MODELLING BEHAVIOUR
Brief profiles of women academics at the University of Malta

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
Gender Issues Committee
Preface

There are so many factors that influence a woman’s life. If I had to look back on my own experience, there are so many people and so many events that contributed to what I am. There is an element of luck in our experiences. However, our decisions have a big influence as well.

When I was ten, my mother insisted that I do my share of housework. I hated washing the floor and dusting furniture and tried my very best to invent excuses not to do it. One convenient excuse was that I had to study. This was an acceptable reason for my mother. However, later on I had to face my father who believed that my studies were useless since I had a boyfriend and had plans to marry him. My boyfriend shared this opinion as well and put a lot of pressure on me to stop my studies. I gave in to this pressure but I was unhappy. I decided to go against the wishes of my father and boyfriend and go back to my studies. My boyfriend called it a day and my father gave up trying to stop me.

The decision to continue my studies changed my life completely. I studied for a degree, followed a Masters and later a Ph.D. I became an assistant lecturer at the University of Malta in 1992. In 2006, I was given a new role of Pro-Rector for Students and Institutional Affairs.

I am writing this after conferring degrees to the students of Communications Studies, Management and Tourism Studies. Together with me, conferring the degrees were the Vice-Chancellor, Ms Bernie Mizzi, and the Registrar, Ms Veronica Grech, two other women who occupy ranks that are among the highest at the University of Malta. I felt so encouraged by this experience! I hope that whoever is reading this booklet is encouraged by the narratives of the various female members of our university who have opted to share their experiences with us.

Prof. Mary Anne Lauri
Pro-Rector
Student & Institutional Affairs
University of Malta

"I hope that whoever is reading this booklet is encouraged by the narratives of the various female members of our university who have opted to share their experiences with us."
Introduction

This booklet represents the culmination of a task set by the Gender Issues Committee which has taken a year to reach fruition.

The intention was to compile personal experiences of a number of senior female academics of the University of Malta about the way in which their academic career progressed. In this way it is hoped that these various contributors will help to serve as role models to their junior counterparts, with the ardent desire that they may be encouraged to persevere in the uphill struggle to achieve a successful academic career. These senior academics have somehow managed to attain some kind of balance between their career and their family life using various strategies. However, there is general agreement that this equilibrium is not easily achieved. The contributors come from diverse fields of academia which makes reading these profiles so much more interesting. However, there is an underlying common element when it comes to the various hurdles that have to be overcome to achieve success.

The booklet should also be of interest to younger students who are about to embark on their tertiary education and who may be having second thoughts about what the future holds for them.

Last and not least, I feel that it should be an eye-opener for our male colleagues who may not always be sufficiently sensitive to the needs and difficulties that their female colleagues have to face.

My sincere gratitude goes to each contributor who has so generously accepted to share her personal experiences with the readers of this booklet.

Prof. Marie Therese Camilleri Podestà
Chairperson
Gender Issues Committee
University of Malta

These senior academics have somehow managed to attain some kind of balance between their career and their family life using various strategies.
Contents

Preface ....................................................... 3
Introduction ................................................ 4
About the Gender Issues Committee .......... 6
Prof. Lilian M. Azzopardi ......................... 7
Prof. Rena Balzan .................................. 8
Prof. Stella Borg Barthet ......................... 9
Prof. Frances Camilleri Cassar ............... 10
Prof. Marie Therese Camilleri Podestà.....11
Prof. JoAnn Cassar ................................. 13
Ms Maria Cutajar .................................. 14
Dr Ing. Claire De Marco ......................... 16
Prof. Carmen Depasquale ....................... 18
Ms Pauline Dimech ................................. 19
Prof. Helen Grech ................................. 21
Dr Anna Khakee ................................ 22
Dr Janet Mifsud ................................. 23
Dr Suzanne Piscopo ............................. 25
Dr Kathrin Schödel ............................. 27
Dr Sandra Scicluna ............................. 29
Prof. Isabel Stabile ............................. 29
Prof. Yosanne Vella ............................. 31
Dr Marion Zammit Mangion ................. 33
Anonymous ....................................... 33
Anonymous ....................................... 35
Anonymous ....................................... 35
The committee was originally set up in 1991 in order to act as a focal point on gender issues on the recommendations of the Women in Society Secretariat. Its terms of reference are to advise the University Council on issues of gender equality. The Committee works on several areas including the identification of sources of unequal opportunities or treatment with respect to gender, and promotes a policy of equal opportunity.

