STUDENT, CLASS 2008

PATHWAYS TO MEDICINE

The UOW Bachelor of Medicine & Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) is a four-year full-time graduate entry-level medical course. Because it is a graduate program, applicants must have already completed a Bachelor degree. The GSM does not require applicants come from a particular degree or study area, however. It’s more important that a student has performed exceptionally well in their chosen area and shows a passion for learning and helping people.

Medical students need to have good aptitude for studying science, but there are many options for picking up this knowledge during undergraduate studies. Even if an applicant’s Bachelor degree is unrelated to health sciences, they can take relevant subjects as electives, or even seek outside tutoring.

The other main entry requirement is the Graduate Australian Medical School Admissions Test (GAMSAT). The GAMSAT is an independently developed exam designed to help graduate medical schools select candidates. It is a day of examinations that evaluate reasoning and problem solving, communication skills, and reasoning in biological and physical sciences.
Global warming, mining and resources, and emissions trading are all high on the political agenda in Australia, and will remain so for years. Sustainability and social conscience are here to stay.

As such, businesses will very soon need a new breed of graduate—they want both the knowledge and skills expected from a world-class degree, but also a graduate who operates with social responsibility.

In this setting, the University of Wollongong has created a new type of degree for a new kind of student. Second-year Bachelor of Commerce student Carolina Vaaranen is one of this new breed. Originally from Finland, Carolina completed her Higher School Certificate (HSC) at Canberra College in the Australian Capital Territory.

Placed with a host family throughout her Year 12 studies, Carolina was eager to stay in Australia to continue her education. “I knew at a young age that I wanted to be able to compete in business on an international scale, so I really needed to study in an English speaking country. I didn’t want to go to America and the United Kingdom was too cold, so I chose Australia”, she explained.

After she sat the HSC, Carolina knew she wanted to study business and started to show qualities of a pragmatic business student. First, she explored the quantitative elements of the degree. “I wanted a business degree of international standing, but also a degree that was linked to the social aspects of business.”

The UOW Commerce degree is firmly built on the foundational knowledge needed for commerce and business so it maintains a strong focus on the core disciplines of accounting, finance, marketing, management and economics. However, it offers first-year students a range of subjects and all students complete a subject on socially responsible commerce in the first year and as a capstone in the final year. This focus differentiates it from any other undergraduate commerce degree in Australia.

Carolina was accepted to all five universities that she applied for, so needed to make a decision about which one was for her. She knew her happiness as a student was an important factor. “I was after a university that had atmosphere, one where I could have a life outside my studies. Factors such as weather, outdoor activities and the social scene were all considered.

“I ended up choosing UOW after an extremely positive phone conversation where the other person gave me such a good impression of the University. This helped make my decision for me and I haven’t looked back. “I am really enjoying my time here and feel that my degree will set me up for the international business environment— which is what I set out to achieve.”

Socially Innovative Commerce

Over the last decade, responsibility is a theme that has shown remarkable resilience. Across our governments and media, this theme has underscored and outlasted political fashions to create a strong global message: take responsibility for what you do.
Modern mechatronic engineering is a distinct and exciting blend of mechanical and electronic technology. At its core, mechatronics is about combining machines and control systems to improve performance. Its most dramatic products are robots, typified by the powerful, multi-jointed arms found in industries like automotive manufacturing.

Most mechatronic systems are more humble than this. They are devices found in businesses and homes: printers, washing machines, home computers, and our increasingly sophisticated cars. These devices are ubiquitous, and mechatronic engineers are the professionals who make them happen—making careers in the field particularly future-proof.

The University of Wollongong was an early proponent of teaching mechatronics as a distinct discipline, and has developed a strong undergraduate program around the field, as well as significant research capabilities.

Engineering is one of UOW’s founding faculties and has long been regarded as one of the nation’s finest engineering schools. Its national reputation was affirmed by its admission to the Group of Eight Deans of Engineering (Go8) and Associates in 2002 in recognition of the quality of its engineering research, teaching and scholarships.

