



August 2006 Edition - a newsletter for RAMUS Scholars, Mentors and Alumnus members

From the Manager....

Greetings on behalf of the RAMUS team!

We are very pleased to present an exciting opportunity to RAMUS scholars and Alumnus members with the introduction of the new Conference Placement Program. Through this initiative, you can now apply for partial funding to attend conferences that promote rural health in Australia. Further information on the program as well as a list of selected conferences that you can apply for can be found on pages 2-3 of this newsletter.

Should your application be successful, you will be required to submit reports for publication in the RAMUS website, newsletter and in other material. There are set amounts to partially cover conference registration and other costs such as travel. This opportunity will be available from September 2006 – June 2007 for up to three scholars at each university (RAMUS scholars at University of Queensland and Griffith University are combined for this purpose) and for one Alumnus member from each state/territory (Alumnus postgrads only). So roll up, roll up!

You may also apply for the 9th National Rural Health Conference in Albury through this program. We will be selecting one scholar from each university and one Alumnus member from each state/territory for this extra incentive. Applications to attend this conference are due by 1 November 2006.

In this issue we start to follow two new first year scholars, Phillipa Baker and Francisco Letters, and as they continue on we will have more news from them. Also highlighted are recent media activities involving Alumnus scholars and mentors. We would like to hear of any similar activities that you have been involved with. We will be happy to publish more news so that Alumnus members can learn about others' experiences.

Over the years, we have been getting inquiries from scholars, mentors and rural health clubs about promoting RAMUS at various events. We would like to thank all of you for the continuous support and recommendations. RAMUS brochures are now readily available upon request. Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have further suggestions about the RAMUS Scheme.

Margaret Ruhfus
Manager, RAMUS

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Placement Program](#)

[In This Issue](#)

[Scholars & Mentors in the
News](#)

[AJRH Update](#)

[Meet new scholars:
Francisco Letters and
Phillippa Baker](#)

[RAMUS brochures!](#)

[New RAMUS brochures are
now available to those
who are interested in
promoting the Scheme.
Contact us and we'll send
some that you can
distribute during school
visits and other events
that promote rural health
professions and rural
scholarships.](#)

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RAMUS Scholars and Alumni Conference Placement Program

Apply Online Now!!!

HOW MUCH?

Two levels of funding are available to support the registration costs of attendance at conferences:

Up to \$1000 for conferences further than 200km from the applicant's term residence

\$500 for conferences within 200km of the applicant's term residence

HOW MANY?

Grants are available to current RAMUS scholars and RAMUS Postgraduates who are Alumnus members on the following basis:

Scholars: up to 3 grants per university per annum

Alumnus Postgraduates: 1 grant per State / Territory per annum

WHICH CONFERENCES?

Eligible conferences must be held in Australia between September 2006 and June 2007 and have a rural and remote health context or enhance clinical skills. A list of approved conferences is included in the Program Guidelines (available on the RAMUS web page).

Some other conferences may be eligible if they are organised by accredited Australian professional health/medical organisations. See the guidelines on how to apply for a conference not on this list.

9th National Rural Health Conference, Albury 7 - 10 March 2007 (and concurrent events)

Special arrangements have been made for RAMUS scholars and alumni to attend this conference. Awards are available for one current RAMUS scholar from each university and one RAMUS Alumnus from each State/Territory to attend this major action-oriented research and networking conference.

Applications to attend concurrent events in Albury during March 2007 will be considered on their merits.

HOW TO APPLY?

Program Guidelines and Application forms are available from the website.

DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS:

Closing date	For conferences during . . .
1 August 2006	September to December 2006
27 October 2006	January to March 2007
12 January 2006	April to June 2007

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Peter Brown

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Email: peter@ruralhealth.org.au

RAMUS Conference Placement Program

Approved conferences 2006-2007

(The first four conferences have been included as examples of likely eligibility in future years.)

June – December 2006		
Rural Doctors Association of Queensland (RDAQ)	10-12 June 2006	Chinchilla
Australian Rural and Remote Workforce Agencies Group (ARRWAG) Policy Forum	June/July 2006	Brisbane
General Practice (GP) and Primary Health Care (PHC) Research Conference	5-7 July 2006	Perth
Australian Medical Students' Association (AMSA) Convention	9-16 July 2006	Perth
National 2006 Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH) Conference	13-16 September 2006	Albury
Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP)	5-8 October 2006	Brisbane
11 th Prevocational Medical Education Forum	29 October – 1 November 2006	Adelaide
Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) Scientific Forum	16-19 November 2006	Adelaide
Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG) Annual Scientific Meeting (ASM)	October 2006	Perth
January – June 2007		
9 th National Rural Health Conference (NRHA)	7-10 March 2007	Albury
Rural Doctors' Association of Australia (RDAA)/ACRRM Symposium	March 2007	Albury
National Rural Health Network (NRHN) Meeting	March 2007	Albury
ARRWAG Policy Forum	March 2007	TBA
Orientation to Rural and Remote Medicine (ACCRM)	April 2007	Brisbane



Hot Off the Press!