The Gender Issues Committee (GIC) also receives and monitors complaints from University staff and students regarding sex discriminatory practices with the recommendation of appropriate action, and liaises closely with the Sexual Harassment Advisors. The Gender Issues Committee also promotes teaching and research that reflects the knowledge, experience, and aspirations of both men and women.

Ongoing work includes the establishment of networks with individuals and organisations with similar objectives, from outside the University and from the international scene. The GIC is seeking ways of raising the profile of University employees and students. One of the initiatives of the GIC was a Mentoring Scheme for students. The GIC has also collaborated with the Health Promotion Department to create a Degree Plus Module for students. The students will participate in interactive discussions about different aspects of maintaining a healthy lifestyle.
The characteristics of the period when I was reading for my doctorate were a complete dedication to my area of study, including financial sacrifices. I am grateful to my mentors with whose support during this period I was able to develop my skills in research writing. Gratifying experiences were when I received two international awards for research in the area of pharmacy.

When applying for the promotions to an Associate Professor and a Professor, the application process started off with compiling copies of my publications which in itself was a laborious process. There was a somewhat prolonged timeframe from the time of submission to the result from Council. Age maybe is a factor that features during these steps of career progression.

Balancing the basic day-to-day demands of home and family life with the demands of maintaining an active research and teaching career requires meticulous planning.

My day starts with thinking about pharmacy and sees me working well into the late hours of the day writing up papers and going through student proposals. However, despite this, it is gratifying to see your students achieving excellent standards and succeeding in attracting very good positions. Positive response to research publications and my duties within international fora give me an extra incentive to commit myself to my contribution within the University.

Planning time and activities pays back when juggling various work activities at University and home life. Carrying out research and publishing makes life hectic but worth it – you can look back and see what ground you have covered together with other colleagues.
The main aspect that helped me was my keeping up to date with what was happening in the field of Genetics at all levels, i.e. cytogenetics, molecular genetics, population genetics, etc. I never stopped studying Genetics since I got acquainted with the topic at quite an early age. My major hurdle to get my doctorate was the financial aspect. I needed a grant. When I had the opportunity to get one through the University of Malta, I started reading for my Ph.D. in UK, which I got in three years.

My last promotion did not come easy. When I first applied, it was just turned down and this kept me from applying again for a number of years, especially knowing that at the time there were individuals who were promoted and who were not better achievers than I was, to say the least. I tried not to get demoralized or bother excessively, chiefly because I was enjoying my research studies and the rest of my academic work. The second time I applied, after being pressed by more than one colleague of mine to do so, I had no problems whatsoever.

Since both Science and Literature (which is also very important to me) occupied a good part of my life, I made my choices (which I never regretted) earlier on in life, and so I never had any major conflicts between my career and my home or family life.

I thank God that I still love my work at University and enjoy it.

In my opinion, what is important is that you love what you are doing (of which teaching and research play a vital role in our academic life), keep yourself abreast and well informed on the subject chosen, and try to enjoy yourself as much as you can in your contribution to the academic world. Then when you think your promotion is due, work hard for it, without allowing it to be the sole objective in your life.
I am happy and proud to have had three children. Looking after them did slow me down in getting my doctorate. I do not think it is really possible to have three children without a negative impact on one’s career. I think it would be quite unfair for me to expect to progress in my career as quickly as people who have one child only; still less with women who have no children at all. I do not think it is a good idea to compare with men who have three children either, particularly if they have wives who give more of their time and energy to parenthood.

