

The Spekboom

Rhodes University

DES Welcomes Gladman as our new HOD

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve as the Head of Department of the Department of Environmental Science for the next 3 years. I was a PhD student in this department between 2009 and 2011, and heading it is a huge privilege and speaks volumes about the support I have received over the years and the service I must render to others. In other words, it is not possible to do it all alone.

I would like to thank my predecessor, Prof James Gambiza for leading the department during the past 3 years, especially doing so during the COVID-19 difficulties and uncertainties in the second half of his tenure. My desire is to support the department on its growth trajectory, cognizant of the varied challenges, including COVID-19, we are still grappling with.

My hope is for the department's activities to be shaped by intellectual thought and collaborations. My beliefs on the value of intellectual thought and meaningful collaborations are informed by the concept of **slow scholarship**, which speaks to among other things being receptive to new ideas, attentive and careful, creativity, cultivating a positive working environment, and creating dialogues between academic and support staff and our students. I take pride in the fact that the Department of Environmental Science is a

leader in being responsive to transformation imperatives as they relate to research, teaching and learning. I would like us to continuously reflect on the department's fitness for purpose in the context of a rapidly diversifying student body and barriers to student success. This can help inform our practices, particularly, how we can better listen to and support marginalized groups of students and identify barriers to epistemic access and success. I think to maintain our status as a leading Environmental Science Department in the country, we should continually cultivate an environment where everyone feels welcome, valued and is granted equal opportunities to grow and flourish.

Undoubtedly, the next few months will be challenging, and we may not be able to enjoy staff-student interactions in the lecture theatres, and corridors, at field trips or at the Friday teas that our department and University is known for. However, despite these challenges there is no barrier to reimagining creative ways for staying socially connected. We can build on our varied experiences to design strategies that can allow academic and social activities to continue while minimizing the chances of COVID-19 transmission.



Issue 29

July 2021

Worldwide Environmental Dates

- 29th July: World Tiger Day
- 16th Sept: World Ozone Day
- 21st Sept: Zero Emissions Day
- 21st Sept: International Day of Peace
- 26th Sept: World Rivers Day
- 4th Oct: World Habitat Day
- 6th Oct: Energy Efficiency Day

Inside this issue:

- | | |
|---|-------|
| Conversations with Ruth Kruger and Esther Ndou | 2 |
| The Pluriversity for Stuck Humans (a new publication) | 3 |
| Learning & Working in Lockdown | 4 |
| River Rescue (Part 1) | 5 |
| News from Georgina Cundill Kemp in Canada | 6 |
| Rebecca Farquharson's adventures in England | 7 |
| Living & Learning in Lockdown (Cont) | 8 & 9 |
| River Rescue (Part 2) | 10 |

Ruth Kruger goes legal



It seems like just yesterday that I finished my Honours in the Enviro Department at Rhodes! Well, maybe the day before yesterday. Quite a lot has happened to me since then. After my Honours I got a job working as a programme officer for the Centre for Environmental Rights in Cape Town. I wanted to get into environmental law, but didn't yet have the necessary legal qualifications. And I also wanted to do this in an interdisciplinary way, so I decided to do a Master's in the environmental field. And at that point I was very lucky. I won a scholarship to study sustainability science at Lund University in Sweden, and I spent two years there. It was a wonderful experience,

not least because I had the chance to do a research project on the Grand Inga Dam in the DRC. I analysed the project using the lens of energy justice, and spent six weeks at different sites along the Congo River, doing interviews and running focus groups. It was a very interesting project, and led to an opportunity to spend a short time as a visiting scholar at the University of St Andrews in Scotland, after I finished my Master's.

I came back to South Africa after that, as I had planned – aiming to contribute to the brain gain rather than the brain drain. And I still had the dream of going into environmental law. So I kept studying. I enrolled with the Law Department at Wits University and completed a post-graduate LLB. This was somewhat removed from my studies in the Rhodes Enviro Department, it is true... But I really enjoyed learning to think about the legal systems within which our society operates. I was particularly interested in constitutional law, and that led me to my current job.

“I came back to South Africa, aiming to contribute to the brain gain rather than the brain drain”

I am a legal researcher for Justice Majiedt at the Constitutional Court, and am enjoying it hugely. The matters that come before us are not all environmental in nature, of course – in fact, not many of them are. But I really think that an understanding of our constitutional systems is vital if we are to give effect to environmental rights.

