

## Modern Languages alumni profiles

Catrin Shi, BA (Hons) German Studies, 2010



“The best part about the German Studies course at Birmingham is the range of subjects you have the opportunity to study.”

Catrin Shi  
SNL Financial

Catrin Shi (BA German Studies, 2010) is now a journalist for SNL Financial - a subscription-based financial newswire and data provider. Catrin speaks to professionals from Germany, Switzerland and Austria on a daily basis. She said:

“My German Studies degree was essential in getting this job! The language skills and cultural knowledge I acquired on the course have been invaluable.

The best part about the German Studies course at Birmingham is the range of subjects you have the opportunity to study, particularly in final year. The departmental staff are incredibly helpful and supportive and my year abroad studying was one of the best, and most challenging, years of my life so far - especially leading a 90 minute university seminar in German, to native German speakers!

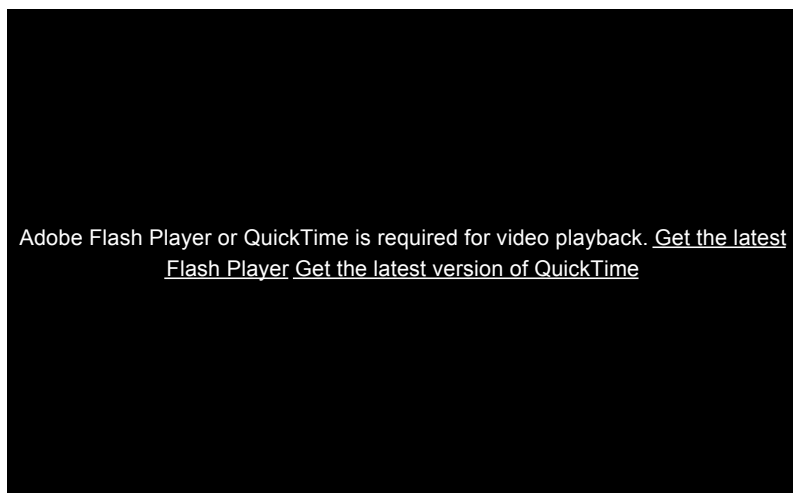
By graduation, I felt I had a sound knowledge and understanding of German culture, which still benefits me every day. I'd written for Redbrick, the University's highly-regarded student newspaper and participated in the Personal Skills Award media module which was pretty handy to include in my application for the postgraduate journalism course.”

Catrin advises students to make the most of their time as Modern Languages students:

“Your options are endless! Think outside of the box – most industries have an international presence these days. Point out the skills you have developed as well as your language skills, such as good communication skills, organisational skills, overcoming challenges.

Take as many opportunities as you can to expose yourself to your chosen language and finally, enjoy your university years. Take every opportunity Birmingham throws at you, because there certainly are many.”

Lydia Gibson, BA (Hons) French Studies, 2010



Adobe Flash Player or QuickTime is required for video playback. [Get the latest Flash Player](#) [Get the latest version of QuickTime](#)

Lydia Gibson (BA French Studies, 2010) talks about her degree at Birmingham

and her job for a craft distributor and manufacturer.

Sandy Dhesi, BA (Hons) German Studies, 2009

Sandy Dhesi completed her degree in German Studies in 2009. She has worked as a development officer and is now completing a MA in Social Work.

Sandy says, “I wouldn't be where I am now without studying German. It provided me with invaluable skills, knowledge and life experience. Employers not only look at individuals' experiences but also their degree classification and chosen further education institution. The University of Birmingham has a great reputation, thus, it enhanced my chances of employment.

Sandy decided that she wanted to enter a career path which would allow her to make a difference in people's lives and obtained employment immediately after graduating as a development officer. She said “My employer chose me because I possessed the skills and knowledge needed because of my degree - I was able to write academically and my university experience, such as meeting deadlines, writing assignments and exams, showed that I was organised and able to work under pressure.”

