

“The thesis species”, *The Australian*, Higher Education Special Report, September 9, 2006.

Postgraduates are a mixed bunch, but there are some ubiquitous figures that permeate the hallowed halls of academia. No matter what your discipline, you are bound to come across some of these folk during your study.

The Arrested Developer

This student has a latent social urge that lay dormant until s/he enrolled as a postgraduate. Having missed all the fun of being an undergraduate union representative, women's officer, band member and overall great guy, the Arrested Developer is determined to make up for lost time. Consequently they are keen to "get involved" and will take on every role possible: editing journals, organising departmental social evenings and enjoying a little too much of the complimentary cask wine at faculty monograph launches. Their scholarship money is seen less as an aid to study and more as a facilitator of their crazy lifestyle. This type rarely completes their thesis, but they certainly go out with a bang.

The Gifted One

The Gifted One's meteoric academic rise is due to pure talent, so they are not to be confused with the similar but taxonomically distinct *Departmental Darling* (those who are given unspoken patronage by the department due to family or old school connections). Gifted Ones invariably submit their thesis before its due date, publish it in world class journals, secure book contracts, win accolades, attract media attention and then crack self-deprecating jokes about the whole experience (often in Latin). Songbirds flit about their heads, and small furry animals run to them.

The most astonishing thing about the Gifted Ones is that, despite all their achievements, they are also very likeable and unassuming. Naturally enough, Gifted Ones are universally hated by their fellow postgrads.

The Phantom Postgrad

Every department has a student or students who are supposedly enrolled in a postgraduate course, but who, like the Scarlet Pimpernel (or perhaps Big Bird's friend Snuffleupagus), are never actually seen on campus. You read their names on conference paper lists, you see their mail in departmental pigeon holes, you even hear them referred to frequently by your peers, but you start to doubt if they really do exist.

You are surprised when you get invited to their submission drinks, still wondering who the hell they are. Arriving a little late, you are told that they have just left, possibly riding off into the sunset. And so the mystery continues.

The Show Pony

This highly competitive type is found in all walks of life, but when placed in a postgraduate setting they exhibit unique characteristics. Their greatest skill is the ability to always present their exploits in a positive light. If they fell down the stairs at a departmental dinner and broke their leg, taking the vice-chancellor with them, they would be bragging about it the next day, describing the wonderful bonding time they spent with the old boy in the ambulance.

The Show Pony is a master networker and acts as a "success barometer", allowing you to pick the most important person in any room, as the Show Pony will inevitably be getting up close and personal with them. This voracious competitor does serve a useful function for their fellow students: you can be sure your own studies are going well if they call you up "just for a chat".

The Interminable Scholar

The Government has tried its damndest to rid our universities of the immature pupal (or "undergraduate") form of this species, but in the postgrad world they endure. Never wearing out their welcome - except with the funding bodies - they somehow manage to avoid submitting their thesis for years and possibly decades, while remaining a vital member of the department. They hold a wealth of information about past students and staff members, having seen whole generations pass through the university. They have sat on all known student committees, have been on research trips to all six continents, and their poignant cry of *I will be submitting my thesis next year* has echoed through the university since time immemorial. This type of student acts as an inspiration for all those who find it hard to progress to the next level: a proper job.

The Departmental Tortoise

Like their wrinkly namesake, this student plods through their tenure with a slow and steady pace. The Departmental Tortoise is rarely seen at social events, preferring the quiet of the library. They eschew even the slightest glimmer of enthusiasm and display no academic flamboyance. But just when everyone assumes that an extension (or a nervous breakdown) is on the horizon, the Tortoise appears at the submissions office with a well bound thesis in triplicate, collects a degree, then trudges silently off campus, never to be heard from again.