

Scholarships Awarded for PhD in Art Therapy

Divya Ramanathan was one of 300 students world wide to be awarded an Australian International Postgraduate Research Scholarship, she also won a La Trobe University International Research Scholarship – to undertake her PhD in art therapy at La Trobe. Miss Ramanathan always wanted to explore art therapy, but perhaps she didn't realise how much she might contribute to the profession, so early in her career.

Miss Ramanathan started out at La Trobe University by undertaking her Master in Art Therapy. Art therapy coursework programs at La Trobe not only meet international art therapy training standards and the curriculum combines the best of classroom, studio and clinical settings. Theoretical training and practical experience enables graduates to excel in this growing profession.

Miss Ramanathan describes the work experience as a 'golden opportunity'; "We were required to complete 1000 hours in clinical placement to qualify as art therapists and I was fortunate enough to grab experience working in different settings. I remain utterly grateful for the experience and exposure gained at my placements."

Miss Ramanathan completed her Masters in 2002, but before she returned home to India she applied for the two scholarships. "While at home I did a little art therapy work and a few presentations on art therapy to intrigued and interested audiences. I enjoyed introducing art therapy to Madras, and intended working there as an art therapist, but I was somehow awarded both scholarships and they obviously had a delightful effect on my plans for my immediate future."

For Miss Ramanathan gaining the scholarships had more than just financial benefits, it boosted her self-confidence, "It certainly has reinforced my belief that when you work hard enough, dreams can come true. My friend Rajugan said, 'Success is like a boomerang; put in efforts and they come back as achievements.' While I'm still in disbelief that I was awarded both scholarships. I'm utterly grateful, and not just for the financial support."

The scholarships give Miss Ramanathan the opportunity to undertake research on an aspect of art therapy which is particularly pertinent to her personally, but has potential benefits for many, she says,



"My immediate career goals involve making a substantial contribution to the literature on the use of art therapy as medicine for chronic pain, and to help those whose daily living is almost consumed by chronic pain," says Miss Ramanathan

"My PhD focuses on exploring the use of art therapy as a tool in management of chronic pain. Art has always been my therapy. Born with spina bifida I first experienced it as a form of medicine after one of 4 corrective surgeries. Over the years I used art to express, communicate, explore and work through different emotions and experiences, one of them being chronic pain. Having also used it with a few clients at work, I came to realise the scope for art therapy as alternative medicine for pain, and this PhD gives me the opportunity to explore the rudimentary knowledge available on the subject. The way I see it the greatest strength of a PhD is not the fact that it gives you a high qualification to teach afterwards, but that it gives you the opportunity to conduct intensive research on a particular topic and make a significant contribution to the field."

For research students it's particularly important to have access to the University's resources, Miss Ramanathan has lived on campus throughout her studies and enjoys being so close to the facilities she needs. "I'm utterly grateful that I live on campus and don't have to worry about travelling in to Uni.

What's great is that I also don't need to worry about security and indeed zip across to the office I have on campus to work until 3am if need be! The beauty of this campus is that it has most conveniences and we even have a medical centre on campus.

Easy access to the library is another huge bonus, and of course living in Glenn College I have my own space whilst enjoying the benefits of living within a multicultural community of 350! As a doctoral student there are other access benefits and privileges, so I've even decided not to move off-campus until I finish my PhD"

La Trobe has been an excellent study environment for Divya. "The highlight of my time at LTU would definitely be the people I've met, from all walks of life," she says, "I like to think of myself as a 'people person,' and my life here is so enriched because of the wonderful people I've met that I really can call this place 'home' too."

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