

# Nicole Sharp Report

My year at St Andrews has passed by so quickly and it is sad that it has finally come to an end. Without a doubt, it has been the best year of my life so far!

It didn't take too long to adjust to St Andrews, arriving in October it was still warm for Scotland! St Andrews has a great community feel, with students getting involved in various clubs and societies. This was a good way of meeting new people with similar interests — for example I joined the St Andrews Ladies Golf Society, the Fine Food & Dining Society, the French society and also the Celtic Society to learn how to dance at the weekly Ceilidh!

My classes were really interesting, with a good mix of people from different professional backgrounds e.g. engineers, geologists and geographers (I was the only accountant!). The courses took a multidisciplinary approach, so we learnt about sustainability things such as climate change, biodiversity issues, adaption/mitigation, social accessibility (i.e. to things such as education, food, employment) and so forth. My favourite class was 'Management as if the Earth Mattered'. a business course designed to change attitudes to status quo business approaches towards the environment and social matters.

The workload throughout the taught semesters were intensive, but we managed to have some fun as well, going on field trips to sustainable enterprises and communities, having coffee at our favourite café in St Andrews (Northpoint), and of course making the most of the St Andrews traditions and nightlife. For example, tradition has it that we honour a former St Andrews villageman who saved many people from a shipwreck just near the Castle ruins. Students light wooden torches and proceed towards the stony pier, where balloon-lanterns are released into the air. Another tradition included swimming in the North Sea at dawn (freezing, bone-chilling temperatures) on the first of May, which is considered the 'end' of winter. I did it, and was lucky not to catch pneumonia!

After the first two semesters, the St Andrews environment over summer changed significantly with all of the undergraduates leaving, and golfers from around the globe flocked to the Old Course. By this stage of the academic year, the postgraduates had formed a close-knit group, and we celebrated the 'odd' summer's day with barbeques on the beach, practising our swings at the driving range and the occasional pint at the local pub (helping, of course, with writer's block!). It was so sad to say goodbye at the end of the summer, with all of us flying back to our different countries. I am so grateful for the wonderful experience of meeting so many diverse and interesting people, and hope that many of us have formed friendships for life.

During the Scottish summer I was writing my Master's thesis, titled Switched On or Off? Making Sense of Sustainability's Complexities in a UK Energy Company. This thesis engaged with a renewable energy company committed to sustainability in its purpose and operations. I spent three months engaging with the company, with a week on-site in beautiful Bath. Luckily, the Scottish summer was in fact cold, raining and windy for the most part (i.e. not much different from a Scottish winter), which provided extra motivation for being in the library and at the company's offices.

My thesis results discovered that the renewable energy company found it difficult to apply their sustainability ethos and strategy within its daily operations. With the company growing, the sustainability ethos was becoming lost, as more emphasis was placed on commercial growth and profits. The company's difficulty in articulating and practising sustainability led to important questions such as how an organisation conceptualises sustainability's state, sustainability's meaning and its multidimensional nature.

My thesis called for a need to understand organisational sustainability through complexity frameworks, such as Post Normal Science (PNS). A PNS approach may assist organisations with sustainability missions, such as GE, by facilitating them in navigating, highlighting and addressing the difficulties, conflicts and complexities of organisational sustainability. PNS provides an alternative for organisations with sustainability missions, enabling them to conceptualise sustainability as systemic, dynamic, complex and multidimensional through multiple approaches at multiple systems-levels.

My overall results for my Masters in Sustainable Development comprise Distinction Overall (that is, both Distinction for taught coursework and for the thesis), which is the best possible result I could have hoped to achieve. In addition, I was one of the few students in my class to be awarded a prize for my thesis and to top it off, was the top student of my class! I'm fortunate to have had the financial support that you have provided me over the year because such wonderful academic results could not have been achieved if I was under financial pressure and forced to work part-time.

Graduation at St Andrews was an amazing day. The ceremony had many traditions spanning the University's 600 year history. The highlight of the day was that my parents were able to make the long trip to see me (finally!) graduate. Being in November, graduation was pretty cold, and most of us froze even with our cloaks! We were welcomed into Younger Hall (where the ceremony was held) with Bagpipes and during the ceremony, the St Andrews Student Choir sang traditional Scottish songs, such as The Bonnie Banks o' Loch Lomond. I tried to introduce my parents to fine Scottish cuisine such as haggis, but Mum wasn't too keen! However, we enjoyed a lovely celebratory dinner at the Old Course restaurant, overlooking the Old Course, town and sea. Afterwards, I joined my classmates and fellow Masters for one last hurrah at the sole St Andrews 'nightclub' ('the lizard'), celebrating long into the night!

I am now back in New Zealand and start work with Deloitte in Wellington in February. I will be working in the audit department with the hope of being able to conduct carbon and sustainability reporting audits. This will be an exciting opportunity to apply some of the knowledge acquired during my Masters into practice with New Zealand organisations that are committed to sustainability. During my time with Deloitte, I will work towards my chartered accountants qualifications which should take two to three years to complete.

My long-term aims would involve working as a sustainability consultant for businesses, to be a sustainability leader of a large organisation or to work for international bodies such as the OECD, the International Energy Agency or the United Nations in order to achieve global sustainability. I hope to be part of a new and innovative field of sustainability accounting and global sustainability efforts. I am very fortunate to be able to pursue these dreams — it

is thanks to your support and belief in myself and this cause that such career and wider aspirations are possible!