Sandy is now studying to pursue her goal further: “I believe that studying German provided me with a stepping stone to my current profession. I would not be able to study at Masters level without my degree. Life experience is vital for a career in social work - studying at the University of Birmingham has provided me with that experience and skills which I am currently utilising and will hopefully lead to a prosperous career in my chosen profession.”

She adds that her favourite memory of her time at University of Birmingham was her graduation day. “Despite the rain, I had a wonderful day with my fellow students. It is one of the proudest moments of my life and hopefully it'll be one of yours too.”

Natalie Hill, BA (Hons) Modern Languages: Russian with French, 2009

“The department staff were extremely supportive, always willing to give up their own time to help and their confidence in me has made me a more confident person.”

Natalie Hill ([BA Modern Languages: Russian with French \(undergraduate/courses/lang/modern-languages.aspx\)](#), 2009) now uses her language skills on a daily basis in her job as Relationship Manager for Clariden Leu (Europe) Ltd, an External Asset Management company which works with high-net worth clients setting up and managing private bank accounts.

"My degree incorporated a variety of modules – two languages as well as literature and politics– which meant that we had to prioritise our work very effectively. This is probably one of the most important aspects of my job now.

"Our teachers expected very high standards! However, they were extremely supportive, always willing to give up their own time to help and their confidence in me has made me a more confident person."

Natalie particularly enjoyed studying abroad which is part of all of the Modern Languages degrees.

"Arriving in Moscow for a year abroad was daunting. But this extreme immersion really accelerated our learning as we had to pick up all the vocabulary very quickly. I came back with many funny stories!"

"We were also very lucky to go Petrozavodsk in the summer after first year to do an extra language course. At the end of my final year, I went on the same trip as a group coordinator and translator. This was a brilliant experience and the reference I received from the tutor really helped me to get my job at the bank."

Natalie advises students to spend as much time abroad as possible. She says: "There is nothing that matches up to living in the country itself and speaking the language on a daily basis."

## Holly Roper-Newman, BA (Hons) French Studies with Italian, 2009

Adobe Flash Player or QuickTime is required for video playback. [Get the latest Flash Player](#) [Get the latest version of QuickTime](#)

Holly Roper-Newman ([BA French Studies with Italian \(/undergraduate/courses/lang/modern-languages.aspx\)](#), 2009) talks about how her degree helped her to land a job with the fashion brand French Connection.

## James Doig, BA (Hons) in Italian Studies, 2009



I think the year abroad element of my degree also prepared me for life working abroad.



James Doig  
Site Administrator in Greenland

James graduated with a [BA \(Hons\) in Italian Studies \(/schools/lcahm/departments/italian/undergraduate/index.aspx\)](#) in 2009. He is currently working as a Site Administrator of a gold mine in Greenland.

"My Degree was valuable in developing my standard of written and verbal communication; useful for the administrative side of my job. I think the year abroad element of my degree also prepared me for life working abroad. I think that any modern languages degree still holds a lot of value for employers, especially in the UK where very few graduates can speak more than one language. In an increasingly competitive job market the ability to speak Italian

can really help you to stand out. The route I took to get where I am now probably didn't require a degree but I definitely learnt a lot at University that has helped in my career so far."

## Sarah Gray, BA (Hons) in French and Italian Studies, 2007

Sarah graduated in 2007 with a [BA \(Hons\) in French and Italian Studies \(/undergraduate/courses/lang/modern-languages.aspx\)](#). She currently works as a Translator for the Council for the European Union.

"After graduating from Birmingham I did an MA in Applied Translation Studies at London Metropolitan University, and graduated from there in 2008. I then started working as a translator at an agency based in London and also undertook freelance translation and editing work. I completed the European Union (EPSO) recruitment competition, and was recruited by the Council of the European Union in late 2011. I took up my post in Brussels last December.

My work involves translating Council documents from French, Italian and Swedish into English. I use my language skills every day and will have the chance to learn new languages too. My translation skills allow me to contribute to the work of the Council and other European Institutions, and I find that very satisfying."