But what's next? Well, I want to work my way into the field of environmental and human rights law. And I might just be back in Makhanda one day. I love the Eastern Cape, and I think there is a lot of work to be done there. Plus, the High Court is in Makhanda. So watch this space!



Interview with Esther Ndou

What has life been like for you since graduating from Rhodes?

After graduating at Rhodes University, I went and studied an MSc in Hydrology at UKZN. In 2017 I got an Internship opportunity at the National Department of Public Works as a WaterCare Management Intern for a year. I then worked as an Environmental Officer at Philo Environmental Management from 2018 to 2019. Currently I am working as a Junior Environmental Assessment

Practitioner at Segope Water and Environmental Services and have been working since 2019 till present.

What are your responsibilities at your new job?

I am currently working as a Junior Environmental Assessment Practitioner at Segope Water and Environmental Services. My responsibilities are more focused on mining related projects specifically Environmental Authorisation applications. Detail experience

Esther Ndou contd..

includes conducting Environmental Impact Assessments, compiling Surface Water impacts studies, Water Quality sampling and reporting as well as applying for Water Use Licences.

What is it like for you now as a working person?

It is amazing. There's always something interesting to learn more especially in the environmental field when you are looking at being a qualified environmental specialist in the future.

Any insights or advice you have for fellow postgrad students?

If there's anything I learnt from my experience at Rhodes University, which I am always grateful for is to always be

open to learn new things, network as much as you can and also try your level best to live in the present.

What was it like studying your Masters at UKZN?

Studying a Masters degree was a very challenging experience but it was definitely worth it. Challenges that I faced was transitioning into conducting research in a very broad and detailed scope. However, it is one experience that really developed my personal and professional skills in terms of perseverance and dealing with challenges. The experience also helped develop my scientific research skills as well as communication skills. As challenging as it was, only when it was

completed that is when I reflected and realised how much it was so worth it for my growth both academically, professionally and personally. I will always be grateful for such an experience because it helped shape the environmental professional that I am today.

“Be open to learn new things, network as much as you can, and try your level best to live in the present”

The Pluriversity for Stuck Humxns: A Queer Ecopedagogy & Decolonial School

Jess Cockburn talks about her new book chapter, which she co-authored with two DES Alumni, Dylan McGarry and Taryn Pereira, among others.

It was a really fun and thought-provoking writing project which is different to any. The chapter takes a queer, decolonial, arts-based and poetic perspective on higher education and how we might re-think and transform it. Each contributing author dreamt up a new 'department' which they would love to be part of in this re-envisioned university.

I developed the *"Department of the Stuff -In-Between"* drawing on the ideas around relationality which I worked on during my PhD and also since then (p. 209).

The chapter also foregrounds the notion of pluralism, which I think is so important in sustainability science and in our transformation and decolonisation work.

This makes a unique and creative contribution to the conversations around decolonisation and transformation of

our universities.

The book chapter is included in the Book: *"Queer Ecopedagogies: Explorations in Nature, Sexuality, and Education"*.

Below is an excerpt from a poem manifesto by Lena Weber, which is included in the Chapter:

"In the Department of Uncertainty

We both accept and critique –

The uncertainty in our work and world"

Said the department's feet.

To recognize our inner wisdom

In the Department of Intuition

We learn to trust our instincts

To bring our desires to fruition...

Here we learn from error,

In the Department of Meaningful Mistakes

We set aside our egos

To give more than which we take.



World-shaping is what we do

In the Department of Careful Crafting,

With threads of old we weave the new

Remembering our grandmothers' darning.

Together we are powerful,

Our differences make us strong

'Coalescing of the Marginalized'

Is where we all belong".

Learning & working in Lockdown - stories from Enviros staff and students

Kamogelo Maraba (3rd year)

The highs of online learning were the constant communication and being able to pause and write notes while listening to the lectures or go back made it easier to get the picture being presented. Lows, the constant communication, it made it feel like we never had an off like we had to be working all the time. The most important thing I learned is that it can be done, not my favourite method of learning there are a lot of perks with face to face but online did stretch out perseverance and independence.



