Welcome to AHANews

Welcome to the first edition of AHANews. It’s a new regular newsletter to add to the vitality, information and relationships of AHAN, the Accounting Honours Alumni Network.

We will be distributing AHANews electronically, initially twice a year. If you’re reading it on screen, make use of some of the electronic navigation features we’ve built in.

Your network of talented alumni has great potential, both for all members and the wider community. As Tony Abrahams (1996) says in this issue’s feature interview: “You are exquisitely well placed to challenge assumptions and effect change… in any area of life.”

We hope you will read AHANews, enjoy it, benefit from it, and contribute to it. Above all, we want it to be stimulating and valuable for YOUR network. So participate, share the synergy, and let us know what you think!

Professor Wai Fong Chua, Head of School, pictured at the April Meet the CEO reception

Network profile: Tony Abrahams, Chair of AHAN

Tony Abrahams (1996): Rhodes Scholar, community leader, accountant, lawyer, and now director of TAJ Productions and Chair of the UNSW Accounting Honours Alumni Network.

HOW many degrees??

Since leaving Sydney Boys’ High School as Dux in 1991, Tony has been keeping the calligraphers busy!

At UNSW, Tony completed both his BCom (Hons), with a University Medal–winning thesis on R&D Capitalisation, and finished first in the combined commerce/law program. His undergraduate days at UNSW included a scholarship to study on exchange at Canada’s University of Alberta, where he was awarded Best Performance in Pacific Rim Law.

Tony then moved to Oxford, completing his MPhil in Economics on Pricing to Market and Exchange Rate Volatility, as well as an MBA.

Balance & commitment

Tony’s 1998 Rhodes Scholarship recognised that he contributes far more than intellectual talent alone. He enjoys the world of music and entertainment, and loves being active outdoors with cross-country skiing, jogging, and bushwalking.

Tony also has a genuine concern for others, and, combined with his experience, interests, qualifications and natural leadership skills, applies this in his current work co-directing TAJ Productions.

Professional synergy

In 2002, Tony teamed up with Alex Jones, a professionally trained actor/director who is profoundly deaf, to create TAJ Productions.

TAJ provides consulting services to help corporate clients and industries understand and deliver to customers with disabilities. The company also produces special events, festivals, and live theatre to celebrate difference, diversity and disability. TAJ will be managing the cultural festival for the Deaflympic Games in Melbourne in 2005, “A Celebration of Possibility”.

One of Tony’s many achievements as a director of TAJ has been to lead the FOXTEL/ASTRA captioning initiative, focusing on the financial, regulatory, data management, and channel communication aspects of the project.
Previously, Tony has also worked in management consulting (Boston Consulting Group), in hedge fund trading (Rubicon Partners), accounting (Andersens), legal (Mallesons) and education (UNSW).

**AHANews interviews Tony Abrahams**

**How did your time at Oxford compare with your earlier studies at UNSW?**

Oxford was great – but for very different reasons to UNSW. I had the benefit of teaching and studying at both institutions.

At Oxford, the history is inescapable, the student body is truly global and the networking opportunities outstanding. In terms of coursework and academic excellence, however, there was far less of a willingness to innovate, be relevant and modernize at Oxford than was the case at UNSW.

I actually believe that this is one of UNSW’s competitive advantages: being a “new” university with a very strong brand allows it to simply be more nimble and less constrained than some of its older world-class peers.

**What was it that inspired you and Alex Jones to start up TAJ Productions?**

For many reasons, hedge fund trading had a very limited life-span for me. I was looking around for what to do next and after seeing an absolutely inspiring production of his in a local theatre I raised the option with Alex of starting a production company focusing on celebrating diversity, difference and disability. Alex is a great actor – trained at NYU’s prestigious Tisch School of the Arts.

Within 6 months we had 4 actors and strong bookings for an innovative school show called “Heads UP!” which takes students and teachers on a “journey” into the world of the Deaf and their language, Auslan.

We are steadily building the brand; we have introduced sign-language programs (our first is a Halloween weekend) and will be managing the cultural festival for the Deaflympic Games next January in Melbourne with some amazing international acts.

**What are the pros and cons of “political correctness”?**

Labels have power. What I find amazing is how successful “labeling” campaigns can be. Look at how the right wing (including FOX News) has turned the word “liberal” from a respectable economic and political philosophy to an all-encompassing (negative) label to slap on anyone you perceive as weak. Once a term is appropriated as such, you need to find alternative means of communicating your message. “Political correctness” itself suffered a similar fate in about 1996. It is now a cliché that has lost any meaning it once had.

To answer a more specific question: Do I think there are good reasons to question and revisit language if that language serves to oppress, vilify or degrade? Yes. I believe there is power in language – but there is also the imperative of communication. Some “politically correct” terms are almost vacuous. This interplay is perhaps even more relevant in terms of sign-language. Deaf culture is far more direct than hearing culture – if you were to try to convey in sign-language that someone is of Asian origin – quickly – how might you sign that? Many “hearing” people would be offended with a sign pulling back an eye – but if the aim is to communicate a meaning, not to denigrate, is it okay? It is difficult – but at the end of the day, I think it is a question of context.

