

The Research Room

April 2026

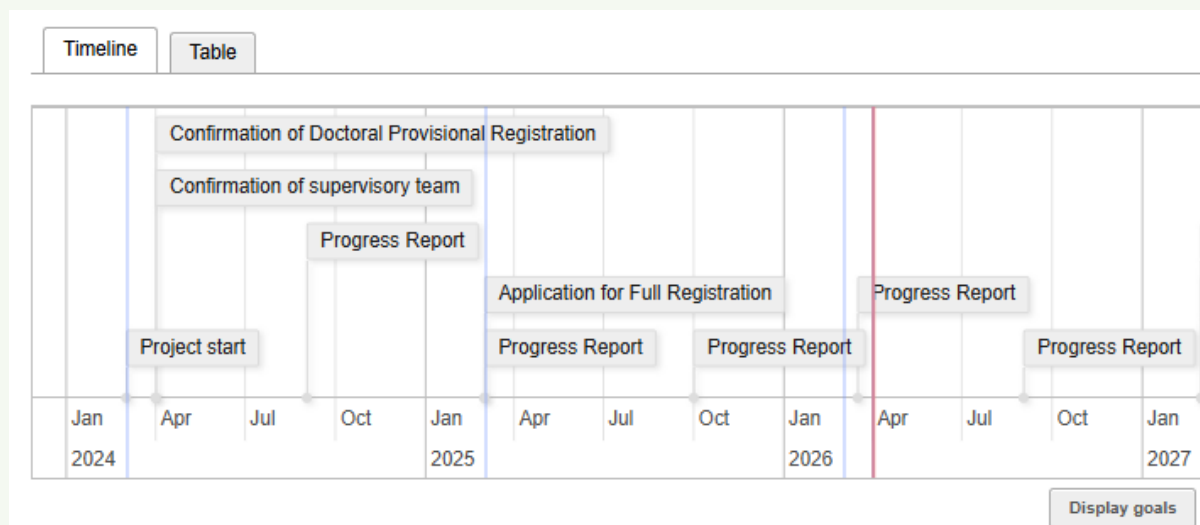
Tips of the month

Here are some tips and tricks you can use to make your research experience at VUW much more productive and enjoyable

Have you seen your upcoming milestones in PanoHo?

Use the Checkpoints button to see what you have completed and what is due next.

For those of us who like to see things visually, you can view your milestones as a Timeline, or if you prefer a list, you can switch to Table view. If you have set yourself goals, then these will be shown in your timelines when you select the Display Goals button.



Rachel Hjert, Deputy Manager, FGR, Victoria University of Wellington

Share your story

When utilized effectively, stories can be powerful tools to motivate and change minds. If you need an extra dose of motivation, this story should help you out

Across Hemispheres: A PhD in Motion—Marcella

It would be impossible to capture every turn of this journey in a single article, but I would like to share a few of the moments that shaped it most deeply.

How it started. I like to think of my PhD as a voyage guided by distant stars, flickering at times, yet continuing to guide the way. It began in Dublin, where I was conducting research for my master's degree in modern Languages for Communication, Publishing and International Cooperation, building on my bachelor's studies in International Relations and Applied Languages. I travelled alone, exploring places connected to the author I was studying. Research became lived experience, eventually leading to my first academic publication and, soon after, to a PhD scholarship in Literary Translation Studies at Te Herenga Waka -- Victoria University of Wellington: the beginning of a new chapter.

My initial project was rooted in Māori culture, and I was eager to begin. But then COVID--19 brought the world to a halt: borders shut, and flights disappeared. Instead of boarding a plane to New Zealand, I found myself back in Italy with no departure date and no certainty about when that might change. Months of waiting followed—months filled with distance, doubt, and unanswered questions. That pause forced a reconsideration. Without access to essential sources and with no clarity about relocation, I faced a decisive moment. The project I had designed was no longer viable from afar. I reworked it from the ground up, returning to Seamus Heaney (1939--2013), the Nobel Prize-winning Irish poet, lecturer, author and translator, who had guided my master's research. What began as necessity became direction: translation and pedagogy moved to the centre of my work. A year later — entry permit in hand, restrictions still in place, I finally landed in Wellington. New Zealand felt vast and charged with possibility. What had once seemed distant and suspended in uncertainty was suddenly under my feet. The journey had truly begun.

The rollercoaster. My PhD was a journey of constant movement. Over three years, my entire life fit into a 23--kilogram suitcase. I crossed hemispheres, started over from scratch, and called six different places home, four in the final year alone. Alongside my research, I began teaching Italian at the university, first as a tutor, then as a Teaching Fellow and Course Coordinator, working with students from first to third year. Between lectures, marking, exam supervision, translation work, and Italian evening classes for adults and children at the Circolo Italiano di Wellington, the days found their own rhythm. All of this, together with my scholarship, sustained me in a high- cost city while my thesis evolved and my research found its way into publications — a reminder that doctoral life is rarely confined to the page.