## Rachel Century, BA German Studies and Philosophy, 2006



The staff at University of Birmingham have supported me to get me where I am today and where I hope to be tomorrow.



Rachel Century  
Education Officer - Holocaust Memorial Day Trust

Rachel Century graduated with a degree in German Studies and Philosophy in 2006. She now works as an Education Officer for the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust.

Rachel's studies sparked a passionate and inspirational career, "My degree has helped to prepare me for the working world in so many ways. It armed me with skills such as time management, research, writing concisely, and meeting deadlines. My job allows me to ensure that as many people as possible know about the Holocaust, and helps to reach lots of people who want to know about and commemorate the historic Holocaust."

Rachel believes that her time at University of Birmingham has helped to shape her future, "Birmingham has been a vital stepping stone to help me onto the various stages of my career. I completed an MA at UCL and a PHD at Royal Holloway, both in Holocaust studies. I then embarked on my career as an Education Officer for the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust. The staff at Birmingham have continued to support me, have showed an interest in my research, and provided references and recommendations when I have needed them. They have got me to where I am today - and where I hope to be tomorrow."

Her advice to Modern Languages students is, "Make the most of your year abroad - there's so much to see and do. It's a fantastic opportunity to explore another country and culture and really immerse yourself in another way of life, particularly before you have to settle down for final year!"

## Paul Szumilewicz, BA (Hons) Italian Studies and Commerce, 2003

Paul Szumilewicz graduated in 2003 with a degree in Italian Studies and Commerce. He is now working as the Head of Retail Banking and Wealth Management for HSBC Bank Middle East Limited, Lebanon – based in Beirut.

"Studying Italian and commerce at Birmingham gave me the opportunity to study for a year in Verona, Italy (Università degli studi di Verona). This really opened my mind to different cultures, experiences and languages and was ultimately the drive in my ambition to work for a global organisation. My time at University of Birmingham shaped and moulded my character, desire and thirst to experience a variety of societies internationally. I have developed so much professionally and personally through these opportunities, and continue to do so everyday. You get used to being out side of your comfort zone ... which is the best place to be as that is where you learn the most!"

"After graduation, I worked for Lloyds Banking Group in places like Dubai and Hong Kong before taking up my role with HSBC, where I had my first placement in New York. I now oversee HSBC Retail and Wealth Banking, in Lebanon and also have staff in Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

"The advice that I would give to any student studying Italian in a multicultural city like Birmingham is to get as much as you can out of your time there. The year abroad is really challenging, but you'll grow as a person, if you throw yourself into the opportunity and culture as well as developing your language skills immensely. You'll never get the time back, so grab every opportunity whilst you're out there!"

## Kate Stowe, BA (Hons) French Studies with Mathematics, 2001



“ Even apparently simple things like setting up a bank account or getting a telephone connected are an adventure in a foreign country ”

Kate Stowe  
Priest, Church of England

Kate Stowe graduated with a joint honours degree in French Studies with Mathematics in 2001. She is an ordained priest in the Church of England and currently Chaplain to the Bishop of Birmingham.

As part of her degree, Kate took a year abroad to study in Belgium and believes this was a 'formative time' in her development. She says, "I think the experience of doing a 4 year degree, which included the year abroad, allowed time and space for me to grow and develop. Even apparently simple things like setting up a bank account or getting a telephone connected are an adventure in a foreign country, and require patience and perseverance - qualities that are valuable in

most jobs!

"Following my degree I trained as a Maths teacher. I taught for two years and then trained to be a Church of England priest. Studying a language to degree level meant that I was able to teach a bit of French when the need arose, and also that I was well prepared to learn the Biblical languages of Greek and Hebrew as part of my theological training."

Now an ordained priest, Kate is very happy in her new role: "Being a priest is a privilege and a joy in so many different ways. Perhaps the most humbling part is sharing in profound moments of both joy and grief in people's lives - occasions such as weddings, baptisms and funerals."

