

# GRAD*Life*

VOLUME 14 2023



## Flour Power

Meet the visionaries working to save the planet

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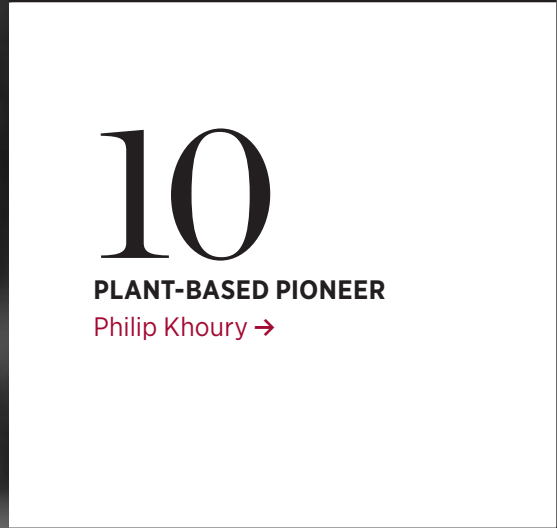
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**Front cover:**  
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# WELCOME

## MESSAGE FROM VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT, PROFESSOR BARNEY GLOVER AO

This issue of *GradLife* is devoted to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and alumni who embody these goals. The SDGs form an urgent blueprint for a more sustainable future for all.

We were delighted when Western Sydney University topped the 2023 Times Higher Education (THE) University Impact Rankings for the second year in a row, demonstrating our commitment to the SDGs. At Western we are putting these goals into action and showcasing our commitment to finding practical solutions to pressing social and environmental challenges through several initiatives.

In April, we were certified carbon-neutral, surpassing our original sustainability goals. Our world-leading researchers are finding practical solutions to food and water security in the face of climate change and creating resilient urban communities.

Our teaching programs encourage students to be a force for positive change and, in this issue of *GradLife*, you can read about our alumni who are driving change. Our cover star, Harrods' head pastry chef Philip Khoury (p10), is a pioneer of vegan baking and is developing innovative packaging using 3D-printing to make trays out of chocolate instead of plastic.

In Canada, Allison Hawkins (p16) helps a non-profit organisation work to repair and restore the planet, while in India, Dr Bhakti Devi (p8), guides communities on how to sustainably secure water supplies. Podiatry graduate, David Karamanis (p20), is putting his skills to good use in rural and remote villages in Central and South America.

I hope you enjoy reading their stories.

**Professor Barney Glover AO**  
Vice-Chancellor and President



GRADLIFE

# NEWS

## TWO FROM TWO: WESTERN AGAIN TOPS GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY RANKING

Western Sydney University was named the world's number one university for its social, economic and environmental impact in the 2023 Times Higher Education (THE) University Impact Rankings.

It's the second year in a row that Western has topped these influential rankings. The back-to-back wins are an Australian university first. The rankings are the main global ranking system that assesses universities on their commitment to the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Western topped the list, which is based on teaching, research, outreach and stewardship, of more than 1700 institutions from 115 countries. Western's Vice-Chancellor and President, Professor Barney Glover AO, said it's an extraordinary achievement for the University to be recognised as best in the world two years running.

Professor Glover said, "Western is proud to be an institution that's working with its students, staff and communities to make the world a better place. Our innovative teaching and learning programs are encouraging students to be a force for positive change. We're a young and modern University and tackling the most pressing social and environmental challenges has always been important to our core mission.

"Our world-leading researchers are finding practical solutions locally and globally on important issues like food and water security in the face of climate change, and addressing housing affordability and creating more sustainable, resilient urban communities."

Professor Glover added, "The University has also met its ambitious target to be carbon-neutral by 2023 – a significant milestone in our journey to becoming climate-positive by 2029."



## WESTERN CELEBRATES RESEARCH EXCELLENCE



Western Sydney University celebrated the real-world impact of research excellence at this year's Research Week. The week's theme - Global Challenges: Capturing Solutions - emphasised Western's collaborative efforts with government, community and industry to find long-term, practical solutions to real-world problems.

Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President (Research, Enterprise and International), Professor Deborah Sweeney, said Research Week highlighted Western's dedication to creating meaningful change for communities around the globe. "Research Week is a fantastic opportunity to highlight how our cross-disciplinary research goes beyond conventional boundaries to shape a better future for all," Professor Sweeney said.

The week's highlights included seminars, workshops, presentations and panel discussions featuring Western's world-leading researchers addressing national and international challenges. The topics included enhancing dementia research and care, sustainable urban futures, supporting carers in the workplace, and how Western's International Centre for Neuromorphic Systems is driving the development of cutting-edge computer hardware and software systems based on the human brain's structure and function.

Western's strength of research translation was also on display at the annual Research Impact Competition, during which 16 researchers were challenged to present their work's impact in just five minutes. The 2023 competition winner was Dr Manuel Esperon-Rodriguez from the Hawkesbury Institute for the Environment. He quickly and memorably summed up his project, Are Urban Forests Ready for Climate Change?.



# ALUMNI IN ACTION

## SDGs BROUGHT TO LIFE

As our alumni from past decades show, when it comes to achieving the UN 17 Sustainable Development Goals, everyone can do their bit.