A PhD hardly offers stable ground: my project shifted, my supervision team changed, and translation theory gradually opened into a pedagogical inquiry. I realised my most meaningful contribution lay not in adding another theoretical layer, but in exploring how translation practice could inform and transform education. The thesis became a meeting space for learning and teaching, shaping not only my research, but who I was becoming through it. What looked like constant change was, in fact, a deeper coherence taking shape.

What I learned about a PhD by doing one. Beyond methods and theories, the greatest lesson was learning to navigate uncertainty. Plans change; what feels like loss often becomes refinement. Research is not linear, it is lived. It is revision and recalibration, late nights fuelled by coffee, and peers beside you as dawn shifts the sky from dark blue to pale red in an office that feels suspended beyond time. The project you begin is rarely the one you finish; its integrity lies in that transformation. Crossing languages means crossing ways of seeing. Translation taught me that meaning is never fixed; it emerges through negotiation, dialogue and understanding. Resilience grows quietly, in lesson plans drafted after long days, in chapters rewritten multiple times, in drafts multiplying, as deadlines approach and sleep becomes optional. It grows

in birthdays, Christmases, and Easters spent far from home; through building new circles of belonging while keeping old ones alive through time zones and video calls. It grows when the office shifts from a place of confinement to one of momentum—where long hours accumulate into progress and determination steadily outpaces fatigue. And somewhere along the way, you realise that the degree is only part of the story. What truly changes is you!

What I learned about life by doing a PhD. Beyond the academic milestones, there were lessons about life that shaped me just as deeply. Staying connected to the world around me proved essential—remaining open to people, to friendships, to unexpected encounters. Community does not happen by chance; it is built intentionally, and I chose connection over isolation. Cultivating passions outside academia became necessary. For me, that meant long walks in the nature, painting in the sun, horse--riding, yoga, meditation and prayer as a return to breath, and dancing whenever I could. Those moments were the fuel that made my PhD sustainable.

Presence became a discipline: Trying not to remain trapped in the past, nor obsess over the future. As someone inclined to overwork, I had to confront the truth that productivity is not identity. There must be space for sunsets, for laughter, for quiet moments with a kitty and a hot cup of tea, for conversations that have nothing to do with deadlines. Letting go of what I cannot control became part of the practice, along with accepting that a “perfect” thesis does not exist: a dissertation is never finished in any absolute sense; it reflects who you are at a given moment in your evolution, and evolution is ongoing.

Relationships grounded in consistency, presence, and mutual care proved essential; spaces where there is no need to perform or explain yourself, where you are accepted as you are and the love you offer is genuinely received. Loving deeply does not always mean holding on; sometimes it means gratitude for what was and growth through what changed. Words matter when sustained by coherence and action. Energy is finite, learning to invest it wisely has deepened my sense of gratitude.

That gratitude, in turn, extends further. I realized that pursuing a PhD on a scholarship on the other side of the planet is not simply an achievement; it is an extraordinary privilege. If I can write these words today and call myself “Doctor,” it is

because generations before me fought for the freedom and recognition of women in academia. That awareness is both humbling and grounding, and it carries responsibility, one I feel constantly, especially in the classroom. My students have been central to this journey. Through their questions, their curiosity, and their progress, I witnessed growth unfolding, not only theirs, but my own. Their achievements became some of my greatest joys.

I am equally thankful for the people who made this journey extraordinary: family and old friends who stayed close; new friendships who became anchors; colleagues who offered guidance, generosity, and trust; and the remarkable university staff, who supported us through uncertainty and change, their steady presence made an unfamiliar place feel like home.

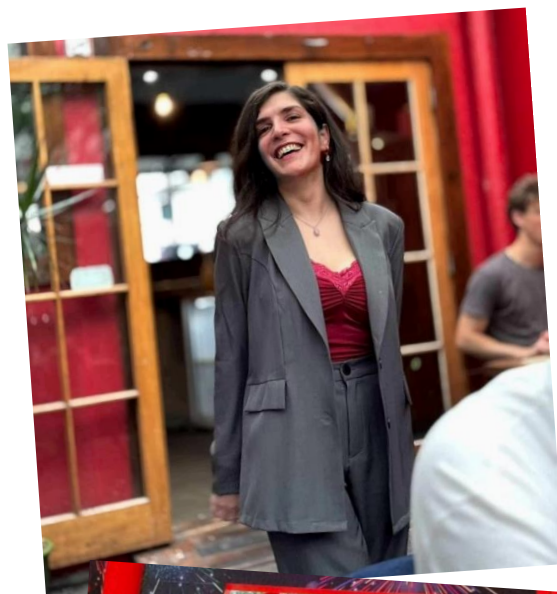
From all of this, I came to learn something deeper: even the painful, destabilising moments can become lessons. They show us what still needs healing, what still needs courage, what still needs softness and care. A PhD shapes your mind; life during a PhD shapes your character.

My main advice for new PhD students.

