Our first students

A glimpse into the background, motivation and aspirations of just a few of our new students suggests that Griffith's School of Medicine is justified in being extremely proud of our first cohort. Here's a brief preview of three students who will be out to impress as they move through their training and begin interacting with our clinical supporters and the wider community.

Sonia Arwadi

Sonia Arwadi has had music in her life for almost as long as she can remember and has already demonstrated passion, commitment and high achievement beyond her years. The accomplished pianist started learning music at four years of age and achieved her Associate Diploma (or AMus) when she was in year 11 at high school.

The next step would have been her Licentiate but as any good musician knows – timing is everything. Instead, Sonia put her head down for her final school years and then a science degree majoring in chemistry.

“I started thinking about medicine in my second year at uni and sat the GAMSAT back then just to see how I might go. I left it then for a couple of years.”

Sonia had kept up with her music by teaching piano students and at the end of her undergraduate degree took a “brain break” for a year. With the possibility of expanding her music teaching even more, she then completed a Graduate Diploma in Educational Studies.

However a more serious GAMSAT attempt, an interview process where she “felt right at ease”, and finally the offer of Griffith place set her direction for the next few years. While the Licentiate may still happen, it is unlikely in the near future. Sonia doesn’t have any preconceived ideas about where her medical career may take her and instead, says she is open to everything interesting.

However she seems to have found a sustainable balance for now. Mondays to Fridays are spent on the Gold Coast then she heads home to Brisbane for the weekend where she spends most of her Saturdays teaching piano to high school students. “It’s a good break after five long days of study.”

Student selection

For those clinicians, academics and community representatives who gave so freely of their time to participate in the interview process, we extend our sincere thanks and confirm that their energy and expertise has been rewarded in the high quality of the first medical students enrolled at Griffith.

Of the 86 students enrolled:

- 52% have undergraduate degrees from Queensland universities
- There are also students from universities in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA.
- Some 49 of the 86 students have undergraduate degrees in the biological sciences and 21 with degrees in health sciences or health related disciplines.
- There are also students with undergraduate degrees in the arts and social sciences, commerce, engineering, mathematical and veterinary science and economics.
- The majority of students are aged between 20 and 25 years with 38 male, and 48 female.

International students

Griffith’s enrolments for its medical program will increase in 2006 to include international students. As we work towards 20% of our expanding cohort being international, we welcome the diversity in cultural and academic backgrounds that these students will bring. The GAMSAT is taking place late March and our selection team is now at the early stages of organising interviews to take place in September/October 2005. Griffith’s School of Medicine looks forward to the continued support of clinicians, community representatives and academics in maintaining the exceptionally successful selection process for our second intake of students in 2006.
Drew Cronin

There are many different pathways to Griffith’s School of Medicine but Drew Cronin’s has to be one of the more circuitous ones. The former Coastie and surf lifesaver is delighted to be back at home on the Gold Coast after five years of boarding school and the best part of another three years studying for a science degree in Brisbane. But even then it wasn’t destined to be a smooth trip to medicine. Drew had scored well in his GAMSAT but risked not finishing his undergraduate degree in time to take best advantage of it.

With an opportunity to be one of Griffith’s first cohort, he switched to Bond University in order to fast track his studies. He completed 19 subjects in four semesters in order to graduate from Bond on February 5 – the end of his first week as a medical student at Griffith.

Apart from the chance to be back home on the Coast, Drew sees other advantages in studying medicine at Griffith. “It’s all brand new here for this first intake and everyone is pretty excited about it. Also I can be one of 88 medical students here instead of one of 300.”

Drew has some insight into the profession as his father David Cronin is an ENT surgeon and, more recently, also an academic title holder in the School of Medicine. However none of his three older brothers went into medicine at all, so Drew feels free to keep his options open about the speciality areas that may attract him. Maybe ENT or maybe dermatology.

For now, he’s just pleased that the hard work he put in to get here has paid off. “I have always been good at science and I do surf lifesaving because it’s good to know I can help. Studying medicine seems something of a logical progression.”

Student participation

Students will have opportunities to make a significant contribution to the development of Griffith’s medical program. This will be a professional responsibility and preparation for the type of contribution they will need to make as future medical professionals.

School committees

Student participation in decision-making about the medical program is highly valued by the School, and the appointment process is underway for first year representation on the education committee, the major policy committee for the curriculum. One student in each year will be awarded membership (albeit two in this first year), including the postgraduate programs.