## 1990s GRADUATES

### MEEGAN JONES

Bachelor of Business (Marketing), 1990  
Lives: Australia

*I've established a company that teaches events professionals how to produce events sustainably while supporting the SDGs. I've also written three books on this topic.*

### KIRPAL SINGH CHAUHAN

Master of Computing (Information Technology), 2000  
Bachelor of Commerce (Computing and Information Systems), 1992  
Lives: United States

*Working as an innovation lead, I've designed and implemented two global innovation challenges. Creative anti-corruption and climate innovation solutions included a machine learning-based toolbox for climate policy analysis, a block-chain project to enhance transparency in wage-bill practices, and a tool to monitor disaster-related trade disruptions from space.*

### MICK GARNETT

Bachelor of Commerce (Employment Relations), 1997  
Lives: Australia

*The organisation I lead has tripled participation in nine wheelchair sports over the past four years, ensuring another 1,000-plus people are enjoying the life-changing benefits of sport than before this revolution started in 2019.*

### CHRISTOPHER HIRST

Bachelor of Applied Science (Systems Agriculture), 1999  
Lives: Australia

*I'm a non-executive director of a global firm focused on creating positive impact around the world. In 2022, we positively impacted 75 million lives and supported the protection/restoration of more than two million hectares of land.*

## 2000s GRADUATES

### FAY CALDERONE

Bachelor of Commerce (Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations)/ Bachelor of Laws, 2001  
Lives: Australia

*As partner in a legal firm and employment lawyer, I help eliminate workplace discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment, and encourage employers to create inclusive and respectful workplaces.*

### KATHRYN FITCH-DANIELS

Graduate Diploma in Financial Planning, 2022  
Bachelor of Commerce (Marketing), 2002  
Lives: Australia

*As a financial adviser with an ethical investment advisory firm, we build portfolios that include our clients' ethical stances as well as incorporating investments with SDG goals in their mandate. We access genuine impact investments and work with activism groups to push environmental resolutions on Australia's biggest corporate carbon emitters.*

### MARICAR QUINTANA-AQUINO

Master of Educational Leadership, 2003  
Lives: Australia

*I'm an assistant director of corporate risk and quality assurance but one of my greatest achievements is co-authoring a children's storybook, Who is the Better Leaf?, with my mother. It teaches children (and hopefully adults) about nature and the unique attributes of plants that the environment needs to survive and thrive.*

### WASIF SULTAN CHAUDHRY

Graduate Diploma in Commercial Computing, 2003  
Lives: Pakistan

*As country head of a global commercial real-estate services firm, I'm spearheading green building initiatives to promote energy efficiency,*

*implementing eco-friendly practices in property management and advocating for sustainable building methods.*

### GORAN STANISIC

Bachelor of Business (Marketing), 2003  
Lives: Australia

*Working as operations administrator for an internationally recognised IT asset disposal business in western Sydney, I'm helping to achieve best-in-class, sustainable and environmentally friendly practices when it comes to the disposal and consumption of IT assets.*

### DR MEAGHAN VOSZ

Bachelor of Applied Science (Social Ecology), 2003  
Lives: Australia

*Following multiple climate-change disasters in NSW, I'm part of a team that produces research, publications and community sector projects that build socially-just institutions, reviews community resilience-building practices and reduces inequity by empowering young people.*

### DR GENEVIEVE NELSON

Doctor of Philosophy, 2008  
Bachelor of Psychology, 2004  
Lives: Australia

*I lead an organisation that works to improve lives, livelihoods and futures of people in rural and remote Papua New Guinea. We help people access high-quality education and health care, improve safety for women and foster the next generation of leaders.*

### EDWARD SAULIG

Master of Arts (Social Ecology), 2007  
Lives: Australia

*As a place manager, I've long had a vision to provide neighbourhood parks where there was a serious deficiency. In 2020, eight new parks were created through land-use zoning changes.*

## 2010s GRADUATES

### MEHR TIWANA

Master of Professional Communication, 2012  
Lives: Canada

*I work in communications with a non-profit organisation that helps reduce barriers for newcomers - health workers, skilled immigrants, refugees, international students and others - to Canada. We conduct pilot programs, work on policy submissions to government and analyse the existing labour market landscape.*

### DR FARJANA MAHBUBA

Doctor of Philosophy (Social Science), 2014  
Lives: Australia

*I'm pursuing my second PhD, which investigates the experiences of spousal financial abuse among migrant Muslim women in Australia. My aim is to help reduce inequalities and prevent abuse against migrant women in their domestic environments.*

### DR TONMOY CHOUDHURY

Doctor of Philosophy (Business), 2018  
Lives: Australia

*As a senior lecturer, this year I led a group of international academics at the G20 conference in India. We delivered one of the cornerstones of the policy briefings - Sustainable Energy's Impact on the Global Banking Sector - that provide guidelines to the top 20 economies of the world.*

### DR SACHIN CHAVAN

Doctor of Philosophy (HIE), 2019  
Lives: Australia

*After completing my PhD project on wheat responses to interactive effects of climate change factors (elevated CO<sub>2</sub>, heat stress and water stress), I'm a postdoctoral research fellow investigating light-altering films and greenhouse crop production at the National Vegetable Protected Cropping Centre at Western's Hawkesbury campus.*

### RAGESH EMPERUMAL

Master of Engineering, 2019  
Lives: Australia

*My electrical engineering course highlighted the need for renewable energy transition. I found my entry into this world at a mega-solar farm 400km from Brisbane. Now I'm an electrical engineer at a 1GW-capacity wind farm, working in NSW and Queensland.*