Karabo Lamola (2nd year)



Some of my highlights include being able to write my exams and assessments without any time constraints. I do not work well under pressure and so being given 24 hours to complete one exam really helped me cope better

with exams and would be the reason if I get high marks. The lows were so many, considering that it was the first time I had to work towards a university degree online. The transition was quite rough, after adjusting to that the academic year was rushed and so I was

chasing deadlines but not quite learning anything. The material was quite overwhelming and it had to be covered in such a short time frame, this was the breaking point for me. It got too much and I felt like I was just fighting to survive, just to stay afloat for the next submission.

A lesson that I felt was most important was that discipline is very important; designing a work schedule and sticking to it will help with a lot of pressures. Many might think just because you are home and have no strict timetable, then you have ample time which is false because if you mismanage your time you might find yourself left with little to no time for school. So time management and discipline are very important in online learning and they work best when implemented together.



“Discipline is very important—designing a work schedule and sticking to it will help with a lot of the pressures.”

Kelly Bernard (Honours)

The highlights of online learning were being able to work from home and set my own timetable for each day, which meant that I could walk the dogs, go for runs, and do housework in between my studies. It was a nice opportunity to create a holistic lifestyle for myself. The biggest challenge of online learning for me was to overcome the isolation of social distancing and working alone from home, which I did by keeping in touch with friends and family over the phone. One of the most important things that I have learnt this year about learning online is the importance of keeping myself accountable to the targets that I set so that I get my work done to a high standard, while still finding time for nature, enjoyment and exercise! A balanced lifestyle is key to success and happiness!



Michelle Maziofa (Honours)

Comfort and convenience have to be my top two highlights of online learning - not being bound to physical class sessions allowed me to learn from places that I am most comfortable. Some lecturers did provide audio and video learning materials and this further helped in cases where I did not understand certain concepts the first time around. Online learning availed the option to play back the videos/audio materials till I understood the concept. I really appreciated this about online learning. Internet connection issues have to be a major challenge faced during online learning. The off-campus wifi service provided by the university is unsteady and very unreliable, at times I would go for days without connection. It is also important to note that this was further aggravated by load-shedding.

River Rescue...the beginning (Part 1)

By Helen Holleman
New Year, 2020
Jarvis Street



Inspired by Afroz Shah's example (he was the muscle and inspiration behind cleaning up Versova Beach in Mumbai), I looked at the bridge and Jarvis Street, and thought, "It's not as big as Mumbai Beach". After all, my dream was very simple: just get the river clean enough for kids to play in again – safely.

So, I donned my oldest clothes, gumboots, gloves, got on my scooter and headed off to Jarvis Street to start cleaning up. Within days, two other women had joined me, Gloria Papu and Ntombomzi Monakali. We worked every day, rain or shine, filling black plastic bags. We each tried to fill ten before calling it a day. But there were problems:

How could we get the bags to the dump? Old motor car tyres won't fit into bags – neither will broken washing machines, old TVs, bits of barbed wire, blankets, or tree branches – and broken glass tore them. A huge, abandoned recycling dump above the bend of the river was the source of a constant flow of rubbish into the stream. Sometimes the smell of sewerage was overpowering and we gagged our way through the morning.

It wasn't all 'downs' – there were 'ups', too:

Every taxi that drove across the bridge hooted encouragement, and passengers sometimes clapped and cheered; People with bakkies and trailers offered to cart the bags to the dump; One morning – totally unexpectedly – a front-end loader appeared and did in half an hour what we could not have accomplished in months; Vuyolwethu

Jezi joined us and worked tirelessly – quite often on his own – and at every opportunity; More volunteers came to help, usually on a Saturday morning, and the cleaning up became delightfully social, filled with laughter and banter; The man responsible for the recycling dump appeared and started clearing it up. When the water eventually flowed freely under the bridge again, we heard it sing.

Evans Street Bridge



Upstream from Jarvis Street was the Evans Street bridge – blocked. Elizabeth Davies lives in Evans Street. Some people live for themselves; some live for the wider community – and Elizabeth is one of the latter. A small group of River Rescue volunteers came to help together with about a dozen children from the neighborhood. We set to with a will and freed the river to sing again ... but ... also to flow further downstream through an immense sewerage leak on its route to the Jarvis Street Bridge.

Vukani

'Pop-up schools': The children who voluntarily join in the clean-ups have become an outdoor 'pop-up school' where they are given a chance to share what they know about rivers and the creatures that (should) inhabit them. This approach could be extended beyond simply oral exchange of information into games, drawing, matching activities, drama, etc.