Students are also represented on the year committees for years 1 and 2 and years 3 and 4. Here they have opportunities to provide direct feedback to staff on all aspects of their studies in the respective years, for comments to be taken on board, and appropriate changes made.

Student representatives, one from the graduate-entry program and one from future postgraduate students, are also being sought for the school committee, the primary decision-making entity within the School.

University committees

Students from the School of Medicine will have the opportunity to nominate for student positions on various university committees, including the University Council, Academic Committee and Advisory Council Gold Coast campus.
Emily Fitzpatrick

Former Sydneysider Emily Fitzpatrick has spent about nine years working part-time in her father’s dental practice. She’s done reception duties, sterilising and autoclaving, assisted with patient care and with surgery. However her undergraduate studies in medical science at the University of Sydney opened her eyes to other career paths.

“I loved anatomy and physiology and how the whole body works together as a symphony. There is so much variety in medicine,” she says.

She also trained as an assistant nurse and started working regular Sunday shifts and the occasional Saturday evening shift in local hospitals and nursing homes.

“Even my little part in changing bed sheets and helping move patients was very rewarding. Medicine definitely seemed to be the way I could best combine the intellectual challenge of the science that I love with my communication skills and caring side.”

Last year Emily enjoyed the self-directed learning and experimental work of an honours year focussing on Parkinson’s Disease. It would also have helped boost her chance of entry to medicine in Sydney in 2006 but by then she had been offered a place here at Griffith.

“Griffith has turned out to be a really good choice for me and a real adventure. In particular I really like how they are throwing us into the community straight away.”

Emily lists neuroscience and geriatrics as just two areas she might pursue in the future.

“My assistant nursing jobs have helped me realise there is an aged community that needs a lot of help and support, and from an economic point of view there will be a large increase in need in that area.”

Griffith University Medical Society

The first cohort of students has established the Griffith University Medical Society which represents them within the university and externally. It is affiliated with the University’s Student Guild and the Australian Medical Students Association and fulfils important academic and social functions.

External conferences

Rachel Wyndam was selected to represent students at the Medical Education Towards 2010: Shared Visions and Common Goals conference, held 7-9 March in Canberra.

Aiming to develop a future vision for medical education in Australia, the conference brought together the partners in medical education to provide the impetus for building better relationships and ongoing dialogue amongst stakeholders and the Australian community more broadly.

Keen but unsure of what she could contribute, Rachel found herself in the equivalent of a PBL group with representatives from government, the AMA and specialist colleges.

However her relative inexperience didn’t deter the group from nominating her as group spokesperson.

Rachel says the problems under discussion were of critical importance to medical students, with a common theme being the difficulty linking the various stages in medical education and training.

“For example, with more universities now offering medicine and more medical places in the system, the management of intern placements at the end of our degree will be interesting. As a new student body, we need to keep on top of that.”
Health in the community – Year 1 curriculum

The students have commenced the innovative curriculum element, “Health in the Community”. Students will work with three community organisations near to their allocated general practice and hospital for clinical skills teaching. This curriculum element was designed to address one of the core values of the School, engagement with the community. Students have been enthusiastically welcomed by the clinical community and we look forward to them being fine ambassadors for the School through their work with community health groups.

- Covered all major disciplines as well as law, ethics, population health, health psychology, epidemiology and public health.
- Attended 262 lectures, 56 practical classes, and participated in 360 hours of small group discussions relating to 72 clinical cases.
- Involved in 75 clinical skills sessions covering history taking, basic life support and physical examination of all the major body systems.
- Worked with three community groups, spent 54 hours (over 18 visits) in a general practice and completed a community research project aimed at providing grounding in qualitative or quantitative research or audit in a community setting.
- Worked their way through 100s of research articles and book chapters to understand the mechanisms behind normal and disease processes.

Expectations of students by the end of year 2

- Well practised at an integrated approach to hypothesis formulation and testing, setting their own learning goals, working in teams, time management, locating resources and application of basic sciences to clinical scenarios.
- Be familiar with the nature of a patient consultation and be able to take a history, conduct a systems examination and a focussed examination on the system pertaining to the presenting complaint.
- Able to document both the history and examination in the medical notes, and undertake venepuncture and injection with supervision.
- Able to assist with clinical measurement, have an early understanding of pathology results and their interpretation, and have a basic understanding of radiology and interpretation of x-rays.

Having been involved in clinical environments for more than 18 months, these collective skills will make students useful members of a team.