

Five minutes with: Michael Bukur-li

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What is your job title and how long have you worked at Loughborough?

I'm a Doctoral Researcher in the School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences and I've been here a year and a half.

Tell us what a typical day looks like for you?

A typical day at Loughborough can be quite dynamic. The first half of my PhD has focused heavily on training and development, relationship building, and data collection. What that means is every day can be quite different. Prior to the start of my PhD, I had studied Media, Culture, and Communication at NYU and Cultural and Critical Studies at the University of Westminster. Coming to Loughborough has meant a transition in terms of academic discipline and field in addition to quite a large personal transition from major metropolises to a more rural setting.

My days are generally spent with early mornings in our shared PhD office on campus, an afternoon full of meetings and events, and lots of outreach and emails to organisational and community partners to push forward the final stages of data collection and start to plan for a public action event this summer at Mile End Park Run down in East London. Between meetings and emails, I am always trying to play catch up with transcription from a summer and fall full of qualitative interviews and I'm also starting to shape and write the early parts of my thesis. Loughborough may not be New York, but it sure can feel for me like the town that never sleeps sometimes!

What's your favourite project you've worked on?

A project which was incredibly close to my heart was the East Midlands Film Festival earlier this year. The theme for LGBT+ History Month was 'Behind the Lens'. Due to my position as Collaborations Lead and my prior work experience in film, I figured that it would be brilliant to bring some form of queer cinema to Loughborough. With a preliminary idea, having never hosted a film festival before, and a small team of just me and two other people, we were able to source over 1000 submissions from across the world and even award funded prizes for best feature and best short thanks to the support of LU Arts. For me, it was not only a beautiful event filled with great films but an incredibly fulfilling experience to be able to bring together the Loughborough community through queer art and give filmmakers from across the world the opportunity to have their films shown to audiences far from home. Hopefully, this can be an annual event which continues for years to come with the support for the LGBT+ Staff Network, LU Arts, and the University itself.

What is your proudest moment at Loughborough?

My proudest moment at Loughborough was in the context of teaching on the undergraduate module Sport and the Social Sciences. I remember the topic was about socio-critical perspectives on gender and pedagogy. Normally, teaching on social and critical theory can be a bit difficult in the context of the School of Sport because oftentimes students are less interested in the topic or struggle to see its relevance to their desired career paths. However, this day I had delved deeply into intersectional theory and encouraged the students to explore how identity is relational and inextricably embedded in systems of power and place. Students were fairly engaged throughout; however, my proudest moment came when one of the students was leaving and she turned to me and said how sincerely grateful she was for how I covered the content that day in seminar. For me, it is moments like that which make teaching, and especially teaching the social sciences, such a fulfilling experience because you can see first hand how it provides students with ideas and a way of thinking that can help them understand themselves and the people and world around them.

Tell us something you do outside of work that we might not know about?

Outside of work, I am an English teacher to non-native speakers. I started teaching English when I was living in Madrid back in 2020/2021 as a language assistant at a secondary school. When I left Madrid to come to Loughborough to start my PhD, I continued teaching online. Teaching English has given me the opportunity to not only hone my teaching skills but also connect with and learn about people and places across the world.

What is your favourite quote?

"Being queer saved my life. Often we see queerness as deprivation. But when I look at my life, I saw that queerness demanded an alternative innovation from me. I had to make alternative routes; it made me curious; it made me ask, 'Is this enough for me?'" – Ocean Vuong



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