Scholar; and Mentor; in the Media

RAMUS Alumnus member, Dr Ian McWhirter, was interviewed on ABC Radio National's Bush Telegraph on Thursday 19 July (check out www.abc.net.au/rural/telegraph/content/2006). Previously a wheat and sheep farmer from Kellerberrin WA, Ian graduated from University of WA in 2003. He headed to Cairns by motorbike and is still there, currently working in obstetrics.

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RAMUS Alumnus member Dr Jared Watts recounts his experiences studying in Broome last year at the UWA Rural Clinical on the front page of the new issue of PartyLine, the NRHA's newsletter. Jared, from Collie WA, graduated at the end of 2005.

PS: for RAMUS colleagues

This year I am completing my internship through Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. I am currently working in emergency medicine at a peripheral hospital - Joondalup - which is great fun, as it has a mix of paed's and adult medicine. I then have respiratory medicine before heading off to the Pilbara to work as the general medicine intern at Port Hedland hospital, to finish off 2006.

Next year I am looking at staying at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital but have applied for rotations from SCGH to Broome and Alice Springs, so hopefully I get one or both! After that I am thinking of applying for general practice rural pathway, and would be very interested in seeing if ACRRM has it own training program soon. Then I would like to work as a Rural Medical Officer, hopefully in the Kimberley of Western Australia. I would love to also head overseas at sometime and volunteer my skills in a developing world.

* * *

The May issue of Australian Rural Doctor features an article about South Australian rural doctors honoured at a special ceremony, including four RAMUS mentors, Dr David Rosenthal, Renmark, Dr Jeff Baker, Balaklava, Dr Graham Fleming, Tumby Bay and Dr Peter Joyner, Mannum.

RAMUS mentors, Dr Duncan Mackinnon of Bega NSW and Dr Natalie Burch of Scottsdale, Tasmania, are featured in the June issue in articles about family life.

In the July issue RAMUS mentors, Dr Patrick Giltrap of Gilgandra NSW and Dr Gavan Mackey of Orange, NSW are featured with their practice nurses. Doctor-pilots Dr Paul Mara of Gundagai, NSW and Dr Olga Ward of WA are included in another article.

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A third article in the series about Emma Goeman was published in The Age in June. She graduated from the University of Melbourne last year and The Age is following her during her intern year. So far she has worked at Royal Melbourne Hospital and Wimmera Hospital in Horsham.

SCHOLAR PROFILE:

Francisco Rodriguez-Letters

University of Queensland, MBBS 1

I was born in Armidale in 1980. My mother was born and bred in Armidale and my father is a Spaniard.

I lived in Sydney for the first few years of my life and then went to Spain for two years, before settling down in Armidale to go to school. I lived in town but frequently went on magnificent camping trips. Armidale has such fascinating national parks in the general area, including Dorrigo, Washpool, Dangar's gorge, and out west to the Warrambungles. From a young age I dedicated myself to learning all the local birdlife. There are some wonderful and rare species in the area. Bushwalks gave me intense pleasure, even in winter. Armidale gets really cold and can get down to minus 10, so we all have wood fires at home – this can prove quite traumatic for asthmatics in town, but I was one of the lucky ones.

So what do I like so much about living in a country town?



Put simply, the freedom: The freedom for a child to roam around town practically unsupervised, playing cricket with friends and going on bmx bike rides into the local pine forest. You can't do that in the city. And the locals are so friendly and relaxed. Much more trusting people. I grew up as an only child with my mother (my father still lives in Spain, and I visit him annually, which gives me a great chance to travel often). My recently deceased grandmother was an integral part of my life. She was a professional violinist and taught me from an early age. Music was very important in my upbringing. I also learned the viola and later the guitar. As for pets, we had the usual assortment of cats and dogs over the years, as well as rabbits, guinea pigs, lots and lots of chickens, and I had a ferret named Proton. I just love ferrets and it saddens me that they are illegal here in Queensland. I don't know why they are – they could never survive in the wild.

When I graduated from high school I began a Bachelor of Science at the University of New England and stayed there for a year, before venturing off to the ANU for an extra year, and finally up to the University of Queensland for a further three years where I got a Bachelor of Science with Hons class 1 in the field of mathematics under Prof Tony Bracken. I just loved maths for its intellectual rigour and fascinating and powerful tools to probe the nature of reality and truth. I was particularly interested in the area of Mathematical Physics, a somewhat abstract field of maths which tests the limits of space-time and quantum mechanical phenomena.