It is unsurprising then, that this name for excellence has travelled around the globe to attract a high calibre of student to the University.

Chinese student Rui Yan chose to study Mechatronics at UOW’s Faculty of Engineering because of its reputation in both teaching and researching.

“A good university has two indispensable parts: good software; and good hardware. UOW has both. The experienced teaching staff make studying here fulfilling,” he explains.

“Also, the convenient infrastructure such as the campus wide wireless network coverage makes studying life here easy and enjoyable.”

Mr Yan was accepted into the Faculty of Engineering’s Scholar program based on his excellent performance in high school. Engineering Scholars have access to advanced programs, postgraduate seminars and extra tutoring.

He also receives the Faculty’s International Engineering Scholarship for Academic Achievement.

In addition to the Scholar program and scholarship, it’s the practical side of the course that Mr Yan appreciates the most. “The course offered at UOW is more practical than theoretical. I’m not only taught how to solve mathematical or physical problems but also taught how to implement such theories in real world.”

This is the teaching philosophy that has been helping Engineering graduates start their careers for the last sixty years, and Mr Yan is no exception.

“After I graduate, I’ll have the confidence to face a real competitive working environment.”
A world first supporting cancer patients

When University of Wollongong student Sheridan Gho started university, her passion and talent for sport was taking her towards a career in physiotherapy. Five years later, she is now a PhD candidate researching ways to improve the lives of women with cancer.

Coinciding with World Cancer Day 2010, the National Breast Cancer Foundation (NBCF) announced $9.2 million funding for 25 new research projects, including a world-first study at the University of Wollongong, co-funded with Cancer Australia.

The project’s objective is to help women living with breast cancer through the development of better bras. The study was sparked by Sheridan’s investigations.

Sheridan, an international student from Fiji, came to Australia to complete high school in 2001. Since then she has played rugby in Australia at a national level and still holds a current world record in outrigger canoeing (similar to dragon boat racing). So when it came time to choosing her career, Sheridan believed her future lay in sport.

Like many secondary school students, she was unsure of the qualifications she needed to pursue her dreams. Despite a few lingering doubts that it was the right path, she took the plunge and enrolled at UOW, packed her bags and has never looked back.

Once she was in Wollongong, Sheridan realised the Bachelor of Science (Exercise Science) program was flexible enough to allow her to explore many different career paths.

Sheridan is the first to admit she did not consider research an option and “didn’t even really know what research was.” However, she very quickly found herself excelling in the degree and went on to study Honours.

Sheridan wanted to do her research in a field that would not only contribute to the academic world but would also make a genuine difference in people’s lives. She initially began with the idea of assisting women living with breast cancer and breast cancer survivors to become more active.

Although the effect of physical activity relating to cancer survival rates is largely unknown, it has been suggested that physical activity can improve prognosis, as well as decrease the risk of cardiovascular disease, a cause of death for many cancer survivors.

As part of her initial Honours research, which has now been published, Sheridan identified a number of barriers that survivors and sufferers face to exercise. While several psychosocial and physical capacity impediments had been
investigated, no study had systematically researched whether bra discomfort inhibited breast cancer patients from exercising.

Sheridan’s research identified bra discomfort as the fourth most common barrier to exercise amongst women living with breast cancer—and the first that could be treated with improved technology. “Bra discomfort was the first barrier listed that could be externally influenced, via bra design modifications,” she says. “Making it an ideal option for intervention.”

Working closely with the NBCF and the Breast Cancer Network Australia, Sheridan and her team, which includes UOW’s Professor Julie Steele, Dr Bridget Munro, and Professor Sandra Jones, are now investigating innovative bra designs using data acquired from a national survey and comprehensive laboratory-based biomechanical assessment.

The primary outcome of this project is to make design recommendations for comfortable bras that can empower all women living with breast cancer to exercise in comfort and, in turn, enjoy the health benefits associated with an active lifestyle.
DOUBLE DEGREES

A double degree broadens your skills base and improves your career options in competitive and increasingly interactive fields. For a high school student looking to university, there are a number of criteria to consider, from a world-class degree to great career opportunities. Completing a double degree at UOW checks all of these boxes and provides students with something equally important—the flexibility to shape the university experience into something truly valuable.