### SABINA JUGURNAUTH

Master of Psychotherapy and Counselling, 2019  
Lives: Mauritius

*As a family welfare and protection officer, I help victims of domestic violence with counselling and application of court orders under the Domestic Violence Act, and implement projects and programs to fight gender-based violence.*

## 2020s GRADUATES

### AISHWARYA JOSHI

Master of Business (Marketing), 2020  
Lives: India

*As founder and director of marketing and business of a company in the renewable-energy sector, we aim to enhance India's efficiency in mega- and micro-solar projects while pioneering ground-mounted solar projects and floating solar solutions, and using a skilled green workforce. These ventures address seasonal employment, rural development and clean energy research.*

### DR ERIC BRENYA

Doctor of Philosophy (HIE), 2020  
Lives: United States of America

*I'm a postdoctoral researcher investigating the potential of ethylene, a gaseous plant hormone, to enhance plant growth and stress tolerance when used to treat germinating seeds. Given the challenges posed by global warming and diminishing arable land, horticultural and agricultural discoveries are crucial for sustaining our population.*

### MARCO LUPOLI

Master of Social Work (Qualifying), 2021  
Lives: Denmark

*As an Erasmus Mundus scholar, I'm working alongside social workers from all over the world and focusing on development of global partnerships for sustainable peace and prosperity. I'm convinced that building international collaborative partnerships is key to universal peace and a sustainable future.*

### GEOF MARSH

Master of Financial Planning, 2022  
Lives: Australia

*As a financial adviser, I encourage clients to consider the environmental, social and governance impacts of investing and recommend fund managers and funds that will have a positive impact on climate change, deforestation, pollution and waste.*

### ANNA DIMO

Bachelor of Community Welfare, 2023  
Lives: Australia

*I'm a pastoral care worker. With the help of volunteers, we foster skills in refugees that enhance job prospects, especially for women. We're also setting up support for Sudanese students studying at university allowing better access to education.*

### CHRISTINE YEN

Bachelor of Traditional Chinese Medicine, 2022  
Lives: Singapore

*I contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals as a program coordinator. Collaborating with a global team, we identify and support young leaders working on impactful social projects.*

### DR LALITHAMBIGAI RAJAGOPAL

Doctor of Philosophy (Translational Health Research), 2023  
Lives: Australia

*As an education officer, I incorporate climate-change awareness into my students' curriculum. This includes the causes and consequences of climatic change, how it impacts us daily and how an individual's action may contribute to global actions.*

### DR GIRISH NAIR

Doctor of Philosophy (Business), 2020  
Lives: Australia

*As an Australia-Pacific quantitative and ESG (environmental, social and governance) strategist, I help institutional investors understand the SDG pillars so they can make objective, measurable and impactful investment into sustainable equity assets.*

### DR YAGIZ ALAGOZ

Doctor of Philosophy (HIE), 2020  
Lives: Saudi Arabia

*As a postdoctoral fellow, I'm researching the biosynthesis mechanism of novel plant growth promoter molecules and their applications on crop plants. I'm part of a team involved in projects that impact crop production and protection, all aiming to feed our rapidly growing global population.*

### AYODEJI AWOPETU

Master of Project Management, 2021  
Lives: Australia

*I'm a sustainability and environmental lead at my company, which manufactures intelligent products through responsible processes and educates employees and stakeholders on how to protect the environment. One of our goals is to achieve zero waste to landfill by 2025.*





# TAPPING THE *life aquatic*

After 25 years in Australia, Dr Bhakti Devi returned to India to help communities sustainably secure their water supplies.

WORDS BY KATRINA LOBLEY  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY VISHAL SHARMA



Bhakti Devi made a big impression while studying for her doctorate at Western Sydney University in the 2000s. Living at the Hawkesbury campus during the week, the bubbly engineer turned urban water professional quickly became a social connector. “The other residents were quite shy,” she recalls, “so I was very keen to make friends with them and wrote a little note and put it in everyone’s room.” The note urged them to come and say hello to the keen cook.

Bhakti had noticed some students didn’t prepare nourishing meals. “So I said, ‘Look, what we could do is that once a week, we can cook together. We can cook without it feeling like a cooking class and it would be a four-course meal with curries and dhal’.” Her informal gatherings became so popular they moved to the Hawkesbury EarthCare Centre’s mud-brick and rammed-earth house that’s also on campus.

Like karma, the support she gave came back to her through the University’s thesis-writing circle, in which doctoral candidates lean on each other as they complete their theses. As soon as she submitted her thesis, she found a job with City of Sydney. She progressed to Sydney Water where she also made a social difference by initiating stress-busting lunchtime Bollywood dancing sessions in a meeting room. The CEO was so impressed that the dance troupe was invited to perform a flash-mob routine at the annual awards night.

However, after 25 years in Australia, Bhakti felt a strong urge to return to her homeland. She headed to India for two weeks to gauge

career opportunities and was offered a two-month project. A 12-month sabbatical from Sydney Water allowed her to follow her heart – and she relocated permanently to India.

She’s experienced both urban and rural water problems after working in Bangalore (one of India’s most water-stressed cities) and living in a mud house in Uttar Pradesh where power was sporadic and water had to be hand-pumped. There, she cast fresh eyes over watershed projects that not only provide water-supply solutions but vital employment (the unemployment rate among young Indians is estimated at nearly 25 per cent).

