GG3005 Placement-Linked Dissertations
The Student Experience
Internationally recognised for the quality of its teaching and research, the Geography Department at Royal Holloway provides students with excellent opportunities to study this diverse and vital subject. Our impressive facilities provide a stimulating environment where students can develop their knowledge and skills, guided by staff who are leading authorities in their field. The Department prides itself on its career provision in the form of skills seminars, one-to-one ‘in-house surgeries’ for students to gain individual advice plus career action planning through small group teaching.

Kathryn Hampshire conducting her dissertation research on placement at Wildwood
Placement-linked dissertations offer undergraduate students the opportunity to undertake a substantive and original piece of formally assessed research in conjunction with an organisation that has a professional interest in geographical concerns.

The placements are arranged by academic staff who forge links with the organisations and supervise the students’ respective projects. From work experience, expert training on public communication of their research, to one-on-one CV guidance, the scheme works to enhance students’ employability alongside their independent research skills. Committed to ensure fair and equal access, their research, travel and accommodation expenses are kindly supported by the Royal Holloway Alumni Fund.

This brochure showcases the experiences of Emily, Kathryn, Emma and Kathleen who each won through the competitive application process to become our first student cohort in 2013-2014. For further information on the student experience visit our dedicated blog site rhulgeogplacements.wordpress.com

For more details on our wider careers provision visit rhul.ac.uk/geography/yourfuturecareer

Dr Katherine Brickell, Department of Geography Employability Lead

“This is an innovative scheme that gives students so much more than just work experience. The placement-linked dissertation means that students are able to make direct connections between the content of their geographical courses, the skills that they have been developing, and the work of our partner companies and organisations. For participating employers there is the chance to work with some of our most committed and enthusiastic students, who will want to make a real contribution to the hosting organisation.”

Professor David Gilbert, Head of Department of Geography

“This placement scheme enables students to develop key employability skills such as communication skills, problem solving and time management in a real work environment. It is a great bridge to the working world helping students to develop business awareness, to demonstrate their added value to an employer and to make those all important contacts.”

Liz Wilkinson, Head of College Careers Service
Play Southend: Community Intervention through Participatory Art

My placement organisation: Furtherfield (www.furtherfield.org)

My supervisor: Dr Harriet Hawkins

My research: “Working through a digital arts organisation, I focused on Play Southend – a participatory art project based in Essex. From drawing storyboards, creating sound bites, to playing games, it aims to bring about greater social cohesion and empower individuals to become more involved in the planning of their local community. My thesis explored and revealed the meanings, dynamics and limits of such ‘participation’”.

My future career: “I was recently invited to an assessment day for Customer Analysis at Tesco...the competition was really intense and I was lucky that I had the experience of working with Furtherfield to evidence teamwork, data collection and using my initiative. I got the position! Feedback confirmed that the placement research played heavily into why I was chosen.”

My new skills:

Teamwork – Coming fresh to work within a pre-existing team is something I had never done before, but which I now feel confident in doing.

Organisation – Planning my schedule around the needs of Furtherfield and the logistics of working in Southend taught me how to coordinate and maximise time.

Interviewing – I have become adept at interviewing different participants, both in time-pressured situations on game launch days with the public, and in more formal interviews with Furtherfield staff after.

Data collection and analysis – I now have first hand experience of data collection through questionnaires, as well as secondary data analysis of games on the Play Southend website.
An Investigation into the Effects of Wild Boar on the Soil and Vegetation Characteristics in Kent

My placement organisation: Wildwood Trust (www.wildwoodtrust.org)

My supervisor: Professor Danielle Schreve

My research: “I assessed the impact that wild boar might have on soil and vegetation characteristics and the speed at which land recovers from the disturbance. Vegetation surveys and soil samples from four enclosures at the wildlife park were taken. The findings are helpful for understanding the effect of wild boar should escaped feral populations be allowed to spread or a formal reintroduction plan be implemented.”

My future career: “During my placement, I gained valuable experience of working within an environmental charity, understanding how the organisation works, and liaising with staff from different departments. The placement has sparked a passion in the impact of environmental change on conservation and how habitat availability effects reintroduction strategies.”

My new skills:
Perseverance and determination – digging 8 soil pits was no easy task especially when the weather was not being kind!
Research design - Setting up a scientific project and effectively testing hypotheses
Public engagement - Communicating scientific ideas about my project to a range of audiences
Technical expertise - Advanced knowledge on soil sampling techniques and analysis
Policy insight - Knowledge on legislation surrounding conservation and different species-specific reintroduction plans
Young Women, Ethical Consumption and Campaigns: Exploring Feelings and Attitudes

My placement organisation:
The Body Shop (www.thebodyshop.co.uk)

My supervisor: Dr Dorothea Kleine

My research: “The business of business should not just be about money, it should be about responsibility. It should be about public good, not private greed”. Inspired by Anita Roddick, Founder of The Body Shop, my thesis focused on young women’s ethical consumption in the form of positive buying (where ethical products/companies are favoured). Tapping into a consumer base the company wanted to know more about, my research discovered how ethical purchase decisions are bound up in emotion; that the perceived proximity of the ethical issue is an important factor in decision-making; and how ethical products are often associated with high cost and luxury.

My future career: “I talked with a variety of inspiring people about their careers and their thoughts on my research. It turns out the findings have important implications for the company as I have been asked to write an executive summary of my dissertation findings and even suggest practical solutions! I will showcase this in my graduate job applications.”

My new skills:
Mixed method research – design and delivery of questionnaire and focus group research with young people
Flexibility – responding to the challenges of participant sampling and time availability
Building synergies with industry- Translating my research and class-room teaching on fair trade and ethical consumption into knowledge valued by a pioneering cosmetics company
Social media – blog writing and Twitter usage to promote my placement research to public audiences
Street Children and the Police in the Developing World: An Analysis of Representations, Perceptions and Initiatives for Change

My placement organisation: StreetInvest (www.streetinvest.org)

My supervisor: Professor Katie Willis

My research: “I focused on local police forces and the work UK organisations are doing to alter negative attitudes towards street children. I analysed news articles and adverts and organised two focus groups with street children from Kolkata, India. I also conducted interviews with three organisations - StreetInvest, Railway Children and War Child. My study highlights the crucial role of the child rights police training schemes in challenging police attitudes in targeted communities. At the same time it highlights the difficulties of achieving broader attitudinal change amongst the police and in the media.”

My future career: “My time with StreetInvest gave me an understanding of how the development charity sector operates. I now have a real awareness of the day-to-day workings of an NGO, the different roles within them and the realities of what the work consists of. I have come to the important realisation that I want to pursue a ‘people-facing’ career”.

My new skills:
Teamwork - making contributions to weekly meetings and debating concepts in group discussions to plan proposals for future StreetInvest projects.

Flexibility – responding positively to research challenges. When police forces were unwilling to speak with me with, I looked to media sources to understand police perceptions.

Organisation - Contacting various organisations, arranging interviews and co-ordinating work with teams in different countries to plan focus group discussions.

Effective communication - Conducting telephone, email and Skype interviews and communicating with StreetInvest. Effectively attaining the desired information from interviews and negotiating the involvement of organisations within the project.