

Interim Report for International Federation of Graduate Women

Melanie Bunce, Academic year, 2008-2009

My year at Oxford so far has been incredibly busy and rewarding. I have spent the last 6 months getting my teeth stuck into my DPhil research project, presenting at several conferences, and getting heavily involved in Oxford life - debating, playing rugby, and running social events at my college.

Academically, most of the year has been spent writing up papers based on my MPhil research and fleshing out my DPhil's theoretical framework and methodology. I was accepted to present at a number of conferences that went very well – an Oxford University Conference on Human Welfare, a Reuters Institute Seminar on Journalism Studies, and at a very exciting interdisciplinary conference in Algeria. These experiences have been invaluable – honing my academic presentation skills, and prompting constructive feedback that has improved the quality of my thesis.

For me - a debating geek from way back - one of the magical things about Oxford is the Oxford Union, where some of the most famous people in the world have delivered their most powerful lines. I signed up as soon as I arrived, and have taken part in debate tournaments and public speech events ever since.

However, early in the year, I became concerned with the very small number of women involved in debating and student politics more generally at Oxford (in 2008, only 3 of the University's 33 colleges had female student presidents). Shocked at this statistics, and in conjunction with the Oxford Union Women's Campaign, I designed and delivered a four-part seminar and workshop series targeted at women who wanted to develop their public speaking skills – to help them run for office, and to speak up at the union. This was a great success. We taught more than 40 women public speech skills, and the series has now been integrated into the annual events programme.

Once a week, I have also been working with a charity that teaches debating, critical thinking and confidence to children in very low income schools in South London. This has been a very rewarding part of my time in the UK, and has let me see a totally different side of England; I get to spend time with some fantastically bright kids, and I hopefully help by equipping them with a small tool in their fight against a range of academic and social challenges.

I have become very involved in college life at Oxford. I am the Vice President at my college, where I plan and manage student social activities. This is a lot of fun – it means I get to meet loads of students from around the world, and do silly things like punt down the Isis dressed as a pirate! As well as organise trips, music nights, and exchange dinners with other colleges.

I have also played a lot of sport this year – I play for the Oxford University Women's Rugby 1st XV, and I earned my blue this year - meaning that I was a starting player in the (incredibly important!!!) annual match against Cambridge. I have also been captaining my college cricket team.

All in all, it's been an incredibly hectic year to date, and shows no sign of slowing down. Right now, I am preparing to spend August and September in

Nairobi conducting more of my DPhil fieldwork on international journalists. I have received field work funding for this work from *The Round Table*, the oldest international affairs journal in the UK, who will publish an article about my findings upon my return.

I would like to take this occasion to thank the International Federation of Graduate Women for their support of my studies. I simply could not afford to be studying at Oxford without your generous fellowship, and the experience is having an incredible and positive impact on my life.