During the pandemic, she moved to the western state of Maharashtra where she pondered how water professionals often speak about water in isolation and not as part of the natural water cycle that includes vegetation and soil. “People are invited to fix what is wrong with water only, disregarding solutions that involve improving the top soil and revegetating the local degraded lands – without which, any water saved will not be sustained,” she says. “We need to look at the holistic picture.”

This was the epiphany that inspired her life purpose, leading to the creation of her non-profit organisation Jal Smruti (its motto, Sujalaam Sufalaam, is a line from India’s national song about the importance of being well hydrated and well vegetated).

Through her organisation, Bhakti (now nicknamed the Urban Water Doctor and based in New Delhi) is spreading the word that “the

future of water is completely dependent on how the individual water-user groups are able to restore the water cycle around them”. Water users, she says, should be “actively participating in restoring the local water cycle that’s well within their control”.

“We’re not asking people to change the world but holding their hands to change their world around them,” she says. “For example, an apartment complex can do a lot to restore the natural water cycle that’s within its own control. That’s what will make them more water-secure sustainably for the long-term.” She’s also working with one of India’s most water-stressed states on a groundwater sustainability program, as well as learning about water use in the thirsty agricultural sector.

Her time in Australia, both on Western’s agricultural campus and at work, gave her the confidence to engage with those working in the rural sector and to see how long-term change is created. “Sustainability is about giving ownership to people and making it community-centric,” she says. “There is so much potential for decentralised, small-scale, community-led systems – that’s the future.”

So how does she measure Jal Smruti’s success when change at both grassroots and big-picture policy level can be creakingly slow? She says it’s all about creating momentum. “It’s a marathon, not a sprint, because it’s about trying to make systemic change,” she says.

“We’re not asking people to change the world but holding their hands to change their world around them.”

DR BHAKTI DEVI  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY, 2009







# PLANT-BASED PIONEER

*thinks outside the box*

How Philip Khoury’s design degree  
turned into a sweet career that  
helps the planet.

WORDS BY KATRINA LOBLEY  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF GILBERT



London’s luxury department store Harrods takes sustainability seriously. So seriously that, when the institution’s head pastry chef Philip Khoury wanted to sell a six-pack of peacock-hued praline and caramel Easter eggs this year, he had to put his thinking cap on.

“Initially we were told we couldn’t get the plastic tray [we wanted at first] because we’d already reached the threshold of plastic use in the packaging format we had,” says Philip, a Western design graduate who is pushing culinary boundaries in several ways, including the use of 3D printing and mould-making. “Harrods has quite rigorous rules now around plastic use and

recycling and sustainability. They’re trying to drive change so the packaging couldn’t have more [than a set percentage of] plastic. We said, ‘Fine, we really love this product though – why don’t we make it out of chocolate?’ So we did and it’s been a phenomenal success.”

Philip is chatting with GradLife from one of Harrods’ restaurants at 7.30am while sipping a black coffee. The coffee order, along with salads for lunch and dinner, is his way of counterbalancing the taste-testing he must do at work. “There are two days of the week where I’m just tasting things all day and I won’t be able to eat a normal meal because I’m too full from





“The cold, hard fact is that it takes so much more land and water to feed and rear animals for consumption.”

PHILIP KHOURY  
BACHELOR OF DESIGN  
(VISUAL COMMUNICATION), 2012

eating, tasting and developing cake products,” he says. “I’m constantly struggling to maintain a healthy weight. My weight fluctuates by about 10 kilos every few months.”

Some of that tasting involves plant-based desserts. In the Harrods kitchens, Philip is pioneering vegan baking. In the Roastery and Bake Hall, where a bell is rung every half-hour to signal that fresh goodies have just emerged from the oven, customers will find at least two vegan options in the patisserie counter and vegan sweets on the store’s restaurant menus.

Philip has become such a star in this culinary niche that he’s made the front page of *The Sydney Morning Herald* and regularly appears on British TV shows such as *Saturday Kitchen*. “Every time people taste desserts that are vegan, they’re always like, ‘I can’t believe it,’” he says. “That response is always super-gratifying. Lately, people always ask, ‘Is this one vegan?’ because I think they’re onto my tricks.”

You don’t have to talk to Philip for long to realise his knowledge of food production and vegan ingredients runs deep. “People do not comprehend that 98 percent of the way food is produced is quite intensive and industrial,” he says. “The cold, hard fact is that it takes so much more land and water to feed and rear animals for consumption.

As a food professional, I feel like it’s my responsibility to be closer to it and know and understand how food is produced. My main focus [in rethinking desserts] is to lower impact [on the planet] and then the animal cruelty aspect of it.”

Pastry chefs’ training, he says, usually revolves around recipes that almost always contain dairy and egg products. “Traditionally, it’s about substituting those products to

make a vegan product but my approach is quite different,” he says. “I don’t agree with that because I think you end up with a bastardisation of a product. I’d rather reformulate and create something that’s really good for being good rather than good just for vegans.”

One example, found in his recently released debut cookbook, *A New Way to Bake – Reimagined Plant-Based Recipes for Cakes, Bakes and Desserts*, is a three-ingredient chocolate mousse. His method is to combine plant-based milk (separated into two temperatures) with chocolate and a dash of sugar.