My progress has not been swift but I cannot say that I have encountered much male prejudice. I am very lucky to have had my husband’s full support since the time I was an undergraduate student. At the same time, no matter how good intentions may be, in my opinion, fathers cannot be mothers. I believe that both are absolutely vital for the children, but the roles are different. I do not think that my husband could have been as passionate and as controlling as I was with our children. His calmer, more accepting attitude to the children provided a much needed balance.

I love my work. As I approach the end of my third working decade, I realize that my personality is made up of several facets Mother/Teacher/Wife/Researcher.

I notice that while the administrative staff in our University is having babies, many academics are not. I have female colleagues in universities abroad who cannot form permanent relationships, let alone have children because of awful work conditions, (temporary employment, the need to move from one university to another to maximize career progression). I hope this is not what is on its way here.
The obstacles the could have slowed me down in getting my doctorate (but didn’t!) emerged from the first area of the University in which I worked and continued to work for 18 years.

In 2000, I was awarded a place as a doctoral candidate at the University of Nottingham (UoN), UK, and a full-time scholarship by the University of Malta. The scholarship was, in my view, unfairly suspended indefinitely by my Head. I have never been able to understand why this was done.

Nevertheless, I was determined to keep going, and for the first two years of my doctoral studies abroad, the money came out of the family kitty. When I reached the third year of my doctorate, I submitted another scholarship application to the University of Malta that would cover the final years and got the scholarship. I finished my studies in just under four years, was awarded a doctorate without conditions, and was encouraged to publish the thesis as, in the words of my external examiner, Professor Emeritus of Social Policy, Paul Wilding, it was ‘an impressive piece of work that makes a significant contribution to knowledge’.

The thesis was then published as a book, and launched at a public forum organized and funded by the University of Malta and presided by the Prime Minister of Malta in 2005.

The aspects of my life that helped me through my doctorate were: a clear focus; strong determination; unstinting family support; and the professionalism of my two Ph.D. supervisors, and other staff at the University of Nottingham.

The hurdles to my promotions were many. My employment status remained at the level of ‘temporary’ part-time research assistant. This meant that my employment contract was renewed yearly (around September). This kept me in a situation of uncertainty that, for many years, caused me and my family much anxiety.

In practice, I had three types of employment, none of them fixed: a temporary research assistant post; a casual lectureship and the position of course coordina-
tor for a diploma course. I still worked hard at research and teaching whilst applying for regularization of my employment. I felt marginalized and exploited.

After 16 years, I was promoted to Lecturer but my employment status was still temporary. In 2009, I was given a transfer to the Department of Criminology and promoted to Senior Lecturer as well as being upgraded to full-time. I have recently been promoted to Associate Professor.

There are absolutely no conflicts between my work and family life.

My thoughts about work at University are very positive. I am an academic at heart and a go-getter who enjoys work thoroughly, otherwise I would have given up years ago.

I don’t think anyone will ever have it so tough. However, words of advice and encouragement to other academics are: persistence and perseverance, combined with unwavering determination. That is the perfect mix that ensures success.

Prof. Marie Therese Camilleri Podestà
M.D., M.Phil., Ph.D.(Lond.)
Professor
Department of Anatomy
Faculty of Medicine & Surgery

I graduated as a medical doctor in 1969 and following two years of housemanship at St. Luke’s Hospital I joined the Department of Anatomy in the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery as a research assistant in 1972. I then proceeded to obtain a local M.Phil. degree. Even then, I had to overcome several hurdles. At one point, when I was writing up my thesis, one of the full time lecturers in the Department left at very short notice. Suddenly his full teaching timetable was thrust upon me.