- 1) Treat your PhD like a long--distance project, not a sprint: productivity will fluctuate, and motivation will shift. That is normal. Consistency matters far more than intensity.
- 2) Be curious and open: with supervisors, with collaborators, with administrative teams. Ask questions, clarify expectations. Professional clarity saves time, energy, and stress.
- 3) Diversify your experience beyond the thesis: teach if you can; attend conferences when possible; write, review, collaborate. A PhD is also about becoming part of a scholarly community. The degree opens doors, but your relationships and experience determine how you walk through them.
- 4) Start writing earlier than you think you're ready. Do not wait for perfect ideas or perfect structure. Clarity emerges through writing, not before it. Early drafts are meant to be imperfect.
- 5) Care for yourself as intentionally as you care for your research. Your body and mind are the ground on which everything else stands, the vessel that carries you through the work and will carry you through your whole life.

Ad majora semper. Across hemispheres and languages, through seasons of uncertainty, this journey has been exactly that: a form of (un)steady movement toward distant stars that once felt unreachable. Some shone brightly, others appeared only in darkness. Yet every departure, every revision, every reinvention brought them closer. A PhD may begin as a research project, but it becomes something far more layered—a training in resilience, perspective, community, and becoming. If you are at the beginning of your own voyage, wondering whether those distant lights are truly within reach, trust that they are. And if you ever want to talk things through, share worries, seek advice, or simply enjoy a coffee on campus, my door and my inbox are open. No PhD journey is meant to be walked alone!

These pictures show me at different moments of my journey:



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Useful resources

Explore our list of research-related links that will help you throughout your research studies

[Research Skills for Postgraduate Study: A Library Primer](#)

This practical, easy-to-use guide helps you develop confident, independent research skills across all key stages of their research journey

Events happening soon

Looking for other events happening at the University and beyond? We go over some interesting events happening worldwide

Opportunities from other institutions

Organizer	Event	Date and Time	Register
Working Voices	Networking Skills (Online)	9 Apr, 09:30-10:30 BST	Here
	Storytelling with data (Online)	14 Apr, 12:30-13:30 EDT; 9:30-10:30 PDT	Here
	Personal brand (Online)	21 Apr, 09:30-10:30 BST	Here
	Presentation skills (Online)	23 Apr, 12:30-13:30 EDT; 9:30-10:30 PDT	Here
	Critical thinking (Online)	30 Apr, 14:00-15:00 BST	Here
Statistics Solutions	From data to defence: Quantitative analysis (Online)	3 Apr, 6:00 NZST	Here
	Qualitative analysis in the age of AI (Online)	10 Apr, 5:00 NZST	Here
	Cracking the data analysis plan: From research question to statistical test (Online)	17 Apr, 5:00 NZST	Here
Ideas on stage UK	How to help your team present to prospects with clarity and confidence (Online)	8 Apr, 3:00 NZST	Here

*By listing these events we are not endorsing any organisations but rather compiling and sharing a list of resources that may be helpful.

Happening here: Events at our university

Organizer	Event	Date and Time	Register
Research Office: Ethics Team	Human research ethics application (In person/online)	22 Apr, 10:00 NZST (Rankine Brown 903 or via Zoom)	--
Student Learning	Virtual English conversation hour (Online)	1 Apr, 15:00–16:00 NZST	Here
	Monday morning writes (In person)	6 Apr, 9:00–10:30 NZST	Here
	Virtual English conversation hour (Online)	8 Apr, 15:00–16:00 NZST	Here

Organizer	Event	Date and Time	Register
Student Learning	Getting started writing and cultivating a writing habit <i>(Online)</i>	9 Apr, 15:10–16:00 NZST	Here
	Monday morning writes <i>(In person)</i>	13 Apr, 9:00–10:30 NZST	Here
	Using AI critically as a postgraduate <i>(In person)</i>	14 Apr, 13:10–14:30 NZST	Here
	Virtual English conversation hour <i>(Online)</i>	15 Apr, 15:00–16:00 NZST	Here
	Monday morning writes <i>(In person)</i>	20 Apr, 9:00–10:30 NZST	Here
	Virtual English conversation hour <i>(Online)</i>	22 Apr, 15:00–16:00 NZST	Here
	Grammar workshop: Verb tenses <i>(In person)</i>	23, 30 Apr, 13:10–14:00 NZST	Here
	Preparing for presentations and research posters <i>(In person)</i>	23 Apr, 15:10–16:00 NZST	Here
	Monday morning writes <i>(In person)</i>	27 Apr, 9:00–10:30 NZST	Here
	Developing a research question and research topic <i>(In person)</i>	28 Apr, 13:10–14:30 NZST	Here
	Virtual English conversation hour <i>(Online)</i>	29 Apr, 15:00–16:00 NZST	Here

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Postgraduate Research Student Advisers: FGR-postgrads@vuw.ac.nz

- Enrolling in your doctoral or master's programme.
- Candidature management changes. Online forms for thesis candidature changes can be found [here](#).

Thesis Examinations: FGR-Exams@vuw.ac.nz

- Submission or examination of theses.

Doctoral Admissions and Scholarships: pg-research@vuw.ac.nz:

- Doctoral applications or the doctoral application process
- Scholarships

Learning and Development: william.eulatthvidal@vuw.ac.nz