PhD students enter the blogosphere

Erica Cervin

David says it’s bad to make faces at stupid questions at conferences, while Deborah reckons you shouldn’t skive off after a panel discussion. Taein has tips on how to make conference conversations love you.

These comments from PhD students in Australia are just some that can be found on blogs, a type of online journal or diary.

Increasingly, research students are using blogs to share academic information or to offer personal thoughts. For example, Chisa reckons he wants the Australian public service commissioner’s job, while Beatrice provides notes on her DJ gigs.

Any student can set up a blog, which is the short form for weblogs. There are also sites that host blogs, which can be accessed via a central port to access them.

Most of the Australian blogs found for this story are on the site PhDWeblog.org and the New University of Lisbon that registers students’ blogs from across the world. According to the site’s statistics, Australia is the third-highest user of these blogs out of 39 countries listed. The US is first and Britain second.

A PhD student at the University of Sydney, Mary-Helen Ward, says younger students in particular are using blogs because they are used to communicating with technology. Ward is researching the extent to which a community of bloggers can provide support for PhD students. As part of her research, she is using blogging as a tool.

For the past four months, eight Sydney University students have been keeping blogs about their PhD experiences.

"Sometimes they write about their PhDs and sometimes about other stuff — good news [and] bad news," Ward says.

"The beauty of the blog is that people can make a statement, and they can post photos and use colours, so it expresses something, rather than an email which is just text. And then other people read what they’ve written and comment, and then other people read that and comment again. So we’ve got a little community."

The Sydney University blogs are installed behind a firewall, which makes them unavailable to the outside world. However, Ward, who has five blogs, has posted some of her thoughts about her research on her public blog, Faultlines.

She has been working on her PhD for a year, and says her research was triggered by a nagging question — why do some students finish their thesis, while others don’t? She says she’d get a group of candidates to follow through and she says she’d get a group of candidates to follow through and she says she’s got a group of candidates to follow through.

"Someone suggested that I set up an email list where people can post. But blogs have the advantage because you are speaking from your own place, you’ve got your own identity."

Continental adventurer lands in Luxembourg

Helene Zametakis

For 10 years, University of Queensland Business School graduate Suzanne Baxter had to adjust her fascination with Europe, starting with Luxembourg.

Advisory Leader in Luxembourg, there, Baxter is responsible for helping co-ordinate proposal and business development strategies across 22 countries in Europe. She is also working with a core team of business development and strategy experts to examine the issue of national languages, corporate cultures and management styles.

"There appears to be a truly global culture and working environment over here — something that I felt was lacking in my career," she says.

"I’m a chemist in the late 1990s, Baxter became interested in science and technology management and, in particular, strategies for commercialising innovation. While theoretical learning has been key, Baxter also benefited from visiting and founding the UQ Business School MTTM Alumni Network. "In my opinion, postgraduate study is evidence of a commitment to your own career and business development," she says, adding that employers recognise this. 