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Stephen Griffin, MEd International Studies in Education 2010

Current role

I work for the University of Birmingham as a Learning Skills advisor and also teach on some of the workshops for undergraduates in essay-writing, critical thinking, presentation skills and a variety of general study skills. Prior to this, I worked as an lecturer in ESOL at South Birmingham College, and as a freelance academic proof reader.

Career experiences

There are far more opportunities open to me within the education sector now that I've gained a postgraduate qualification: I am now eligible to apply for senior teaching posts and positions with more managerial responsibility.

What is the best thing about what you are doing now?

Since being introduced to International Studies in Education through the programme at Birmingham, I have discovered a worldwide community of students and scholars who share the same research interests that I do. Meeting these people and wanting to learn more about their ideas has led me to publish a student-generated publication, International and Comparative Education Magazine (**www.icemag.org (http://www.icemag.org)**) which has recently launched its first issue. It's a very exciting project that I couldn't have embarked upon without the contacts I made while studying at Birmingham, many of whom have contributed to and helped edit the magazine.

Why did you originally apply to do your course at Birmingham?

I was looking for a course that could accommodate me as a part-time student, without too much disruption to my working week. The programme at the School of Education was ideal for this and I was able to choose from a wide range of challenging modules, attending seminars at times that fit around my other teaching responsibilities. That the University of Birmingham itself has such a strong reputation for research was obviously a deciding factor in my choosing it as a place to study but, in addition, the expertise of the academic staff on my course was second to none, with many widely acknowledged as world-leading experts in their field.

What did you think were the best points of the course and the University?

Studying in the School of Education felt like being a member of a small college and had a close, familial atmosphere that was immediately welcoming. This informal and relaxed environment was reflected in the attitudes of both the academic and administrative staff, who were always friendly and approachable. The facilities at the University are excellent - I never had any trouble gaining access to a computer or booking an item from the library. Probably the best thing about my time at Birmingham was meeting so many students from diverse backgrounds: when studying comparative education, it helps to have differing world-views than our own!

What did you think of the learning experience within the University?

The course opened up whole new concepts, theories and areas of study that I never would have encountered otherwise. Now that I've finished my course, I still find myself reading up on current developments in international education that follow on from my studies. I feel confident not just to understand the issues I encounter, but to critically evaluate and discuss them in a more rigorous manner. This is entirely thanks to conversations in tutorial sessions with my lecturers: they pushed me to the limits of what I thought I could do - and beyond.

Did you find your course at Birmingham challenging or easy?

The course was certainly not 'easy', but then again was not 'hard' in terms of feeling like a burden or a chore. The lecturers had such an infectious enthusiasm for their research that it was impossible not to be engaged with the subject. Because I found the subject mater enjoyable, it wasn't difficult. The difficulty came with trying to do the subject justice in my writing, so it was self-imposed to an extent.

Advice for current students

My advice to current students is to read as many recently printed journals in your field as possible and talk to people about your work, be it other students or lecturers - it's the best way to be clear of your own ideas.

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