

The Research Room

April 2025

Tips of the month

Here are some tips and tricks you can use to make your research experience at VUW much more productive and enjoyable

Seek guidance from those who have been there

As you approach the final stages of your research journey, it's natural to start thinking about life beyond university. Whether you're considering academia, industry, or something in between, this transition can feel both exciting and overwhelming. On one hand, you have spent years developing valuable skills and expertise; on the other, the path ahead may seem uncertain—How do you determine the best direction for your career? How can you differentiate yourself in a competitive job market? And how do the research skills you've honed translate to different professional settings?

This is where guidance from someone who has already navigated these challenges can be invaluable. The [Alumni as Mentors programme](#) offers a fantastic opportunity to connect with experienced alumni who have successfully transitioned into their careers. Through this mentorship, you can gain valuable insights into the world of work, enhance your employability skills, and receive tailored advice on career planning. Whether you're seeking guidance on job applications, industry expectations, or long-term career goals, having a mentor can provide clarity and confidence in your next steps.

If you're interested in being matched with a mentor, [apply](#) now or reach out to Dr Anna Greenhow (alumniasmentors@vuw.ac.nz) for more information about available mentors.

Dr William Eulath Vidal – FGR, Victoria University of Wellington

Share your story

When utilized effectively, stories can be powerful tools to motivate and change minds. If you need an extra dose of motivation, this story should help you out

There and back again: My PhD journey—Patrick

My PhD journey began in my hometown, Mumbai, India, where I worked with my father, Prof. Conrad Coelho, on a dramatized version of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, one of the most seminal poems of all time. While we were working on

developing this project together, we wondered what in the poem had led to enabling its dramatization. This became, therefore, the leading question for me as I ventured into taking this idea into PhD territory.

It was 2006 and there was no Faculty of Graduate Research at Te Herenga Waka then. I

was a journalist, part of the editorial team of The Times of India in Mumbai. My friend, Anubhav Malhotra, who was in Wellington, phoned me to say what a lovely city it was. He knew I was looking to do a PhD overseas. This led me to contact the School of English, Film and Theatre at Te Herenga Waka and I heard back from Assoc. Prof Charles Ferrall who was to become my supervisor. A discussion with my friend, the poet T. R. Joy in Mumbai, led to the crystallisation of my ideas into a form acceptable to Charles and the PhD Committee of the School. Like most ideas in Mumbai, the 'eureka moment' came to me as I was sitting in the local train returning from Joy's house to my own. Another lecturer, Dr. Matt Wagner from Theatre, elicited an interest in joining the project. I now had my supervisory team lined up.

I managed to secure the Victoria PhD Scholarship before I left, thanks to having been a gold medallist at the University of Mumbai at the MA and having another Masters' degree from Australia in Journalism. This was key to my study as it would have been financially impossible to pursue the PhD without it. I also secured accommodation in advance in Everton Hall before I left for Wellington. Just before I boarded the plane from Mumbai, I had a moment where I thought twice about leaving my ageing parents alone in Mumbai. However, that moment passed, and I got on to the plane Wellington via Hong Kong and Auckland. On arrival in Wellington, I was met by the Vic Uni representative who was collecting international students from the airport in a shuttle taxi. I entered my apartment in Everton Hall on November 25th, 2006, and met my first flatmate, Zhanna. Nearly 20 years later, Zhanna and I are still friends, even though she is in Toronto now. My flatmates also included Kai from Tanzania and Shaaliny from the Maldives. We were truly an international flat!

On 22 November, I walked to Vic Uni for the first time and met Charles, who took me on a tour of the city on what was a wet and blustery day. I later met Matt with Charles at the old staff club (now defunct). This is where we had our joint meetings. At the beginning, Charles and Matt were excited about my project and talked nonstop to each other for several minutes while I listened wondering when I could chip in. They must have thought I didn't know much (which I frankly didn't at that stage!) when they turned to me and asked for my opinion. I had also kept quiet, because in India, we have a respect for professors wherein we do not interrupt them, till

they finish. I then piped up and put in my two cents worth. Charles, Matt, and I had a good working relationship. I didn't know it then, but I was literally the first PhD student at the university to bring the English and Theatre programmes together. I was also Matt's first PhD student. Charles got me reading into mid to late 19th century French poetry, the Cambridge Ritualists and primitivism, while Matt pointed me towards the symbolist dramatists, Dada and expressionist drama in the late 19th/early 20th centuries which would provide a broader context to the literary world within which Eliot, was writing. This was an exciting time as it got me reading very broadly initially (which I thoroughly enjoyed), while trying to refine my readings into something directly linked to Eliot's love of ritualism and poetic drama. My supervisors asked me to write projects on symbolism, Eliot's ritualism and initial essays, and these latterly became part of the completed thesis in some way.