**Are there particular people who have been role models for you? And who are you learning from right now?**

I try to learn from everyone!

Two very public role models of mine are Justice Michael Kirby and Sir Richard Branson. Both have the courage to be the people they are (in different spheres), and effect profound change in a world very sticky with inertia.

**Tell us about the directions you envisage for the Accounting Honours Alumni Network?**

For me the greatest benefit of my time at Oxford was meeting and learning from others from diverse backgrounds. The Americans were particularly vigilant in harnessing and supporting their networks. I was actually amazed at the strength and self-confidence of the American alumni organisations, and the support they offer to their members. It is a model we would do well to emulate.

I see AHAN providing a dimension to a top-class UNSW education offering a life-long connection. It is not about obligation, it is about participation. As the network strengthens, so will its value. While the value of a network increases with the energy of the individuals within it, a network is significantly greater than the sum of the parts.

**Feel free to dream... What are the big challenges facing the world that you could see talented Accounting alumni helping to address?**

Invent the possibility for your future, and then live into it. With the critical tools to undertake rigorous research and analysis you are exquisitely well-placed to challenge assumptions and effect change. In any area of life. Don’t feel limited by your qualifications – feel free to apply your skills as broadly as you wish.

**And finally - what’s your advice to alumni considering further studies?**

Don’t do it because you think it will get you a better job. Certainly don’t do it for the letters at the beginning or at the end of your name. Do it because you enjoy study, research and learning.

If you do decide to study, try going overseas, or at least to a different institution to appreciate different approaches. Look for scholarships – if you are serious about future study, there is probably one that you are a good candidate for.

**Thank you to Tony for sharing his thoughts. Catch up with Tony and other alumni at the AHAN events: we’d love to see you!**
Accounting honours alumni meet the ceo

Since its launch with Sir Richard Branson, there has been an outstanding response to the meet the ceo series, which gives alumni and current Faculty students access to top quality contemporary business thinking. The meet the ceo program runs four times each year, with an exceptional senior executive from business or government coming to the University to speak with the invited audience.

The series includes a pre-event reception; an on-stage interview with the guest speaker; and open questions from the audience.

This year’s first meet the ceo event, held in April, featured Terry Davis, CEO of Coca-Cola Amatil and a member of the Faculty Advisory Board, in conversation with Helen Trinca, editor of AFR BOSS magazine.

The discussion ranged from Terry’s views on strategic marketing, staff motivation, quality control and board/executive relations, to advice for aspiring CEOs in the audience. Terry’s answers were generously candid and practical, reflecting his wealth of experience.

The perfect timing of the June meet the ceo guaranteed an interesting evening with Michael Chaney AO. Michael had recently announced that he will be leaving Wesfarmers, and the news had just come out about his forthcoming chairmanship of the National Australia Bank.

Michael talked frankly about the elements which he believes help to build a successful business. Like Terry Davis, he emphasized the great importance of focusing on share-holder value, finding and developing talented people who are passionate about what they do, and of building a culture of teamwork that supports and encourages them.

Michael also shared elements of his personal journey: his very positive family background, his early career as a geologist, and the process of discovery by which he came to enter the world of commerce, where he really excelled.

Future meet the ceo events

Gail Kelly, Managing Director and CEO of St George Bank, will be speaking at The Scientia on 24 August 2004, 6-8pm.

Gail is the only female CEO of an Australian Top 50 company. She came to St George Bank in December 2001 from her previous position as Head of the Customer Service Division at the Commonwealth Bank of Australia. The growth she has overseen during her time at St George, based on a philosophy of continuous service improvement, most recently resulted in a record first-half profit announced in May this year.

Roger Corbett, CEO of Woolworths, will be at The Clancy Auditorium on 14 October from 6-8pm.

Watch out for your invitations to these worthwhile events, and come along!

Find out more

Download video, audio and transcripts of meet the ceo interviews from the Faculty website, www.fce.unsw.edu.au.

News from the school

Accounting student wins Investec Prize

Congratulations to fourth year Accounting student Adrian Teh, who has won the prestigious new Investec Prize for most outstanding all-round student in the Faculty of Commerce and Economics.

The $5000 prize, gift of Alumni Leader David Gonski AO, recognises academic excellence as well as achievement in a range of non-academic areas.

As a Co-op Program Scholar, Adrian has experienced 18 months of structured training with three sponsor companies in the insurance and financial services, telecommunications and automotive industries.

Adrian is currently Chairman of the Co-op Scholars Charitable Society, and was one of its founding members. Since commencing in 2002, this group has been supporting a wide range of existing charities including the Cancer Council, The Salvation Army and World Vision Australia.

From 2005, the Society is to establish a scholarship in perpetuity for disadvantaged Australians to attend UNSW in Commerce and Economics and Engineering.