The 'pop-up schools' provide access into the schooling system itself – by recording the names and frequency of those who come to

help, we can visit their schools and arrange with the principals to present them with 'River Rescue badges' of some kind, possibly attracting other children to participate and spread the word about the importance and care of rivers. "Thank you" letters given to the children who participate in the clean-ups to take home to their parents (in the appropriate language) are a way into the adult community and a way to spread the word about the importance and care of rivers.



Jarvis Street cleared



Vukani 'pop-up school'

A climatic adventure at the top of the world - by Georgina Cundill Kemp

When my family and I took the huge decision to spend a few years in another country, give our son a completely different experience, and for me to conduct a massive career experiment, our main concern about the entire enterprise was the weather. Specifically, the Canadian winter. When I googled Ottawa, the location of my new employer, I learned that it was colder than Moscow. I was not excited. We packed the warmest clothing we had, fleeces tested in the Winterberg over many years, and worried about little else.

We arrived here in April 2016, just as Spring was emerging. Within 2 months, it was 35°C, with a “feels like” temperature of 41°C because of the humidity. Humidity so great that when I stepped out into the street and closed my eyes I could have been in Bangkok. This was not in the brochure.

So we went camping. Then we went canoeing. And now we almost exclusively canoe camp – which means you put everything you need for days on end into a canoe and paddle out into wilderness lake systems, claim a camp site, and don’t see a soul for days on end. Also, there are bears, no cell phone signal, and nobody comes looking for you, which is worrying. But lets be positive.

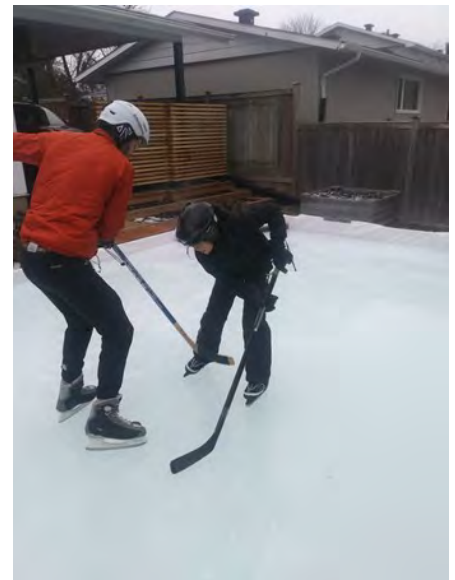
This year, we might have also finally cracked the Winter code – we built our first ever ice rink in the backyard. Covid gave us time for stuff like that. The career experiment has been wonderful. I started work for the International Development Research Centre in 2016 and continue to learn new things and be challenged every day. I work with incredibly dedicated colleagues who are passionate about gender equality and supporting locally-grown solutions to climate & development challenges across Africa, Asia and Latin

Canoe camping in Algonquin – those blue things in the canoe are bear barrels. So bears don’t eat your food. It’s a thing.



America & the Caribbean (although I’m still waiting to be sent to that last destination). I have the privilege of being able to identify and support research and practice teams who are making a real impact in peoples lives.

I still bump into Jess and Gladman quite often in a working group of the Program for Ecosystem Change and Society that we are all part of. I also have an extremely exciting project on Nature-Based Solutions in Southern Africa that is co-lead by Sheona! And... just yesterday I was reading one of Charlie’s papers for a proposal I was editing on livestock in Sub-Saharan Africa. Last year, I bumped into no fewer than four DES graduates at a global climate change conference – all of them playing leading roles in exciting projects. So, as usual, the DES folks are everywhere, no matter where you go in the world. I miss you all.



Justin and Asher Playing hockey on the backyard ice rink

“I work with incredibly dedicated colleagues who are passionate about gender equality and supporting locally-grown solutions ”

Rebecca Farquharson: Adventures in England



I had my plane booked to fly to Heathrow on Boxing Day 2020, but kept on pushing my flight forwards because of the changing Covid travel regulations and the rising number of Covid cases in the UK. Finally, two days before the hotel lockdown in England came into place, I boarded a plane to Heathrow via Dubai. I then spent the next 10 days quarantining in Guildford at my boyfriend's house. During this time, I put my CV on as many job sites

as I could, which resulted in me being head hunted by a recruiting firm in London for a position at a greentech executive recruitment company operating across Europe, North America and Singapore. By Day 13 of being in the UK I had been through 4 stages of interviews and was offered a position as a recruitment consultant.

