

Compass...

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Contents and News

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She's over 6,000 kilometres from campus, has two young daughters, a travelling husband and is on her 5th supervisor - how on earth does she do it? Read Yvonne's story in [it's academic](#).

Speaking of travelling, David & Matthew are recently back from a five country european international studies trip with the Department of Accounting & Finance - read part 1 in [experiences](#).

In our latest [podcast](#) with Radio Monash, two members of the MPAEC, Tsedon and Kathy, have a chat about life as a postgrad association representative. In [commentary](#), a student reflects on the need for more research funding.

We also have a brand new [competition](#), and the winning stories of last issue's competition can be found in [odds & ends](#). Amateur photographers should check out the [reflections](#) page - please do consider submitting your favourite photo. Plus of course we have our usual [Dear Abby](#) column and our live feed for Jorge Cham in [PhD comic](#).



It's Academic

On my own terms

I am a trailing spouse currently completing my PhD in the Department of Management at Caulfield. I have been a distance education student for my entire university education - fourteen years. My goal is to graduate before anyone notices. I married a guy in a skirt nine years ago in Scotland, and whilst I still call Australia home I have not lived there since. As a CEO-wife on assignment overseas for my entire married life, I have been unemployable for most of it as an alien-immigrant-spouse-with-no-work-visa. My doctoral studies are essentially my career – unpaid, but highly rewarding.

Like many others, I came to academia later in life. My first career was in the intelligence branch of the Royal Australian Navy. Then I worked in the corporate world for 7 years, before moving overseas.



I began my PhD in 2002, straight after graduating with Honours at Southern Cross University. At the time I was living as an expat in Chicago. Under the excellent guidance of my first supervisor, I chose the topic of 'expatriate return on investment' for my thesis, which seemed to suit my lifestyle, both personally and academically. It has proven to be an exciting and extremely interesting topic, and one which I am still passionate about, even after all these years. When my first supervisor left Monash for another institution, I was then privileged to have Prof Phyllis Tharenou come onboard and together we achieved a Best Paper at the US Academy of Management Conference in 2004, a journal publication, and a book chapter, this time whilst living in Philadelphia. At Phyllis's insistence I also began reviewing for journals and conferences, which has secured two best reviewer awards over the years. I also lectured for two semesters at a US college on a pro bono basis. When Phyllis left to become Dean at the University of South Australia, an Assoc Professor at Gippsland stepped in as an interim supervisor. At that time I also became pregnant with my first child. As a pregnant, distance ed doctoral student, we successfully changed departmental policy to implement a new policy – a \$2,000 grant per residential visit to cover airfare, accommodation and living expenses.



Of course, if you're going to be a supervisor on my PhD, odds are that you will shortly be resigning ... so in 2005 a senior lecturer in the department became my 4th supervisor whilst I was still on maternity leave. Together we got down to the business of beginning to write my thesis. When that supervisor left Monash in 2006 to start her own consulting practice, Prof Helen De Cieri and Assoc Prof Kate Hutchings stepped in, and it's been a match made in heaven. Together we have seen three-quarters of my thesis written, co-presented at 3 international conferences and co-authored papers for international journals. I've also had another child, taken more maternity leave and had a short intermission to relocate internationally for a second time. Call me an optimist, but I'm hopeful the faces I will see from the stage at my graduation will be

those of Helen and Kate.

I am frequently asked how on earth I manage to juggle a PhD, two small children, a traveling husband, and five different supervisors, all while living overseas. The short answer is that I don't really think about it anymore – I just get on with it. That's not to say that it hasn't been challenging and there haven't been moments when I've wondered if it's worth it – especially late at night when the timezones, deadlines, and colicky babies are working against a decent nights sleep. What keeps me sane is an obsessive use of Outlook to schedule everything I do and my treadmill, which keeps me healthy and sane. I also frequently present at various conferences (both practitioner and academic) to keep me connected to a world outside of my own little office. On one wall I have framed mementos of notable achievements – first journal paper, first conference paper, best reviewer awards. I think of that wall as my 'surrogate supervisors' to keep me going when things get tough.

My other saving grace is my corporate background, which has taught me two things. First, that change is inevitable. This is not to suggest that having five different PhD supervision arrangements hasn't been unsettling and disruptive; it's been a monumental challenge for sure, particularly in terms of establishing and then re-establishing new relationships



with people who are critical to my success, all from a distance. But I tend to be philosophical about it - people resign from jobs every day. Who's to say that academia, and post-graduate students in particular, should be spared such circumstances? We need to cope and adapt just like everyone else, and leverage something positive from the experience.

Second, staying connected to an industry network is extremely beneficial if one wants to pursue an academic career. Doing so makes data collection just that much easier. My PhD studies have used extensive international practitioner networks to obtain data from a majority of Fortune 500 companies, albeit at personal cost to myself in terms of money, time, and effort. But the long-term (not to mention short-term) value of those connections is priceless in terms of the industry collaborations that now exist. Had I not spent time in the corporate world, I doubt I would have fully appreciated just how advantageous and motivating it can be. I have learnt that relevance in academia may be one thing, but relevance in the 'real world' as well, is another entirely.

I am Yvonne McNulty, a part-time student, founder of www.thetrailingspouse.com, currently on assignment in Singapore with my husband and two toddler daughters, and dreaming of one day playing golf again. I live by the motto that the cure for boredom is curiosity; there is no cure for curiosity.

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