That recipe, along with one for chocolate tahini cookies, is included among his 80-plus vegan recipes for classic sweets that use globally available pantry staples. Each recipe also comes with a QR-linked video “so people feel completely supported”.

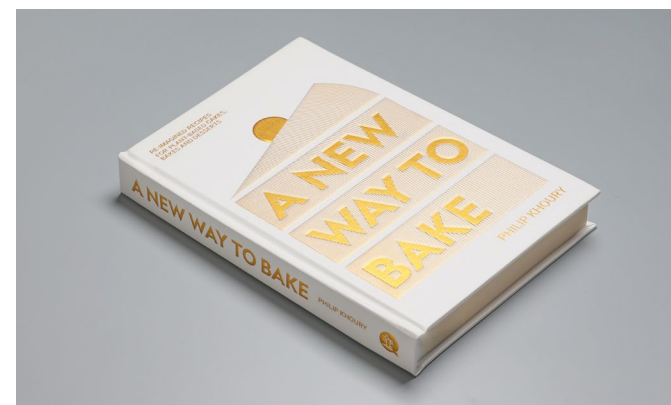
The videos are slick productions, as Philip is also a top-notch content creator. Harrods had head-hunted him, via Instagram, from the research and development kitchen of Australian patissier Adriano Zumbo. For Philip, working for Zumbo – after cooking at Sydney fine-diner Quay – was a professional turning point.

“At Zumbo, it was the first time that I could fuse what I’d learned at university with my job as a chef and that was fascinating,” he says. “I became the unofficial photographer at the time that Instagram was booming. We were doing everything from tens of thousands of macarons per day to ice-cream, chocolate and confectionery, bakery products, patisserie – it was the full spectrum of the pastry professional.”

Growing up in western Sydney as part of a Lebanese family, food had always played a central role in Philip’s life. “I have quite a big family and we were always celebrating something,” he says. “In our household, my dad looked after Western food and my mum cooked traditional Lebanese food. Dad studied cookery for fun – he’s a builder and just wanted to learn how to cook so he did night classes. He was baking a lot and making all of our birthday cakes. He’s a proper foodie.”

Philip, who had worked on his school newspapers, was convinced he wanted a career as a graphic designer. He studied design at Western’s Penrith campus and also contributed to a student publication. “The design degree was me channelling my creative streak,” says Philip. Yet by the time he interned with a graphic designer, baking “had taken over my life”, he says.

“I was always baking – on my weekends, my days off, in the evenings,” he says. “I was always a sweets lover. I just didn’t know or think that it could be a career.”



### ***A New Way to Bake: Reimagined Recipes for Plant-Based Cakes, Bakes and Desserts* by Philip Khoury**

Philip’s ground-breaking cookbook, *A New Way to Bake*, shows home cooks how to make delicious desserts at home – all without using butter or cream. This revolutionary concept brought him to the attention of French-based guide, La Liste, which in September honoured him with an innovation award for the book as well as “great advances in plant-based pastry”.

Philip’s cookbook sets out a brief history of baking before defining what Philip calls the “plantry” – plant-based baking ingredients and their functions. Full of delicious bakes, from apple pie to banana bread, lamingtons and tiramisù, this cookbook puts plant-based baking within reach of any home baker.



# 2022 ALUMNI AWARDS

## Star alumni shine at awards event

Western Sydney University's prestigious alumni awards recognise graduates who are trailblazers and outstanding leaders in their fields. Late last year, seven high-achieving alumni (see this page and next) were recognised for their stellar careers across seven award categories.

The winners were drawn from a community of more than 200,000 Western graduates who are now working all over the world. Their names were announced at the University's Town and Gown gala hosted by Ray Martin AM.

At this glittering event, Western also announced the establishment of a dedicated fund that provides financial support to talented students from a refugee or asylum-seeker background. This is one of the ways Western Sydney University is ensuring accessible, inclusive and equitable quality education to all. Giving to Western supports the learning, teaching and research programs that are shaping our future.

**GIVE TO WESTERN**  
[westernsydney.edu.au/give](https://westernsydney.edu.au/give)

The coveted **Chancellor's Alumni of the Year Award** went to Dr Holly Harrison, an Australian composer from Western Sydney working at the highest artistic level in Australia and overseas as educator, mentor, music performer and composer in residence. She completed a Bachelor of Music with Honours in 2010 and a Doctor of Creative Arts in 2014.



The **Professional Excellence Award** went to Media Diversity Australia CEO and founder of the Islamophobia Register Australia, Mariam Veiszadeh. Mariam completed a Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice in 2008, a Bachelor of Laws in 2007 and a Bachelor of Economics in 2005. Mariam is a lawyer, diversity and inclusion practitioner, social commentator and anti-racism campaigner.



GradLife's 2021 cover star, Sulinna Ong, received the **International Alumni Leadership Award**. As Spotify's Los Angeles-based global head of editorial, Sulinna is responsible for some of the most influential playlists in the world. After earning a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) – Music in 2000, Sulinna started working in AI and robotics before moving into music artist management, record labels, the live concert business and streaming.



The **Breakthrough Alumni Award**, which recognises alumni who are shining brightly in the decade following their graduation from Western, went to Dr Hoda Karimipour. Graduating in 2020 with a Doctor of Philosophy – Engineering, Hoda is a researcher, environmental engineer and environmental activist who has been working for various United Nations organisations throughout her career.



