

Engaging Beyond Your Research: Make the Most of Opportunities to Expand Your Horizons

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*Research students often experience the pressure of managing various commitments, in the face of expectations and the competitive academic environment, writes **Anna Wambach**. She reflects on how the commitments she decided to focus on have complemented her research, allowing her to acquire additional skills and to build up contacts with other researchers in European studies.*

As postgraduate research students, we are more than aware of the need to make our CVs stand out in the tough competition for academic jobs. An urging voice in the back of your head keeps telling you to ‘publish or perish’. Every year, we face the intradepartmental struggle to secure teaching roles – not just for the pay, but more importantly to be able to put another module on our CVs. Building your network goes without saying. At the same time, you should be finishing your thesis in a limited time frame.

Even if we manage to excel at writing, publishing, teaching and networking, however, most of us still feel the need to add to our CVs – to give it a competitive edge, to differentiate ourselves from all the other smart, talented, ambitious PGRs – preferably without neglecting our PhD theses. It was this feeling which led me to volunteer to organise the departmental seminar series, supervise dissertations, help with research projects in central university administration, and engage with the [UACES Student Forum Committee](#).

All those activities will hopefully give my CV that ‘competitive edge’. Looking back at the past two years, however, I have found that I gained more than that. At the same time, I managed to maintain the link between these engagements and my PhD.

My skill set has broadened significantly. Although I have always worked part-time during my studies, I do not have significant professional experience. Organising events like a seminar series or the Student Forum research conference boosts your administrative and problem-solving skills, as well as your perseverance (some invited speakers will challenge you more in this respect than others). Not only do those skills look good on your CV, but they can also prove valuable in your day-to-day PhD life. They can help you structure your workload or – in my case – serve as a dry run for organising research interviews (the perseverance came in handy there).

There are also some aspects of these engagements which can have a direct positive effect on your CV. The UACES Student Forum in particular offers close cooperation with the *Journal of Contemporary European Research* ([JCER](#)), a publication that works closely with PGRs. This provides an opportunity to work with a journal which engages its authors in

the editing process and is very aware of PGRs' needs. This very blog, *Crossroads Europe*, is another opportunity to start disseminating your work.

Of course, you do grow your network. Through organising our departmental seminar series, I have met some fascinating people, researching fascinating subjects. Only a fraction of those speakers I invited work in my area. However, the contacts may still provide useful in the future. Meeting them also satisfied my curiosity about different approaches to different topics. Growing your network is not only about making useful contacts, but also about widening your horizons.

Not everybody is a natural networker. UACES SF events certainly take away some of the awkwardness you may experience at big conferences. It is a very supportive and friendly environment and taking a leading role in the Student Forum has definitely helped me get over some of the anxieties you can experience when networking. Standing for election to become a Committee Member was definitely out of my comfort zone. Looking back, this was a step worth taking, not only because it has added to my CV, but also because it helped me to overcome those anxieties.

Being engaged in the UACES Student Forum Committee has not only boosted my reputation within my department as 'the person to talk to for all matters UACES', but it has also helped me establish contacts with other PGRs outside my home institution. As the only PGR working broadly in EU studies at my university, these contacts have become invaluable. They are not only a source of information, but also of support. Students who are engaged in the Student Forum are happy to discuss and exchange ideas, experiences and worries about our CVs.

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