Kamna Patel

International Development (PhD)

I am a newly appointed lecturer in the Development Planning Unit at the University College London and I teach on a year long module titled 'Development in Practice'. My appointment involves a mix of teaching, research and a number of administrative roles including organising a residential workshop for nearly 200 MSc students.

My research interests on urban land issues in the Global South were well reflected amongst faculty in the International Development Department at Birmingham. The opportunity to work with such well respected and accomplished supervisors in Philip Amis and Carole Rakodi was a wonderful learning curve for me, not only in terms of my research interests, but in terms of learning how to teach and encourage students. Also, the University itself has a strong reputation for research excellence stemming from and contributing to a wide range of thought-provoking seminars, public lectures and workshops that I could access. Related to this, I found there to be a number of funding opportunities and doctoral student support services available. For example, I attended a Universitas 21 conference in Australia as a University of Birmingham delegate in 2009 where I met students from all over the world with a connection to Universitas 21 all researching issues of 'sustainable cities' (the conference theme) as I was.

In the International Development Department almost all PhD candidates spend several months away on fieldwork, so at any given moment there may be only a handful of students actually in Birmingham. For the periods in which I was in Birmingham, I most enjoyed getting to know my colleagues and learning about their research interests. The PhD candidates in IDD have got to be some of the most interesting and inspiring people I've ever met. Almost of all whom have worked for several years in areas they are now researching. I found I could learn as much from them in a coffee break as any journal article.

> I've gained two really important things directly related to my current career from my studies at Birmingham. The first is a thorough knowledge of the research process and approaches to research. The second is the exposure to teaching masters students I gained by acting as a PGTA and as a tutor on IDD's distance learning programme. Without this combination of teaching experience and a solid grounding in research, I would not have been prepared for the challenges in my new role."

As someone who has recently completed a PhD, I'd say try to treat it like a job - work set hours, take time off and develop a timetable for yourself of major deadlines and outputs for those deadlines. As someone who studied at Birmingham, I'd say look inside and outside of your department to stimulate your ideas, broaden your experiences and to meet new people (students and faculty). Consider taking optional modules in other departments and certainly find out about seminar series throughout the year in other departments that are of interest to you and attend them.

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