Our **Indigenous Alumni Excellence Award** went to Dr Angela Dos Santos. As Australia's first Aboriginal neurologist and stroke specialist, Angela is addressing the needs of First Nations families impacted by or at risk of stroke through her work with Alfred Health in Victoria and the Australian Stroke Alliance. Angela graduated with a Bachelor of Medicine/Bachelor of Surgery in 2011.



Paediatric occupational therapist, Laura Simmons, received the **Innovation and Entrepreneurship Alumni Award**. Graduating with a Bachelor of Applied Science – Occupational Therapy in 2013, Laura is CEO and founder of Theratrak. The digital platform provides tools that allow allied health professionals to improve clinical workflows and access to disability services.



Gloria Tabi, who completed a Bachelor of Applied Science – Environmental Management and Tourism in 1998 at Western's Hawkesbury campus, received the **Hawkesbury Alumni Award**. As the CEO of Everyday Inclusion and founder of Voice Everyday Racism, Gloria is a leader in guiding businesses on cultivating workplace diversity, equity and inclusion.





“ We need to demand better leadership from our governments and our corporations. ”

ALLISON HAWKINS  
MASTER OF PROFESSIONAL  
COMMUNICATION, 2005

GRADLIFE

# MEET THE CLIMATE WARRIOR

Canadian Allison Hawkins came to Australia to fine-tune her communication skills, which she's now using to help heal the planet.

WORDS BY KATRINA LOBLEY  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEFANIE NEVES / ETHAN MITCHELL



It's a dark day – literally – when Allison Hawkins speaks to *GradLife* from her home in Toronto, Canada. Wildfires, among the worst in Canada's recorded history and fanned by a warming planet, are making global headlines.

The images and news stories are depressing – but for Allison, who lived at Western Sydney University's Penrith campus in the early 2000s while completing a Master of Professional Communication, the pall only emphasises the urgency of her environmental advocacy.

In Australia, she witnessed the effects of the 2002-03 El Nino event that severely impacted farm production and sparked Canberra's most destructive bushfires in its history. Those memories of drought and heartbreak have stuck with her, along with how much she learned from being part of Western's multicultural student cohort. "I got exposure to other parts of the world and learned a lot more about the workings of Asia," she says. "It was different ways of thinking, different ways of looking at the world, which is really important when it comes to communications."

Today, Allison works as Director of Corporate Affairs for Amida 3D, a company creating 3D-printed homes from sustainable concrete. Through this work, she met Tyler Wood of Hot Planet Repair Team (HPRT) – a non-profit organisation focused on "untrashing", repairing and restoring the planet. She was so inspired by HPRT's vision that she joined the team as one of HPRT's founding members.

While HPRT has lofty goals, such as deploying futuristic waste recycling units

known as Recyclotrons worldwide, Allison says the organisation's immediate focus is on creating a Circularity Centre in North America – a zero-waste facility that will eventually become a campus of sustainability organisations. "Our goal is to teach people about the circular economy and sustainable business practices, and to also educate the public on circularity," says Allison.

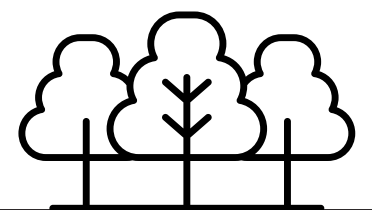
It's a satisfying development in Allison's career, which has included plenty of twists and turns. She studied business administration and film in her native Canada before switching focus to fine-tune her communication skills. This brought her to Australia to undertake a Master of Professional Communication at Western Sydney University.

Returning to Canada, she used her top-tier communication skills to work for the Ontario government. Although she found the high-level policy work fascinating, "I realised the government was a very slow-moving wheel and didn't suit my personality very well", she says. "I was a little bit of a boat-rocker and I realised that it just wasn't in my nature to be quiet if I thought something didn't work well or didn't make great sense." A move into risk management deepened her interest in climate change.

One of her biggest challenges as an eco-warrior is overcoming inertia. "People don't like change," she says. "There's an inordinate focus on money and profit, and the idea of profit is tied into consistent and constant economic growth. And that's just not something that's sustainable, particularly if you're taking out natural resources. You can't do that forever.

We need to demand better leadership from our governments and our corporations.

"What we're trying to do at HPRT is demonstrate that ... you can be circular and sustainable and be profitable. Ultimately, repairing the planet and having healthy ecosystems and circular businesses that aren't taking things out of the earth and then throwing them out will be better for everyone."



## IN A NUTSHELL

### LIFE MOTTO

I'm driven by the belief that we can work together to create a better world.

### HOW CAN ONE PERSON HELP THE PLANET

We only control ourselves so [tell yourself], 'I have to start with me'. That's how most changes start. The more people that believe it, adopt it and make change, the faster it will happen.



# Food for Thought

Within the Hawkesbury campus's shiny glasshouse lies the future of horticulture in a climatically erratic world.

WORDS BY KATRINA LOBLEY  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SALLY TSOUTAS



Glasshouses were built in Europe centuries ago to house exotic plants brought back from the tropics. As the science of botany flourished, they also soon sprouted in universities.

