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## Dr Deborah Gabriel

Before embarking on her PhD in 2010, Dr Deborah Gabriel had already been working as a journalist, part-time lecturer and freelance researcher, where her interest was focussed on “issues of social justice, the experiences of people of African descent and other racialised groups”. With her undergraduate dissertation spawning her first book ‘[Layers of Blackness: Colourism in the African Diaspora](#)’ in 2007, it comes as no surprise that Deborah is now winning awards for her research. Completing a PhD, however, is no mean feat - even for a talented writer from an academically inclined background - and as we shall see, it was Deborah’s passion for her subject that saw her through.

It was the [Graduate Teaching Studentship](#) that brought Deborah to the University of Salford, as it offered her “the opportunity to pursue my research and further develop my teaching skills”. She also acknowledges that “Moving outside my home town of London to limit distractions was also an attractive proposition”: offering a positive benefit where many would see a negative.

Deborah’s thesis - ‘[Blogging While Black and British: An Exploratory Study on the Use of Blogs as Social, Cultural and Counterhegemonic Practice](#)’ – was the first study of its kind in the UK, and initially the emphasis was “largely journalistic”. However, following constructive feedback from one of her internal assessors, Deborah found her interest had shifted to “a broader cultural approach”, as she explains “I was more interested in exploring why and how people are using new media technologies and understanding the social impact of these activities. I saw a gap in the UK literature as race and ethnicity in virtual spaces are under-explored areas and felt it was important to make a contribution to this area of research.” She found that changes in the media sector had also had a big impact on online activity “journalism is no longer a life job or even a safe career choice. There are other jobs that are better paid but blogging still offers an avenue to pursue a passion.” With blogging being Deborah’s passion - managing an online network for bloggers and a news website, as well as maintaining her own blog – her challenge was finding a way to fit it all in, and she was pragmatic in her approach: “The only way to remedy this was to scale down my activities, which I did in years two and three so that I could devote



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more time to my PhD. From 2011 I directed my blogging towards my doctorate, writing a **regular blog** about my research journey, my experiences and the key stages of a PhD. This has been a valuable reflexive learning tool both for me and my readers.”

It's also a tactic that's been successful, as Deborah explains “I recently won the James Thomas Memorial Prize at the Media & Politics Group Annual Conference at Bournemouth University for the best research paper by a postgraduate student, which was based on a chapter of my thesis.” Not one to rest on her laurels however Deborah has also continued to publish and has definite plans for the future “I have two book chapters coming out in 2014 and have just completed a book proposal based on my doctoral research. I hope to secure a full time lectureship in 2014 so that I can continue to make an effective contribution to the higher education sector through teaching, research, professional practice, enterprise and leadership.”

From her position as a lecturer and a successful PhD candidate Deborah's advice for others is invaluable, and when asked it's the content and impact of the research that she emphasises: “Be certain of the reasons for undertaking a PhD and think early on about what contribution the research will make both to the discipline and wider society. Be prepared to work extremely hard and make the necessary time to devote to the research project. Don't pursue an area of research that you are not passionate about as a deep interest is essential to sustain motivation until completion.” Coming from someone as motivated as Deborah, that's good advice indeed.

Read Deborah's blog at [deborahgabriel.com/blog/](http://deborahgabriel.com/blog/)

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