

Graduate profiles
Research School of Social Sciences

What do former doctoral students say about RSSS, and where has their qualification taken them?

Here are four reflections from RSSS graduates

Hiau Kee (Economics)



I was interested in pursuing a PhD after I completing my Honours degree with the University of Adelaide. My application to the ANU was accepted and I was offered a scholarship. Knowing ANU to be one of the finest research institutes in Australia, I accepted the offer without hesitation.

The first year compulsory coursework component was a huge challenge for me. The standard in ANU is high and I was not used to the environment. I found talking to the lecturer and forming study groups with my other PhD fellows was most helpful in my transition. It became easier and more manageable from second semester onwards.

I began writing my thesis from the second year. I found RSSS to be an excellent place for PhD students to begin their research careers. Researchers in RSSS are leading economists in the field and most importantly they are approachable and experienced in supervising students. I found myself constantly engaged in stimulating discussions with the academic staff. Whenever I hit a wall in my research, I could always find the right solution by talking to the right people.

I have learnt so much throughout the program. My thesis consists of four empirical essays, and topics included women in the labour force, education and fertility. I

thought job hunting would be a tough task but it turned out that I had no difficulty in finding a job. Currently I am working for the Australian Government at the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. I am part of the Wages Policy and Economic Analysis team. I find my training at the RSSS to be extremely useful and relevant. The topics I currently work on include: low pay dynamics, gender pay gap, the impact of skill shortages in the labour market and transition of the low paid into higher pay jobs.

Overall I found my experience at RSSS not only very memorable but also very useful and rewarding. I would highly recommend RSSS to anyone who is considering pursuing a PhD career.

Yujin Nagasawa (Philosophy)



I studied in the Philosophy Program at the Research School of Social Sciences as a PhD student from 2000 to 2004. Under the supervision of Professors Daniel Stoljar, Frank Jackson and Martin Davies, I wrote a PhD thesis in which I attempted to show a hitherto unrecognised connection between arguments against physicalism in the philosophy of mind and arguments against the existence of God in the philosophy of religion. (A revised version of this thesis is forthcoming as a monograph from Cambridge University Press.)

In 2004, when I had finished my PhD, I was offered two research fellowships: a Killam Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of Alberta in Canada and a Research Fellowship in the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics at ANU. I accepted both of them and spent six months of each year in Edmonton, Alberta and the other six months in Canberra. In 2006 I moved to the United Kingdom to take up my current position as a permanent lecturer at the University of Birmingham. I am enjoying working on a pleasant campus in the second largest city in Britain. It is interesting to note the coincidence that the head of my department at Birmingham is

Professor Helen Beebee, a young, distinguished metaphysician who was, before I arrived in Canberra, a postdoctoral fellow in the Philosophy Program, RSSS.

I cannot emphasise enough how enjoyable and fruitful my time was in the Philosophy Program. I have visited a number of other philosophy departments, but I have never seen such a friendly and relaxed research environment, where students can work closely with some of the best philosophers in the world and interact regularly with prominent international visitors. I feel fortunate to have been able to develop as a professional researcher in such a wonderful program and I will always be grateful to my teachers and friends there.

Rani Kerin (History)



I caught a glimpse of graduate life at the RSSS in the summer before my honours year. As a summer scholar, I was made to feel part of the History Program; I loved morning and afternoon teas on the Coombs balcony, conversations with other students and staff, and the passion with which people spoke of their work. When it came time to apply for postgraduate scholarships my choice was easy. Apart from the Coombs environment, the RSSS had numerous other attractive qualities: excellent academic staff, generous travel allowances, office space and computer facilities. Proximity to the National Library, the National Archives and AIATSIS was like icing on an apprentice historian's cake.

One of the best things about doing a PhD in history at the RSSS was the level of student involvement in the life of the program: students and staff had offices side-by-

side, students helped to run the weekly seminar program, students were invited to the Annual General staff meeting and were treated as valuable members of the program. I particularly enjoyed the ‘One Day Conference’ which involved every member of the program giving a five minute presentation on their current research. Such occasions reinforced an existing collegiality — they strengthened what was already there. I felt able to discuss my work with anyone in the department, including visiting fellows. Top academics from around Australia and the world visited the history program during my time at Coombs. As valuable as these professional associations have proved to be, my fondest memories are of the friendship and support I received from my fellow students. It’s no exaggeration to say that friendships forged over questions of thesis structure are lifelong!

Now I’m a lecturer at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, where I teach Australian history and Australian Indigenous history and have several graduate students of my own. There is no question that doing a PhD in history at the RSSS helped me get my job. The RSSS is known internationally for its quality academics and graduates. I love my job — it’s my dream job — but I still miss Coombs. I look forward to coming back as a visiting fellow myself one day.

Carolyn Hendriks (Political Science)



I was enticed to Canberra in 2001 because my PhD supervisor, Professor John Dryzek was located at RSSS. My idea was to investigate a puzzle in the field of deliberative democracy that I had stumbled across after several years working as a researcher and a consultant. So I began my PhD with a practitioner's perspective and in the end produced a thesis that brought empirical insights from deliberative practice into dialogue with democratic theory. My thesis won the Australasian Political Science Association’s PhD Prize for 2005.

My PhD journey was a positive experience, one that was definitely shaped by my time at RSSH. It was a privilege working with Professor John Dryzek who was not only accessible but very supportive of my research project. Also on my supervisory panel was Professor Bob Goodin, who provided valuable guidance and contacts, especially during my fieldwork in Germany.

Aside from finding suitable supervisors, it was very important for me to find a productive and supportive working environment for my PhD. I had observed the doctoral process closely in continental Europe where PhD students are often well integrated into a research institution. In my own PhD I was keen to be a part of a collegial environment and avoid writing at home in isolation. RSSH offered this opportunity. I had access to great resources and facilities and interacted with scholars of all levels of experience at regular seminars and morning teas. The international research vibe of the Coombs (where RSSH is located) is also amazing; I was able to meet and establish networks with leading political scientists from around the world.

For me, Coombs was not just an academic hub but it was also an important social space. I formed many friendships with people from other disciplines many of whom were also on a doctoral journey. There was always someone around to have lunch or coffee with and of course celebrate key milestones, like submission!

Without a doubt I benefited enormously from the strong publication culture at RSSH. Throughout my PhD, I was encouraged to present at conferences and submit journal articles. Many of my thesis chapters have been reworked and published in international journals. One in particular was awarded a prize for best article in *Policy Sciences* for 2005.

After I completed my PhD in 2004, I decided to take up a post-doctoral research position at the University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands. On one visit back to Australia, I was given the opportunity to visit RSSH as a visiting fellow, where I was reminded of the unique and productive research environment it offers. I have since been enticed again back to Canberra. I now work as a lecturer in public policy at the University of Canberra, where I am enjoying a combination of teaching and research.