Those early horticultural pioneers could never have imagined the sophisticated 1800-square-metre glasshouse that sparkles like an oversized diamond within the grounds of Western Sydney University's Hawkesbury campus. The \$7 million world-class facility, the centrepiece of the National Vegetable Protected Cropping Centre (NVPCC), incorporates cutting-edge infrastructure and controlled environment and sensor technology. And although it might seem large to a non-farmer, it's a scaled-down version of a real-life industry glasshouse, some of which sprawl over 10 to 20 hectares.

Inside the Western facility, lab-coated students and researchers work on projects in tandem with industry to solve problems, create solutions and increase plant yields, advancing Australia's horticultural capabilities at a time when urban sprawl and climate change are impacting food production. Protected cropping, which increases certainty around food supply, is becoming more important as weather events become more extreme.

For Western's Professor Ian Anderson, who grew up in St Marys and has witnessed the steady transformation of Sydney's peri-urban fringe, the glasshouse represents many things. It's a major drawcard for students who might have previously viewed an agricultural or horticultural career as something as old-fashioned as the market gardens that are still hand-tended near the campus.

"When we talk about agriculture and horticulture now, it's all about data, IT networks, drones and engineering as well as the underpinning sciences such as plant biology, microbiology and entomology – it's

about all sorts of things," says Prof Anderson, Director of the NVPCC and Western's Hawkesbury Institute for the Environment. "Students end up in jobs that are way cooler than what they perhaps imagined a career in agriculture and horticulture could look like."

Undergraduate and postgraduate students could find themselves making detailed observations – using cameras or pen and paper – within this high-tech glasshouse where coloured films applied to the roof repel heat while allowing different wavelengths of light through to various crops below.

Masters and PhD students also use the glasshouse to complete projects with real-life applications. "The aim is for the outcome of their research program to be taken up directly by industry," says Prof Anderson. People already working in horticulture seeking to upskill can also take short courses focused on enhanced glasshouse technology and associated skill development in the facility. "We're the only university in Australia at the moment to have a facility like this," he says.

"Most of the research we're doing is looking at how we can maximise the performance of certain crops under certain environmental conditions," says Prof Anderson. "We can control humidity, temperature, carbon dioxide concentration and the nutrient solution

we're providing to the crop. So in a changing climate and with increasing urbanisation [that encroaches upon farmland], you're able to grow crops intensively using a quite small footprint in an environmentally sustainable way."

Yields must also be nutritious and high quality. "Consumers are now more concerned about use of pesticides in outdoor agriculture," Prof Anderson says. Research crops, which are determined by industry, have included capsicums, zucchinis, eggplants, chillies, cucumbers and strawberries. The resulting tonnes of produce are donated to Foodbank NSW and ACT. "It means that everything we're producing isn't going to waste – it's going to good."

Projects have included new crop varieties and examined the success of indoor pollination methods including miniature drones, acoustic pollination and native stingless bees (observing how these creatures navigate an indoor environment). With the health of bees worldwide threatened by disease, the horticulture industry is focused on developing alternative pollinator solutions. Australia's indoor protected crops are currently hand-pollinated – an expensive exercise. "Anything to bring down labour costs and energy costs is a core focus of the work we do here," Prof Anderson says.



“Everything we’re producing isn’t going to waste – it’s going to good.”

PROFESSOR IAN ANDERSON  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (SCIENCE),  
2001

## WHO'S IN THE GLASSHOUSE

Those who don a white lab coat to work within the Western glasshouse fall into several categories. They might be studying a Bachelor of Science undergraduate degree with a major in Innovative Foods or be undertaking postgraduate coursework in a Master of Science (Greenhouse Horticulture), Graduate Certificate in Protected Cropping or a Graduate Diploma in Protected Cropping. Research students are either studying a Master of Research or a PhD.



# MAN ON A *MISSION*

Podiatrist David Karamanis is walking the walk as he helps put people back on track in remote South and Central American communities.

WORDS BY KATRINA LOBLEY



“It’s not about being the person who’s smartest. It’s about attitude – that’s your foundation for success.”

**DAVID KARAMANIS**  
**BACHELOR OF PODIATRIC MEDICINE**  
**(HONOURS), 2022**

As a high school student, David Karamanis was a teacher’s nightmare. “I’d turn up to school without a book or a pen,” he says. “I was the guy who would talk, talk, talk. HSC time was like a holiday for me.”

The sporty teenager dreamed of becoming a rugby star. “I thought I wasn’t smart enough to go to university,” says David, who started studying podiatric medicine at Western Sydney University’s Campbelltown campus when he was 25 years old.

David’s turning point came after high school when he did a personal training course. “That was the first time I’d paid for my education and, because I was paying for it, I was the one telling the other disruptive people to shut up,” he says. He dabbled with teaching sport but soon realised that podiatry was the best way to channel his love of anatomy and biomechanics.

Hitting the books at Western Sydney University to complete his honours degree wasn’t easy “but it made me realise it’s not about being the person who’s smartest,” he says. “It’s about attitude – that’s your foundation for success. I just kept trying and trying.” Western’s Professor Debbie Turner, a specialist in ultrasound, emphasised the importance of perseverance as she guided him through his honour’s thesis.

David could have followed a traditional podiatry career path but instead he followed his heart – all the way to Ecuador. “I’m the guy who flew across the world for a girl and

she said no,” he says with a laugh. Instead of returning to Australia, he stayed to volunteer in different communities that can’t easily access podiatry services. Working in Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador and Mexico, he has helped people living in the Amazon jungle, disability centres, orphanages and jails. “The most important reason I’m doing what I’m doing is that I want to demonstrate Jesus’s love to people by helping them,” he says.