Anyway, after I graduated, I did not know what to do, so I went with the flow and commenced a Ph.D with full scholarship at the University of Sydney in the area of photonics in the physics department. It was interesting enough, but I found the work a little demoralising, for as it turned out, it involved a huge amount of computer work with little human interaction. I found myself in an ivory tower, somewhat removed from the world and its happenings. I felt that my isolation would inevitably force me into a major life change. So I quit one year into my work and as I walked out of my office for the last time I threw all my equations and software into a garbage bin!

It was scary to leave, but it became the best and wisest thing I have ever done.

I worked temporarily in a software company (out of the frying pan and into the fire, I'm afraid!) and then went to Armidale for 6 months to contemplate my future.

I started to think: 'What do I really want in a profession?'. I want a challenging job in the sciences for sure. I love the crisp and clean precision of the scientific method, but not the coldness and inhumanity of the 'hard' sciences. Medicine is the only field of human practice that offers a scientific vocation which, in my opinion, also offers the immensely humanistic experiences which are essential for a prosperous career and life. It is very important for me to feel that I am playing a part in the cogs of society, and medicine would provide me with just that. So I decided to go back to uni and undertake the grad MBBS degree in Brisbane, a lovely and friendly 'half city'.

I am really loving the MBBS program here in Brisbane. It is hard in that the material to be covered is huge in size. But it is always interesting due to the variation in its content. One main characteristic about MBBS which sets it apart from all other degrees is the people. I have made such good friends, and the whole year, albeit large, is very closely knit and friendly. We all help one another and socialise together and share thoughts about the course. We often have parties, but do study as well!

I love studying in Brizzy. It's great, but I will certainly move back to the country some time to give my children the same wonderful opportunities and freedom I cherished so much.

My mentor, Dr Mark Henschke is a wonderful, patient and kind man. He is a beloved and well known Armidale community member. He was awarded the Order of Australia medal for work in General Practice and in intellectual disability (with Challenge). I wanted to have him as a mentor because I had heard so much about him. He works in a general practice and does frequent hospital, house and nursing home visits. His work often involves obstetrics and neonatal medicine. I had the wonderful opportunity to engage with him and his patients when I was last in Armidale, and I hope to go back soon!



Dr Mark Henschke from Armidale, mentor to Francisco and six other RAMUS scholars



AUGUST HIGHLIGHTS

Researchers from the University of Western Australia have refuted 'common knowledge' arguments that the only significant predictor of rural work is having a prior rural background, using a longitudinal survey, including the years immediately prior to and post graduation, encompassing allied health and nursing students from urban campuses at three Western Australian universities. The research was published in an article, "Going Country: Rural student placement factors associated with future rural employment in nursing and allied health" in the *Australian Journal of Rural Health*. Some of the results were congruent with previous studies in confirming that having a rural background would almost triple the odds of a graduate choosing rural employment, while the link between voluntary placements and future rural practice is significant. The article is available from <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1440-1584.2006.00745.x#h16>

The August 2006 issue of AJRH (vol 14 no 4) includes:

- * Treating acute mental illness in rural general hospitals: Necessity or choice?
- * Community participation in organising rural general practice: Is it sustainable?
- * Co-morbid drug and alcohol and mental health issues in a rural NSW Area Health Service
- * Statistical methods for analysis of repeated measures on maternal morbidity
- * An outbreak of acute post-streptococcal glomerulonephritis in remote Far North Queensland
- * Hearing loss in recreational shooters in Central Queensland: A pilot study

SCHOLAR PROFILE:

Phillippa Baker
University of Adelaide,
MBBS 1



RAMUS scholars Vanessa Hughes and Pip Baker

I am currently in my first year of Medicine at the University of Adelaide. I see my articles for the newsletter as a great opportunity to engage with others, and with an open and eager mind I look forward to meeting other young scholars like myself. I hope that by sharing my journey through medical school, more people will see how achievable and rewarding medical school and the endeavour towards a medical career can be.

I grew up on a dairy farm near the small town of Tongala, twenty minutes from Echuca and the Murray River. Population: 1000. My two elder sisters and I attended a local primary school, and then completed high school in Shepparton, an hour's travel away. While growing up I was oblivious to where I may be headed and what career path I would choose as the supportive and encouraging attitude of my parents facilitated all avenues for me – a situation I much appreciate yet one that posed its own daunting decisions.