There was no need to defend the proposal in those days; the original proposal sent to the School Committee from Mumbai was the one that was accepted. The work on the thesis did change, however, as Charles, Matt, and I refined the project. Matt and I worked on a fresh dramatization of *The Waste Land*, wherein I recruited eight student actors to workshop and perform the poem at the University. The actors all signed Human Ethics forms so I could work with them. The scenes for the performance were all created by the actors; I worked with them in 93 Kelburn Parade (a theatre space), for six weeks. I would give them stanzas from the poem which they workshopped as two different groups over two levels of the space. I made no attempt to explain the poem in any way before the actors enacted the passage. They then came together to perform their work for each other, discussed what aspects of the poem helped the performance of it, and then decided on what was the single best way to present that scene. We thus developed reasons for explaining why *The Waste Land* was dramatic based on our workshops. After the performance and recording of it for a live audience, I began writing about the experience of workshoping and producing the performance.

What the thesis expanded into, eventually, was a complete study of Eliot's literary output over a period of 50 years as it applied to lyricism. I was now about halfway into my PhD and Matt had been away in London most of this time. His wife was a lecturer at the University of London, and

they had just had their first child. In fact, the Theatre Programme wanted to replace Matt with another supervisor due to his absence, but Matt was able to fly down from London and spend four weeks with me just before the performance to help with the same before flying back to the UK. Matt was not the only one balancing personal life and a PhD. I met my wife, then my girlfriend, during my study, and started to make trips to her home country, Vietnam, to see her in the final year of my thesis. This was, of course, disruptive to my work, but crucial for our relationship. We decided to get married towards the end of the third year of my PhD and I asked Charles for leave for the same. This delayed submission of the PhD by a couple of months, but Charles deemed this fine saying that life was more important than a PhD, and I proceeded to get married in Asia.

After this exhausting (financially too!), but happy time, I returned to Wellington and submitted the work to Charles and Matt, who approved it for examination. There was no oral exam in those days, so all I received was written feedback (which took five months, instead of three, due to an administrative blooper!) None of the external examiners wanted any change to the thesis. The internal examiner wanted me to add a definition of drama according to Aristotle, which took me all of 10 minutes to add in and get approved by Charles. It was then that I submitted the final thesis to the library. I thought there should be Handel's Hallelujah playing in the background while I submitted it, but I didn't hear anything!

I attended my graduation ceremony with my new wife in December 2010. It had been an eventful

journey for me. I started as a bachelor from India and had now finished as a married man with a PhD. My real journey was beginning now as I soon realised: being a husband, having a child and finding a stable job.



Celebrating a milestone—Graduation day

I believe it is important for a PhD student to have a balanced life. Right through my PhD, I had tutored (for Media Studies, English and Theatre). I had also sung for NZ Opera. Yes, the PhD is important, but it is not everything. For me, it never was. I enjoyed doing it, but I know that life is more important than a PhD. That said, there are many lessons to learn from doing one ... lessons in planning, patience, and endurance. And I take my hat off to anyone who attempts to do one and completes it. That was my PhD journey. All the best for yours!

*Dr Patrick Coelho, Sustainability Project
Coordinator, Vice-Chancellor's Office, Victoria
University of Wellington*

Useful resources

*Explore our list of research-related links
that will help you throughout your research
studies*

[Take a quiz from Small Steps](#) to assess your sleep habits and get personalized tips for better rest, whether you're struggling to fall asleep, stay asleep, or wake up refreshed.

Looking for a great way to stay active and enjoy the outdoors? Visit www.teararoa.org.nz to explore local walking and biking trails for all fitness levels and interests.

Events happening soon

Looking for other events happening at the University and beyond? We go over some interesting events happening worldwide