Speaking to GradLife from Irapuato in central Mexico, David described how he was helping the charity Amigos del Tren to support desperate migrants – mainly from Venezuela – who are waiting to board freight trains to reach the United States border. “I introduce myself with my terrible Spanish and, if anyone’s got foot issues or lower-limb issues, I try to make things a bit more comfortable for them,” he says.

“Today, there were about 150 people and I had only six [orthotic] inner soles to hand out, so I’ve got to pick who’s in pain, who’s got an infection and so on,” he says. “During those couple of hours [of my visit], I have to prioritise people.”

Quickly triaging people is one challenge, along with overcoming preconceptions about what podiatrists do. “In Peru, people think that podiatrists only deal with toenail issues,” he says. “I like biomechanical stuff, I love the long-limb rehabilitation and injury stuff – and I wasn’t getting any of that in those communities

because they thought I was only there to help with nails.” Some people also only speak Quechua – an Indigenous language – so David would require help with translation.

There have also been times where David’s “had to practise out of my scope because there’s no one else around – no nurse, no doctor, no one who could apply basic first aid”. In Ecuador’s Amazon jungle, he found himself roped into removing stitches from a woman’s Caesarean wound. After a quick phone tutorial from a doctor he’d met in Bolivia “everything worked out perfectly”. “It was an adrenaline rush, I tell you,” says David.

He’s also had to think on his feet when it comes to practical solutions for podiatric problems. “If an older lady presents to me with knee pain that’s likely osteoarthritis but she wears only thongs or no shoes, I can’t make her a supportive device [that slips into a shoe],” David says. Instead, he might show her exercises that strengthen muscles around the knees so she can enjoy a more comfortable life. The words of one of his Western lecturers have stayed with him. “They said that if people don’t have mobility, life will suck,” David says. “Mobility is so important.”

For now, David plans to continue volunteering to help make a difference to as many lives as possible. “I have such satisfaction and a sense of purpose,” he says. “I don’t know what the future looks like but I know I want to keep growing and continuing this journey.”





# A YEAR IN REVIEW

## 365 DAYS WITH ALUMNI

Take a look at how we all stayed connected over the past year.

Our past year was all about creating mutually beneficial partnerships with graduate success as the overarching shared goal. In addition to networking events and professional development opportunities, such as those below, our alumni also participated as guest speakers, mentors and experts, and shared their success stories at Western flagship events such as Open Day, and through our social video segments.

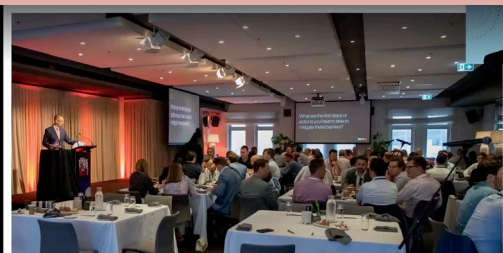
### #SKILLSACTIVATE

This professional development series, facilitated by industry experts, helps to upskill current and aspiring leaders. Keep an eye out for our future series.

**5 JULY 2023** Master the Art of Public Speaking and Presenting

**12 JULY 2023** Effectively Managing Workplace Relationships

**19 JULY 2023** Harness the Power of LinkedIn for Career Success



Master the art of Public Speaking

Presentation Skills, Public Speaking and Communication Training

### INTERNATIONAL NETWORKING EVENTS

We love nothing more than helping our globally based alumni connect in real life. Keep an eye on the calendar for an alumni event near you.



-  **22 October 2023**  
Beijing, China
-  **17 September 2023**  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
-  **27 May 2023**  
Taipei, Taiwan
-  **20 November 2022**  
New Delhi, India
-  **22 October 2022**  
Taipei, Taiwan
-  **30 September 2022**  
London, United Kingdom
-  **28 September 2022**  
Nuremberg, Germany

LOWEST HIGHEST  
NUMBER OF ALUMNI OVERSEAS

 **WESTERN ALUMNI**  
*Around the World*

### GRADUATIONS

Four graduation ceremonies over the past year added thousands more new Western graduates to our alumni community of more than 200,000 members.



### STAY CONNECTED. GET INVOLVED. ACHIEVE YOUR UNLIMITED POTENTIAL.

#### GRADLife Membership

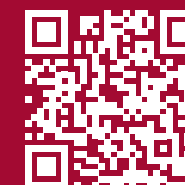
We love staying in touch with Western alumni and helping them to connect and thrive. It's easy to stay connected. Just remember to sign up to GradLife, update your details and access alumni benefits.

#### Alumni Affinity Groups

Connect with like-minded individuals to spark opportunities through these collectives bringing together alumni of shared interests, geographical locations or professional backgrounds.

#### The Mentoring Partnership

No matter where you're at in your career - whether you're looking for advice or willing to offer advice - mentoring relationships offer a great opportunity for personal and professional growth.



**WE'RE HERE TO HELP!**  
[westernsydney.edu.au/alumni](https://westernsydney.edu.au/alumni)





# Elevate *your* career

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\*Program fees are based on a full-time study load (80 credit points) per annum. Check the program webpage/s for specific values, eligibility and conditions or contact us.

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