When my parents retired from the dairy industry fulfilling the sea change most only dream of, I was finishing year 10. What seemed a world away from my rural upbringing was Mackay, Queensland. Population: 80,000. With the usual inhibitions I forged a new home on the beach, learnt a different code of football, attended a new school – to which I am indebted for getting me to med school – and grew to love the passionate and unperturbed people of Northern Queensland.

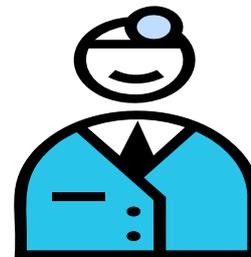
The draw of Adelaide was not only the unique style of learning the medical school has to offer but my two older sisters, both of whom are completing the final years of their agriculture and medical degrees. They both made my transition into college, university and city life easier than I could ever have imagined, and having a big sister as a Med tutor is an added bonus. My initial opinion of Adelaide: cold. But once I got past the weather I realised that the city is a beautiful – but much bigger – country town. There was little time to be shy meeting 150 new people at college and 130 first year medical students in the space of a few days, but everyone was so friendly that I felt immediately at ease.

Why Medicine? I've found myself asking that question so many times when I lose motivation and enthusiasm. I could quote you the answer that I rehearsed so many times for the interview process, but it's different now that I'm on the other side. Before I started Medicine it wasn't about the 'helping people'. It was more about 'solving the problem' and knowing what to do in certain situations to achieve the best outcome. But through different aspects of the course I have developed a new appreciation for what I have taken on and what I can do for people once I finish my training. There really is nothing like Medicine and with so many career paths to choose from, there are still more decisions to be made after these six years. I believe it will always be a fulfilling career in which I will continue to learn, and in return, contribute to society.

My mentor, Dr Simon Sneyd, has been a friend for over eight years. He practises in Shepparton – a long way from home and uni, however somewhere I'm always looking for a good excuse to go visit. I admire the way he has managed to incorporate the things he loves outside of General Practice into his life, and his encouraging, humorous nature endows me with enthusiasm.

At the moment I am still missing home in Queensland, and so for now I'd like to return and work in a country town in the north, but at the end of six years, who knows where I'll be.

ALUMNUS NETWORK NEWS



CALLING RAMUS ALUMNI

In future issues of *Gone Fishin'* we would like to publish details of current work assignments being undertaken by members of the RAMUS Alumnus as well as RAMUS postgraduates and mentors. Send us an email with a short outline of where you are currently working, your experiences since graduation and any pointers you want to share with readers of *Gone Fishin'*. If possible include a photo: perhaps an 'on duty' or 'at play' shot or even remarkable / interesting scenery from your current location. We want to develop contacts and information sharing through the RAMUS network to promote rural medical practice and especially the perspectives of new doctors embarking on rural careers.

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RAMUS Tracking Project (2006 – 2008)

This new project has been funded to operate January 2006 to October 2007 as an extension to the RAMUS Scheme to track early career paths of RAMUS graduates 2000-2006.

The target group comprises all RAMUS graduates since the Scheme began in 2000 which will yield over 1200 graduates with varying lengths of time in postgraduate training and the workforce (1-6 years). Given the key role of mentors in the RAMUS Scheme a subsidiary element of the study will survey a sample of mentors to elicit their views on the Scheme and on likely key decision points in pathways to rural practice.

The RAMUS tracking project has been initiated alongside a wide ranging study covering all Australian medical students by the Committee of Deans of Australian Medical Schools (CDAMS). We will consult other key organisations with interests in medical workforce issues (including CDAMS) to promote awareness of the RAMUS tracking project and to align it with other studies to develop a valuable longitudinal workforce planning resource.

Objectives

NRHA will research and develop a tracking system to monitor the career paths of current and previous RAMUS scholars and to glean feedback regarding:

- scholar and mentor perceptions of the RAMUS Scheme;
- degree of intention to practise in rural areas;
- extent and type of initial rural workforce participation;
- influencing factors in commencing/continuing/ discontinuing in rural practice; and
- emerging outcomes of the implementation of the RAMUS Scheme.

Project Cohort

Stage 1 of the tracking project will survey RAMUS scholars who completed their studies in the years 2000 to, and including, 2006. Members of the cohort will have had a minimum of 1 year up to a maximum of 6 years in postgraduate training and the workforce.

RAMUS Alumnus Focus Forum March 2007

In conjunction with the 9th National Rural Health Conference in Albury (7 - 10 March 2007) we will organise a Focus Forum to review the preliminary results of the RAMUS Tracking Project. If you are interested in attending the Conference and the Focus Forum consider making an application to the RAMUS Conference Placement Program (see page 2 for details).