Sharon Lum is studying her fourth year at UOW completing a double degree in Commerce (Marketing) and Science (Population Health).

When Sharon graduated from high school in 2006, she envisioned herself pursuing a legal career and thus the natural progression was to enrol in a Bachelor of Law – Bachelor of Science. After having the opportunity to try elective subjects in marketing and population health, Sharon soon realised where her passion was and transferred to her current degree.

“The double degree really gave me room to move. Not only did it provide me with the ability to explore a wider range of subjects, but also to make me aware of a range of perspectives when it comes to problem solving.

“The University has been great providing the flexibility I need to find my own feet and get ready for a career that I want.”

Will So (pictured left) is another student who knows the future career benefits of a double degree.

“When I graduate,” he says, “I want to work in the film industry. I like meeting and connecting with new people, so hopefully I can work in communications.”

To this end, he is studying a Bachelor of Commerce – Bachelor of Communication and Media Studies combination. It’s not all about the future, though. Will is enjoying the benefits of studying at UOW right now, meeting new people and learning in a collaborative environment.

“My favourite thing about studying at UOW is the enthusiasm the teachers have about their subjects. At UOW, it is easy to meet new people and make new friends.”

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG IN DUBAI

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has developed rapidly since its establishment in 1971. It has the world’s seventh largest oil reserves and has one of the most developed economies in the Middle East.

The rapid economic and infrastructure development over the past 20 years is being followed by considerable effort in defining strategic priorities at national and Emirate levels. Key national priorities have been established in health, education, sustainable development, security, and economic sustainability and growth.

President of the University of Wollongong in Dubai (UOWD), Professor Rob Whelan, said these developments provided a number of opportunities for research and UOW is well placed to seize some of them. “This is because of UOW’s research strengths in relevant areas and because of the local reputation of UOWD,” he said.

This reputation has so far been built on strong coursework Masters programs. UOWD was awarded ‘Education & Training Provider of the Year’ at the Supply Chain and Transport Awards 2010. This reflects very well on a logistics program being taught in one of the region’s largest trade hubs.

www.uowdubai.ac.ae

2011 marks the 60th year of the University of Wollongong. That’s 60 years of excellence in education, with nearly 100,000 degrees and diplomas awarded.

UOW has grown from humble beginnings into a powerhouse of teaching and research, with an international reputation.

Happy birthday UOW.
The SMART Infrastructure Facility, currently under construction at UOW, will be a world-class research and training centre designed to address Australia’s future infrastructure needs.

SMART brings together diverse laboratories and research fields such as energy futures labs, water labs, rail research, marine labs, asset management, economic and policy assessment labs, telecommunication labs and ports research.

SMART Director, Mr Garry Bowditch, said that the vision for SMART is to be a global leader in infrastructure research and training.

“This is a unique opportunity to make a real difference in Australia and abroad in achieving better infrastructure planning, procurement and operation … we will transform the way infrastructure is taught, researched and developed in Australia and overseas,” said Mr Bowditch.

The Facility will house 200 higher degree research students who will be using the state-of-the-art research labs. It will produce “the next generation of infrastructure professionals who will be in high demand by government and industry due to their unique multi-disciplinary training,” said Mr Bowditch.

SMART is an impressive $61.8 million facility, which has received support from the Australian and New South Wales Governments.

Mr Bowditch says SMART is one of only a few institutions in the world to integrate diverse infrastructure-related disciplines, data sets and laboratories in one place.

“SMART is a hands-on multi-disciplinary teaching and research facility consisting of 28 different laboratories which will be connected by a central simulation centre,” says Mr Bowditch.

The Federal Government provided $35 million in funding through its 2009 Higher Education Endowment Fund and the NSW Government and RailCorp contributed $10 million towards the SMART Rail Institute.