After working for a month at Marks and Spencers in Dorking (a 20 minute train ride away from Guildford in the 'Surrey Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty'), I moved to London and started my recruitment job at the end of April. Now in my 6th week of recruitment, I have been through extensive training on 360 degree recruitment in the greentech/ disruptive tech space.

One of the many opportunities this job has given me is that of conversing with greentech experts from across the globe - Solar and photovoltaic battery storage experts, those in the Future Mobility (electric cars and bikes) and automotive (green sensors, fuel effi-

ciency) field, Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) specialists working on apps such as 'Too Good to Go' (preventing food waste), clean energy/gas/wind engineers and many more.

I have been accepted to study an MPhil in Holocene Climates at Cambridge University (Magdalene College) in September this year. This Masters focuses on the last 10 000 years of Earth geological and climate history, with a focus on studying climate proxies (e.g. ice cores, tree rings) to predict future impacts of drastic weather changes (associated with events like Climate Change). I have applied for funding, but have not yet been successful, but continue to hope that something comes through so that I can take up this amazing opportunity. In closing, I must make mention of my fantastic Honours lecturers last year (James, Kath and Jess) who weathered the much-altered Covid year with us all, as well as helped me in my Cambridge application.

Living in Lockdown Contd...

Alex Collett (Honours)

The transition to online learning this year was tough and extremely different from conventional learning practices. While there were a number of difficulties a few highlights of online learning come to mind. For example, the use of zoom and the use of social media and other online platforms as a tool to conduct research (from advertising to online surveys and interviews). The chance to meet and converse with a variety of lecturers who would have otherwise not been able to lecture us in person. For example, the honours restoration course planned to have field trips and a lot of practical work, however, the pandemic got in the way. As a result, the course co-ordinators (Kath and Tracy) organised lecture's from a diverse group of scientists with innovative and current approaches to restoration. The biggest challenge of online

learning was separating home life from work life. Another challenge was not being able to utilize department computers and spaces without a permit or permission. Lastly, not being able to converse and have conversations in person with lecturers and other peers.

One of the most important things I have learnt about online learning is my realisation that the learning process, whether that be in a lecture theatre or at home in your office/bedroom/stoop etc, never stops. Each of us have to have the drive and will to learn, despite challenges, and adapt to ever changing situations. In other words, acquiring knowledge is not always dependent on physically being on campus (assuming you have the resources to do so at home). Each of us have to have the fire to continue learning in as



many innovative ways as we can during the pandemic, and in this way we can each make the process of online learning work for us. However, not all students have a safe working space at home, stable internet connection, etc and so some students may very well be left behind. With that being said, I would say that there is still a lot more space for the university to get creative with online learning, in a way that accounts for the said challenges and students in compromising positions.

Learning & working in Lockdown Contd..



Kathy Cassidy

When I first heard that we were going into lockdown, my initial reaction was a fear of the unknown, but also a small twinge of excitement, possibly looking forward to a break in my dreary routine of work, home, sleep, repeat. I had both my sons with me and initially we had a very jolly time, learning to bake bread, playing board games, and just talking, relaxing and reading. However, the novelty soon wore off and my little family and I found ourselves pacing around the house, desperate to take the dogs and ourselves for a walk on the beach, and rather tired of having a trip to the supermarket as the only highlight of the day. One of the really hard things for me was the ban on cigarettes and alcohol. I have been smoking since I was 15 years old and it's a very hard habit to break. So was having that glass of wine with my dinner every night. So rather than paying extremely high prices for very sub-standard tobacco, and funding what I knew was a criminal enterprise, I quit smoking, and learnt how to make pineapple beer.

“Some major challenges of the online learning platform was the feeling of constant isolation”

The highs of working remotely are that I really enjoy working from home – it is something I have wanted to do for a long time. Now my lunch hour is spent walking my dogs on the beach, and tea breaks are spent gardening. I feel I am a lot more productive and a lot less stressed. My dogs are a lot happier too. Another plus is not having to drive 45km everyday to work. The lows would be missing the interactions with the students, in particular the fieldtrips. They are an awful lot of work, but very enjoyable and rewarding. This pandemic has made me appreciate how fragile our lives are, to live more in the moment, and to try to squeeze as much happiness and contentment as I can out of each day.