Opportunities from other institutions

Organizer	Event	Date and Time	Register
Litmaps	Literature review (Online)	24 Apr, 06:00 GMT+12	Here
The Effortless Academic	Note-taking mastermind (In person)	14 Apr–19 May, 15:00–16:30 NZST	Here
Taylor & Francis	Publishing Ethics 101 (Online)	09 Apr, 20:00–21:30 NZST	Here
	Open research for Humanities and Social Sciences (Online)	23 Apr, 11:00 PM–24 Apr, 00:30 AM NZST	Here
Statistics Solutions	Quantitative analysis (Online)	04 Apr, 06:00 NZST	Here
	Qualitative analysis (Online)	11 Apr, 05:00 NZST	Here
	A guide to data analysis (Online)	18 Apr, 05:00 NZST	Here
	Get real results with expert guidance (Online)	25 Apr, 05:00 NZST	Here
Crosby Management Training Ltd	Functional skills: Report writing workshop (Online)	18 Apr, 00:00–01:30 NZST	Here
Unconventional Doctorates	Countdown to the defence (Online)	26 Apr, 02:00–03:00 NZST	Here
CRIPticArts	A calling card to writing (Online)	09 Apr, 05:30–07:00 NZST	Here
Global Edge Leaders	Public speaking (Online)	05 Apr, 19:00–22:00 NZST	Here
David Murray	Taking steps to overcome fear of public speaking (Online)	02 Apr, 06:00–06:30 NZST	Here
	Public speaking for impact at work (Online)	15 Apr, 18:00–18:30 BST	Here
Skillsme Academy UK	How to turn your presentations from boring to brilliant (Online)	02 Apr, 06:00–07:30 NZST 09, 16, 23, 30 Apr, 05:00–06:30 NZST	Here
Denver Workforce Development	Interview tips and tricks (Online)	10, 24 Apr, 10:00–10:30 NZST	Here
	Introduction to online job searching (Online)	03 Apr, 08:30–09:00 NZST 10, 17, 24 Apr, 07:30–08:00 NZST	Here
	Resume tips n' tricks (Online)	03 Apr, 11:00–11:30 NZST 17 Apr, 10:00–10:30 NZST	Here

*By listing these events we are not endorsing any organisations but rather compiling and sharing a list of resources that may be helpful.

Happening here: Events at our university

Organizer	Event	Date and Time	Register
Centre for Academic Development	Te Arawai Ako–Student Stream information session (In person)	08 Apr, 11:00–12:00 NZST	Here
Wellington Careers and Employment	Types of internships & how to find one (In person)	01 Apr, 09:00–09:50 NZST	Here
	CV basics (In person)	01 Apr, 09:30–10:20 NZST	Here
	Writing cover letters (In person)	01 Apr, 10:30–11:20 NZST	Here
	Interview basics (In person)	04 Apr, 09:30–10:20 NZST	Here

Organizer	Event	Date and Time	Register
Wellington Careers and Employment	Ace your job applications (<i>In person</i>)	07 Apr, 08:00–08:50 NZST	Here
	Discover your character strengths (<i>In person</i>)	08 Apr, 13:40–14:40 NZST	Here
	Networking & information interviewing (<i>In person</i>)	09 Apr, 16:10–17:00 NZST	Here
	CV basics (<i>In person</i>)	10 Apr, 10:00–10:50 NZST	Here
	Writing cover letters (<i>In person</i>)	10 Apr, 11:00–11:50 NZST	Here
	Preparing for Psychometric Assessment Tests (<i>In person</i>)	11 Apr, 08:30–09:20 NZST	Here
	CV basics (<i>In person</i>)	16 Apr, 13:10–14:00 NZST	Here
	Writing cover letters (<i>In person</i>)	16 Apr, 14:10–15:00 NZST	Here
	Interview basics (<i>In person</i>)	16 Apr, 15:10–16:00 NZST	Here
	Discover your character strengths (<i>In person</i>)	23 Apr, 14:10–15:10 NZST	Here
	CV basics (<i>In person</i>)	28 Apr, 09:00–09:50 NZST	Here
	Writing cover letters (<i>In person</i>)	28 Apr, 10:00–10:50 NZST	Here
	Ace your job applications (<i>In person</i>)	30 Apr, 15:10–16:00 NZST	Here
Student Learning	Successful time management for Postgraduate work (<i>In person</i>)	01 Apr, 14:10–15:00 NZST	Here
	Monday morning writes (<i>In person</i>)	07 Apr, 09:00–10:30 NZST	Here
	Developing a research question and research topic (<i>In person</i>)	08 Apr, 14:10–15:00 NZST	Here
	Monday morning writes (<i>In person</i>)	14 Apr, 09:00–10:30 NZST	Here
	Creating a research timeline and staying on track (<i>In person</i>)	15 pr, 14:10–15:00 NZST	Here
	Life management for night owls (<i>Online</i>)	16 pr, 17:30–19:00 NZST	Here
	Monday morning writes (<i>In person</i>)	28 Apr, 09:00–10:30 NZST	Here
	Applying Te Tiriti o Waitangi ethics to your research (<i>In person</i>)	29 Apr, 14:10–15:00 NZST	Here

FGR

Faculty of Graduate Research
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FGR works to ensure that your experience as a thesis student is a positive one. For more information, visit our [website](#)

Contact

Postgraduate Research Student Advisers: FGR-postgrads@vuw.ac.nz

- Enrolling in your doctoral or master's programme.
- Candidature management changes. Online forms for thesis candidature changes can be found [here](#).

Thesis Examinations: FGR-Exams@vuw.ac.nz

- Submission or examination of theses.

Doctoral Admissions and Scholarships: pg-research@vuw.ac.nz:

- Doctoral applications or the doctoral application process
- Scholarships

Learning and Development: william.eulatthvidal@vuw.ac.nz