The new SMART building will be officially opened in 2011.
Joining Stories

Before coming to Australia, writer Merlinda Bobis lived in Legazpi City, in the shadow of the Philippines’ most active volcano. The mountain’s surreal mix of beauty and danger is mirrored in the city streets. Merlinda now draws on her experience to teach young Australian writers the value of leaving your comfort zone.

A successful author and accomplished performer, Merlinda is now a Senior Lecturer at the University of Wollongong. She works to help bridge the distances between writers and people all over the world, teaching both prose fiction writing and writing for performance.

In the second semester of 2009, Merlinda worked on a collaborative storytelling website, the Transnational Story Hub. It was a cooperative creative project between her students at UOW and postgraduate students at the University of Vigo, Spain.

“We set up this writing website as a project to create a transnational imaginary,” Merlinda says. “A voyaging out, so to speak, from one’s home towards another culture, sensibility and language.”

Vigo and Wollongong are coastal cities on the shores of different oceans, on opposite sides of the world, yet Merlinda says the feeling you have standing in both of them is eerily similar. This familiarity and difference is an important part of the writing project.

Merlinda points out that creative writing isn’t regularly taught at universities in Spain. “The Spanish believe that a writer writes,” she says. “And does not need to study for it.”

“However,” she admits, “after this exercise, I hear the Vigo students are keen to start creative writing groups.”

“I believe story-making is an ideal way to negotiating difference,” she says. “What if we, without denying difference, give as much weight to resonance, to similarities, to points of common ground?”

In finding this common ground, “the small human story is reinstated to interrogate the big stories: of politics, of spin, of war.”

Merlinda’s writing often deals with figures drawn from the darker corners of her homeland, stories of the ‘small’ people she infers.

Her most recent novel, The Solemn Lantern Maker, is one such story, where Noland, a mute ten-year-old lantern maker, believes he rescues a fallen angel from the city streets. In reality, the angel is a hurt American tourist, the events that follow threaten to engulf poor Noland and his family.

These ideas, of mixing the real and the unreal, and of seeing these stories from the point of view of the poor and powerless, are typical of Merlinda’s writing. For all the story’s strangeness, it is also very personal and very human. She carries this philosophy into her classroom.

“As creative writing lecturer, I make sure the students walk into lives other than their own,” she says. “A sense of a bigger and more inclusive world is crucial to teaching and learning.”

“I have seen students’ writing and sensibility bloom from the experience.”

Sometimes, however, it doesn’t immediately click with them. “I sometimes see the resistance,” she says. “It’s rather disheartening. But I tell myself, perhaps not now; the penny might drop years later.”

“When it does, though, when they walk into that alien life, with that little ‘a-hah’ moment, that human twitch of the heart, that little pinprick in the sensibility, I know something magical has just happened.”
Ankita, an international student from Gujarat, India, is working to improve how hydrogels are made. Hydrogels are complex networks of large molecules—polymers—that are insoluble and yet can contain up to 99 per cent water.

Perhaps their most common use is forming contact lenses. Their flexibility and permeability make them far more comfortable than lenses made from rigid materials. They also have potential future applications in medical biotechnology, for example as a wound covering, or in human tissue engineering.

At present, producing hydrogels is a complicated, time-consuming and expensive process. They are created with dangerous reagents under harsh conditions over a period of days.

Ankita aims to reduce this time to under ten minutes, and to make the process easier, safer and more reliable.

Ankita’s father, an industrial chemist, may have awakened her interest in the sciences. As a young boy, he worked reading electricity meters but developed a keen interest in rubber technologies. He rented out a small room in an industrial area where he could conduct experiments and began to design and build a rubber-moulding machine. Today, that small room has turned into two large companies producing rubber automotive parts.

“He is my role model!” she exclaims. However, it’s hard to imagine she would be doing anything else, even without her father’s example, such is her enthusiasm on polymer research and its applications.

While she was offered places in both Sydney and Melbourne universities, Ankita was inspired by the work already being done at UOW’s Intelligent Polymer Research Institute (IPRI).