Milani Ngxokela (2nd year)



Personally, I enjoyed studying in the comfort of my home surrounded by my family. With online learning, lectures were recorded and posted online so that we can access them whenever we needed to, this brought about flexibility in terms of

learning compared to our normal lectures, we were able to rewind the recordings if we had missed some points and also go back to them for revision. In addition, online learning enabled us to continue learning without getting in contact with the virus.

Because learning was now moved online and as much as the school tried providing data for us, the data was sometimes not enough. Some of us live in remote areas where internet connection is bad, this made it hard for us to fully participate in the day to day online studies. Secondly, I had troubles with fully engaging with some of the topics that were taught because I needed further explanation or examples that I could relate to (some of us come from backgrounds that are not familiar with some of the sciences) but I did not

know how to phrase my questions and I personally feel that it would have been best if we had our normal classes. Online learning teaches Resilience, that we should learn to adapt to the changes of the world. This transition taught me that I should broaden my learning techniques.

Tinashe Nyoka (3rd year)

2020 has been an interesting year to be a university student particularly an En-viros 3 student. The year was filled with many highs and lows as a result of the pandemic; some of the highs and highlights of online learning were that it gave us as undergraduate students an opportunity to really mature and take control of our schedules and work at our own pace. To add to this, the lectures that were organized were very well planned, lecturers were open with their contact information and easier to reach than in a normal year as the online learning approach gave them an opportunity to truly connect with their students.

Some major challenges of the online learning platform was the feeling of constant isolation, if you didn't know many people from the class it was difficult as you felt more alone than the average student especially when you got lost. Lastly due to the high volumes of emails, calls and WhatsApp messages lecturers had periods of time when their replies were delayed but this was very understandable. The most important skill or lesson I took from this online experience was time management and independence, a skill that most only develop at higher levels such as Masters level.



Living and Learning in Lockdown Contd..



Tafadzwa Makhuzza (3rd year)

I remember the beginning of South Africa's lockdown as if it happened yesterday. I

had a sleepless night and early morning, adding the finishing touches to my Geography poster. When I realised that I was going to be late for my morning class, I bolted for the door. That's when a housemate told me that school was cancelled. I went straight to bed. I suppose that was my first highlight of the lockdown; a much-needed pause. Prior to the lockdown, I was deeply overwhelmed with school work. I was behind in note-making and I was no longer following what was being said in any of my lectures. The beginning of lockdown allowed me to rest, reflect and regenerate. I could catch up with my work with a refreshed mind. However, there were lows.

Resident students were informed that we had three days to leave our residences and that school would commence online. I did not have resources at home for tertiary-level online learning (and I know this was an unfortunate reality for a lot of students; which also made me sad). If I did go home, I couldn't use internet cafés because they, along with other non-essential establishments, were closed. I feared not being able to contribute to my group Year-Long Project assignments. They needed rigorous research and internet presence (zoom calls and regular meetings). Although the university said they would provide data to those that needed it, I feared I wouldn't be able to make it last for two heavily-theoretical and research-intense majors.

Fortunately, I was able to stay with someone off-campus. I had all the re-

sources I needed. I loved making notes at my own pace. I could pause, rewind and get everything that was being said. In a lecture venue, it's difficult to capture everything being said. However, the disadvantages were that we couldn't put up our hands to ask questions whenever we were stuck. I loved hearing international stories of nature restoring itself in the absence of humans.

Jess Cockburn (Staff)

Engaging in different ways

with students was one of the highlights for me: getting to know some of the students in my class on a more personal level via WhatsApp was rewarding and made it easier for me to cope with all the uncertainties and worries that came with teaching under lockdown.

Another highlight for me was the opportunity to do assessments in a different way: doing exams via 24-hour online or 'open book' style meant that we could assess students' learning in more learning-oriented and authentic ways, i.e. we could give them assessment tasks that are more like the kind of work they might expect to do in the working world (like writing letters or project reports). This too, was rewarding, as most students rose to the challenge and did a good job of these alternative forms of assessment.

I found the experience overall quite isolating. I often felt that I was doubting and questioning myself and my ability to be a good lecturer far more than I might have under the 'old normal' conditions. Having to make changes, do new and different things, and make tough decisions when the context was constantly changing and we had so little information was very difficult.