Congratulations Adrian!
AHAN helping students

Transferring knowledge, expertise and information among alumni, students, staff and contemporary business leaders

Enhancing the Honours year as a learning experience

A strong student support network, growing the Honours program

A fundraising network for future scholarships

AHAN 3rd year honours information night

AHAN has given talented third year Honours students a fantastic chance to inform their decisions about investing in an extra year of study.

On 27 May, Honours alumni network members combined with staff and current fourth year students to present an entertaining and informative networking evening moderated by Tony Abrahams (1996).

Professor Stephen Taylor (1981) gave a formal outline of the Honours program, its benefits and how it’s perceived in the employment marketplace. A panel of alumni - representing various vintages from 1974 to 2003 - reflected briefly on questions about career, the decision to do Honours, the experience of Honours and the benefits they have received (both expected and unexpected).

Honours was excellent – especially being able to argue with my lecturers.

Ian Napier (1974)

Of course the Honours year is “academic” – meaning it requires rigorous analysis and disciplined critical thinking – but where do all these research papers come from? From real world problems & issues!

Stephen Taylor (1981)

Honours had obvious academic benefits. But it was the less tangible benefits that stand out – the confidence you develop in how well you will do your job; the way you learn about other cultures as you grow close friendships and share the experience with your fellow students.

Alana Smith (2003)

It was very intense. You work so hard. But that’s great training in stamina for the workplace!

Nicola Flint (2000)

It’s kind of ironic [that my financial accounting thesis had such a focus on CAPM]. I believe the market is driven by sentiment, emotion and psyche - you could say my whole industry is based on the efficient market hypothesis being false.

Scott Armstrong (1991)

All in one week, I was accepted into Honours, I got an Honours scholarship, and I was offered a job at Deloitte. Deloitte held the job for me – so if you find yourself in the same boat, don’t be afraid to ask.

Kate Sherwood (2003)

It was a time when the banks were making substantial investments in IT infrastructure. I remember visiting the lab at the old Bank of NSW... “What’s that thing there?” I asked the R&D guys. “It’s called an ATM,” they said.

Ian Napier (1974)

The work I was doing for my Honours thesis was a precursor to the whole field of change management – broadening the focus of IT into a wider understanding of its interaction with, and impact on, people in the context of major change projects.

Ian Napier (1974)

Why should I do Honours? Why not! Hundreds of people get Masters degrees every year. Very few get Honours.

Nicola Flint (2000)

Thank you to AHAN members for generously contributing your time and experience to help future alumni!
The network news: updates from members

Calling all UNSW accounting honours alumni – please stay in touch! Our contact details are on this page.

Email us if you’re hired, fired, or retired; if you move house, change names, have a baby, go overseas; definitely when you win the Nobel Prize; even if you experience serious illness or weather a mid-life crisis… we all learn from each other!

AHAN is like any network you could model: its value grows exponentially with its number of points – and, I would add, with the energy of those points.

Tony Abrahams

Isabelly Susilowati (2003), Gary Chan (2003), Shen Han Steven Tan (2003), Xin Cissy Dong (2003) and Olivia Olivia (2003) catching up at the April Meet the CEO reception

Coming events

meet the ceo
Gail Kelly
CEO, St George Bank
24 August
6-8pm
The Scientia

meet the ceo
Roger Corbett
CEO, Woolworths
14 October
6-8pm
The Clancy Auditorium

John V Ratcliffe
Memorial Lecture
25 November

News updates from recent AHAN network events:

Ian Napier (1974) – retired in 2002 as Managing Partner of Accenture after their very successful float on the NYSE. Ian is now playing golf, enjoying his winery in the Hunter Valley, and attending Kurri Kurri TAFE to develop his skills as a vigneron. Although he finds TAFE a bit less mental than UNSW, it is still very practical and relevant – Ian has been learning the important skill of mixing vineyard chemicals without accidentally killing himself!

Scott Armstrong (1991) – after working as an equities analyst for Zurich Scudder and Bankers Trust, Scott is now with Jenkins Investment Management. He is enjoying the greater control that a smaller company can offer.

Nicola Flint (2000) – is working with Deloitte. Nicola’s trendy hairstyle is returning after she “shaved for a cure” to sponsor leukemia research earlier this year. Good on you, Nicola!

Isabelly Susilowati (2003) – is an Associate Lecturer at the University of Sydney in the Discipline of Accounting and Business Law.

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Trivia corner: what’s an alum?

(And we don’t mean a double sulphate of aluminium and potassium!)

Alumni is the familiar plural word for a group of former students. But what do you call just one of them?

The word alumni came to English from Latin, where it means pupils, or nurslings - from alere, to nourish. But the singular, alumnus is (like alumni) a masculine term. A female graduate is an alumna - and two or more of them are alumnae.

Many educational institutions, proud of their knowledge of Latin, carefully use alumna, alumnae, alumnus and alumni. Others are opting for a simple anglicisation to alumn - or easier still, alum - to refer to any former student.