IPRI is recognised internationally as leading the development of ‘intelligent’ materials and nanotechnology. Once Ankita discovered UOW also offered a specialist undergraduate program in nanotechnology with opportunities for research early in the degree, her mind was made up.

Seeing Ankita’s work, it seems unreal to think an undergraduate student is conducting such advanced research at all. Her passion for science makes sense of it, though. She leaves an abiding impression of a very capable scientist, one her supervisors are sure will soon deliver some very real solutions.
Teaching Thailand

‘Be prepared for anything!’ was the advice given to Emma Low when she set off for Thailand as part of the Overseas Professional Experience program at UOW. What she wasn’t prepared for was just how much stepping out of the familiar would help her education.

Having attended high school in Sydney, Emma was accustomed to the hustle and bustle of a big city, but even this could not have prepared her for the excitement and chaos of Bangkok.

“The first thing that really hit me was the heat … I was also amazed at how many people are in Bangkok and how busy the streets were. It was a huge culture shock,” she explains.

Not only did she need to navigate the streets, Emma soon found out that she would be travelling by boat each day to her host school—an unusual prospect for someone raised in a city dominated by road and rail transport. “It was kind of scary, because the ferry doesn’t fully stop all the time. You have to literally jump on the side and jump off again!”

Public transport idiosyncrasies aside, Thailand has a well-organised school system of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities. English is taught at all levels, but Thai students’ grasp of the language can vary from almost none to fully fluent. Emma quickly discovered that her students and fellow teachers tended towards the former.

Emma relied heavily on improvised communication to describe skills she was trying to teach. Despite this language barrier—or maybe because of it—she is thankful for the experience. She says it improved her ability to think on her feet and enhanced her communication skills.

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Students at UOW can select from four countries to travel to for the Overseas Professional Experience placement: China, Fiji, Malaysia and Thailand. Emma had always wanted to visit Thailand, so the choice was easy.

As well as the teaching and professional responsibilities, students are also offered the chance to participate in numerous culturally engaging experiences. This can mean riding the rivers and khlongs (canals) on local boats, visiting the Grand Palace and temples, or experiencing Bangkok’s famous shopping and nightlife.

The program also includes a well-deserved weekend retreat to Pattaya, a famous holiday destination on the east coast of the Gulf of Thailand. Students can unwind and immerse themselves in Thai culture away from Bangkok—Emma even had the opportunity to ride an elephant.

Looking back, Emma is sure the program was a valuable addition to her education.

“Being immersed in a culture so different from your own and going into a school to teach really opens your eyes, you learn so much. Teaching in a Thai school has definitely helped improve my communication skills. It also made me much more aware of teaching students from other cultural backgrounds, and increased my ability to include them in the classroom.”
Recognising talent

When Peiyao Li decided to pursue a Masters degree in computer engineering, she had an unusual—but not unwelcome—problem in choosing a university. A first-class Honours student with exceptional marks, she would have been accepted by any university she wanted. She chose the University of Wollongong.

Peiyao began her studies at Zhengzhou University in China before completing the final years at UOW as part of a cooperative study program. While studying in China, some of Peiyao’s classes were taught by visiting UOW lecturers, who sparked her interest in coming to Wollongong.

“Wollongong is one of the best places for international students to live in Australia; beautiful beaches, convenient transportation and lively people!”

Her current research is in image processing; specifically, automatic facial expression recognition. Her aim is to develop novel approaches to automatic recognition of basic human facial expressions from images or video sequences: anger, disgust, fear, happiness, neutrality, sadness and surprise.

Peiyao hopes her research will help improve human-to-machine interactions, including robots communicating with humans.

Peiyao speaks fondly of her decision to come to UOW. “Choosing to study at UOW is one of the best choices I have ever made in my life! One would never regret coming here to study.”

Part of that decision was influenced by the UOW Faculty of Informatics’ excellent reputation, so she expected to develop her technical skills. After all, the Faculty has graduates working for Microsoft, Sun Microsystems, KPMG, the Commonwealth Bank, Australian Bureau of Statistics and Macquarie Bank. It is also one of the largest sites for ICT research in the southern hemisphere. Peiyao says there are other benefits, ones she might not have expected.