I have learnt the value of nurturing interpersonal relationships of care and compassion via remote communication. This has been quite difficult, but it

has been the interpersonal connections that have kept me going and been most rewarding when things were difficult. I would like to extend a very sincere thank you to the colleagues and students who reciprocated and kept the channels of communication and care open, especially while we were all going through the challenges of this year in so many different ways.

Jess Noome (2nd year)

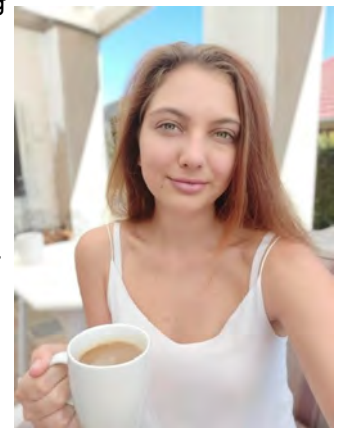
My learning this year must be looked at as a complex adaptive system. If we look at the components in isolation - we won't understand my full online learning experience. Online learning itself was a good, although unexpected experience. I enjoyed the freedom of being able to wake up, do

yoga, have breakfast, and then start my day which is not something I could achieve before a dawnie lecture. I did however miss the interaction with my class and lecturers.

I enjoyed the few weeks of face-to-face learning where we were able to work in the field and learn through experience. The online learning ups and downs were heightened by a tumultuous living situation, where even a consistent study schedule was a piped dream. Trying to manage an unpredictable living

situation with a brand new system of learning where educators and learners alike were thrown into the deep end, was not a

simple task. But I had to adapt, just as we all did. This year has taught us many things, but if I can take only one piece of information with me going forward it would be that all people and systems are complex, and evidently, adaptable.



"That was my highlight of the lockdown..... A much needed pause."

River Rescue (Part 2)

By Helen Holleman

July 2020

Every time we went to clean up at Vukani, the children simply arrived, ready to help. The rule was: If you've got a facemask, we'll give you gloves. They set to with a will and we filled a skip in under two hours. They came so regularly that we started a pop-up school led by Jess Cockburn and Preven Chetty. When the skip was full, they'd return the gloves, wash hands, make a socially distanced circle and tell us what they know about rivers, and we'd tell them what we know. A similar pop-up school developed in Evans Street, too.

For the rest of 2020, we concentrated our efforts in Vukani and Evans Street. Preven led the children downstream to the confluence with the Bloukraans/Mrwetyana; a group of interested adults from Port Elizabeth and Grahamstown walked up river to look for the source and assess the kinds of problems: alien vegetation clogging the watercourse, overgrazing leading to erosion and silting, rubbish dumping, and the inevitable sewerage ...

The bridge at Evans Street is largely clear, thanks to Elizabeth's vigilance and the help of people who live near it. And near to it I was shown a spring of clear water that gently bubbles up and from which people can get a little clean water. Once, not so long ago, all the Makhanda rivers were like that!

2021

The second wave of Covid provided an opportunity to spend some time moving River Rescue towards NGO status. I've had an opportunity to share our exploits with the Makhanda Residents' Association, with learners at PJ Olivier, with teachers at Kingswood, with Jess Cockburn's Honours students from the Department from Environmental Sci-

ence, and with Community Engagement at Rhodes. One of our dreams is to get groups of people to 'adopt a part of the river' near them.

There's a LOT of work to do: the valley that leads up to Sun City, through Ghost Town is horrific: steep and inaccessible, but at the top there's a small spring of clear water. This is the second small spring that I've been shown since we started working in this catchment.

We've also walked up to the top just below Extension 10 where there is a wetland that feeds into the tributary that we've been working on. The view from the top is breath taking – but one doesn't want to breathe too deeply because a sewage pipe leaks into the wetland.

In a sense, we're working 'backwards', moving upstream from Jarvis Street, making contact with the folk who live on either side of the river as we go, simply working there, answering their questions, stimulating interest and hope. Evans Street is beginning to look like a park now, and people have asked, "How did you do that?" Our response is to come to where they are and do the same thing, finding a local champion if we can and working together to restore the river to health. Wherever we work, the children come – unasked and enthusiastic – to help. Their energy is astonishing and their delight infectious. It's a way of opening up the community to our efforts, and of teaching the children about the rivers on which the lives of everyone and everything depend.

"I was shown a spring of clear water that gently bubbles up and where people can get a little clean water.....once, not so long ago, all Makhanda rivers were like that"