Kate looks back at her time at the University very fondly. "People often say that your school days are the best time of your life. If that's true, then your university days come a pretty close second!" As for a message to our students, Kate advises: "Enjoy your time at Birmingham, and allow it to form you and prepare you for whatever lies ahead!"

## George Pasquel-Thompson, BA (Hons) Hispanic Studies, 2001

George graduated in 2001 with a BA (Hons) in Hispanic Studies. He now works as a commercial co-ordinator in Mexico City.

"I love living and working in Mexico, as well as being in charge of various divisions' sales teams and interacting with employees and clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. Take advantage of the literature courses at Birmingham. Never again will you have the opportunity to explore, study and discuss literature at this level, with committed academics of this calibre. Most of the people I come across in work environments in Latin America are well read and proud of their literature. It breaks the ice perfectly and means they respect your opinions more if they know you have good knowledge of their literature."

## Naomi Ives, BA (Hons) French Studies, 2000

Naomi Ives completed her French degree in 2000. She is now an Artist Manager for conductors and instrumentalists with IMG Artists in London.

Naomi says, "I loved Birmingham - I met so many great people, made the most of the city and what it had to offer and generally had loads of fun! I also loved how varied the course. It wasn't all just about learning how to speak, read and write in French to the best of my abilities, I also got to study history, film, literature and song amongst the many things on offer. Doing all of these things taught me how to research, think in depth and apply reason to my essays and presentations. Living abroad for a year was a great experience which was tricky and challenging at times but hugely rewarding and great fun. The process of getting yourself set up in a new country taught me a great deal - everything from opening bank accounts (not straight forward in France!), applying for residency permits, spending hours in consulates and embassies when I lost my passport and adjusting to a new way of life in general really stood me in good stead.

"However, when I was studying, it was very difficult for me to imagine what I might be doing after graduation. I knew I didn't want to be an academic or stay on to do a masters and sometimes I worried that I didn't have a vocational degree which would naturally carry me off in to a career. I think it's important to realise that studying modern languages will prepare you for employment more than you think. It shows prospective employers that you have an aptitude for communication, which can be hugely important in many careers.

"Immediately after graduation, I worked as researcher pulling together large projects often in community safety, public health or public housing. I then went on to be an assistant at IMG Artists so learnt the ropes to my current role. I moved to Scotland where I worked for The Royal Scottish National Orchestra as their Sponsorship Manager and then was Company Manager for Scottish Opera for five years. Working at one of the leading national opera companies gave me invaluable further experience in dealing with artists and also gave me insight in to how the business works on that side of the industry."

## Alison Harvey: BA (Hons) French and Italian Studies, 1978

Alison Harvey graduated in 1978 with a BA Combined Honours in French and Italian. She is currently living in Singapore and working as a Manager for Freixenet Group,

one of the world's largest wine producers, with responsibility for 12 different markets in Asia.

"The more I progress in my career, the more I value my degree and time at University of Birmingham. It was my language qualification that secured my first job, as it was a unique and desired skill, but my degree has given me much more than the ability to speak other languages."

Alison urges students to make the most of their time here to develop the skills needed in the working world.

"Studying literature has given me vital skills - the analytical, questioning mindset needed to study literature is a skill that is necessary in managerial positions. It is crucial for understanding markets, problem solving and communicating especially in my job, where my nearest colleague is in Shanghai!

"The workload and reading helps to develop your organisational skills. I wouldn't be able to do my job without this skill as I currently manage 12 different markets, with different products and timezones! This style of degree programme also gives you the ability to work at a fast pace to meet deadlines. The close relationships I had with my tutors were a real benefit in helping me hone these skills.

"Birmingham is a great city which has got better and better over the years. The campus is a world apart – a real community within the big city."

---

[Privacy](#) | [Legal](#) | [Cookies and cookie policy](#) | [Accessibility](#) | [Site map](#) | [Website feedback](#) | [Charitable information](#)

© University of Birmingham 2015