“I have learned significant technical knowledge at UOW but the most valuable thing I have gained from studying here is that I have challenged myself.

“Studying in a foreign country, living in a new environment and leaving my family all forced me to face new challenges and make difficult choices.”

The Faculty boasts excellent employment rates, which can be attributed in part to the skills and values beyond technical expertise that students acquire as they study.

The Faculty aims to create graduates who are informed, independent learners, problem solvers, effective communicators and responsible: and in Peiyao’s experience, she has gained all these qualities.

“UOW taught me how to face these challenges, how to think, how to do and how to improve myself!” However, it does not stop there for Peiyao. When asked about the future, she is straight to the point.

“My future career goal is to be one of the most outstanding engineers in my industry.” If her working life resembles her study career so far, there’s no doubt she will be.
Recognising talent
UOW has been rated first for overall satisfaction among Australian university students in the independent Sweeney Research Group’s 2009 ‘Uni Student Report’. Students ranked their university based on the opportunities for becoming involved in campus life at their universities.

**UOW PASS PROGRAM RECOGNISED AS WORLD’S BEST**

The University of Wollongong PASS Program has been awarded the ‘Most Outstanding PASS Program’ in the world. The Outstanding Program Award is conferred every two years and recognises the program considered to have made the most sustained and outstanding contribution to student success.

Head of Student Support and Peer Learning and PASS National Trainer, Ms Sally Rogan, says it was the first time in the nearly 20-year history of the award that it has been given to a program outside of the USA.

“As you can imagine, the whole PASS team is thrilled with this huge accolade,” said Ms Rogan.

“PASS is the cornerstone of the ‘first year experience’ at UOW, with the program on offer to 95 per cent of first-year students”. PASS is an academic support program that targets historically difficult subjects. Through regularly scheduled, out-of-class review sessions and peer learning groups, students study together to work through difficult concepts. Studies have shown that students who regularly attend PASS substantially improve their final marks through collaborative learning.

PASS study sessions are informal seminars in which students review notes, discuss readings, develop organisational tools and prepare for examinations. PASS is provided for all students who want to improve their understanding of course material and improve their grades.

**UOW AT A GLANCE**

- Established 1951
- Total student enrolment: 27,958
  - Undergraduate: 17,886
  - Postgraduate: 8,587
- Total international enrolment: 10,894
  - International Onshore: 6,511
  - International Offshore: 4,383
- Full-time staff: 1,824

**Campuses**
- Main Campus: Wollongong, NSW, Australia
- Other Australian Locations: Sydney, Nowra, Batemans Bay, Bega, Moss Vale, Loftus
- United Arab Emirates: Dubai

UOW Improving Regional Health

The Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute (IHMRI) is a focal point for all health and medical research in the Illawarra region, which extends beyond the greater Wollongong area. The Institute is a $30 million project jointly funded by the University of Wollongong and the NSW Government.

Amanda Morgan, Communications Coordinator for IHMRI, says the goal of the IHMRI is to foster research collaboration between academic and clinical researchers in the Illawarra region.

“It is aimed at creating a centre of excellence and innovation for health and medical research in this region, leading to better health services, and a healthier Illawarra community,” says Ms Morgan.

She suggests the difference between IHMRI and other health and medical research institutes is its distinctive regional community-centred focus. “The institute conducts research into health and medical issues common to the Illawarra region. And aims at achieving results that lead to improvements in the health of the local community.”

Located on-campus at UOW, IHMRI’s commitment to local health can be seen in the Institute’s population health laboratory, with an entire floor of the brand-new facility being dedicated to studying the health status of the local community.

Morgan says monitoring the population’s health status will “allow researchers to strategically plan their research program so that it is of most relevance to the local population and most likely to lead to significant improvements in health.”

Future developments for the IHMRI will be based upon research-influenced improvements in clinical practice and the health of the Illawarra community.

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