At that point, giving a lecture which I had never prepared previously entailed a lot of preparation. What made it even worse was that I was then still very young and one of the very first lectures that I was asked to give to a large class of mainly male students was on the male genital organs! It was a real baptism of fire but somehow I coped and managed to give all the lectures assigned to me.
Having obtained my M.Phil., I wanted to proceed with getting a Ph.D. as I had decided to follow an academic career. I applied for several scholarships without any initial success. In the case of one particular interview, I was hardly asked anything and my feeling was that it did not help at all that I was female. Finally I was granted a British Council scholarship for which I was very grateful. The University stopped my salary while I was abroad and I was just able to make ends meet. Fortunately after the expiry of the first year, I was granted a Wellcome grant with an allowance equivalent to that at registrar grade. This made an enormous improvement to my lifestyle. The time I spent in London during this period was indeed memorable, primarily as I was living on my own away from the very sheltered environment I was used to in Malta. I loved London with its theatres and concerts even though I had to work extremely hard in the lab, especially when it came to writing my thesis. The results of my research were rather groundbreaking at the time in the restricted field I was working in and I vividly remember one particular instance where I was bombarded with questions at a conference for about twenty minutes after presenting my findings and needed to muster all my courage to cope.

When I returned to Malta, my academic career progressed smoothly and I was eventually promoted to professor and head of department in 1981. I was the first female professor at the University of Malta and remained the sole female professor for about 20 years.

Meanwhile I got married shortly after I returned to Malta and went on to have 3 children in very rapid succession. I continued working throughout even up to the eve of giving birth, as fortunately I had very uncomplicated pregnancies. Finding a balance between work at University and at home was a constant challenge particularly when the children were young and necessitated the ability to prioritise as well as good time management.

I must acknowledge that I was very fortunate in having extremely supportive parents who helped enormously. Child care facilities were not readily available at the time. I was also blessed in having an understanding husband who however also had a very demanding job leaving him little time for helping in the house. With hindsight I realise that I often tried too hard to be the “super mum” making life more difficult for myself, and it was only later on that I learnt to take some short cuts.

I feel that it is very important to enjoy one’s work. I find that teaching and contact with students is not only a rewarding and enriching experience but has also helped to bridge the generation gap and to understand my own children better. The pleasure I get out of it helps to compensate for the hard work that it involves. It also helps to make up for the fact that having a demanding career leaves very little time for oneself and for other activities. Now that the children are grown up and independent and I have more free time, I often find that at the end of a busy day I have little energy left as age begins to take its toll.

I wish to encourage young academics, particularly if they are female to pursue
their objectives and believe in themselves. As others have managed before them, they too can achieve their goals if they try hard enough but at the same time they have to be realistic and not try to bite off more than they can chew.

Prof. JoAnn Cassar  
B.Sc., Ph.D., CSci, CChem, FRSC, FGS, FIIC  
Associate Professor & Head of Department  
Department of the Built Heritage  
Faculty for the Built Environment

I come from a science background (B.Sc Chemistry and Biology first degree) but now find myself as Head of Department within the Faculty for the Built Environment. This in itself indicates an atypical career pathway, which developed through the taking up of opportunities as they arose, and not giving up when the odds seemed to be stacked against me.

The first problem arose when I found myself unable to continue my studies on graduating, due to the political decision taken at the time to close down the Faculties of Science and Arts at the University of Malta. At that point I started to work (in a Quality Control position in a local manufacturing environment) but I still harboured a wish to continue my studies. An opportunity to study for 18 months in Italy on a UNESCO scholarship led me into the field of stone conservation - then a complete unknown to me but which I was willing to try out. I was extremely lucky to meet two mentors in Italy who both taught me and guided me through my studies and then wholeheartedly supported me when I started my professional career with the Government of Malta, at the National Museum of Archaeology. It is with these colleagues that I first started publishing, and accumulated a reasonable number of publications within a few years. These publications eventually proved key to my employment at the University of Malta. Here again I found two exceptional mentors who greatly encouraged me to continue my studies and research. I have not looked back since, going on to obtain a Ph.D. In subsequent years I applied for, and gained promotions to the grade of Associate Professor, and later became the first Head of the Department of the Built Heritage.

I got married during my Ph.D. studies, and it was only through the wholehearted support of my husband, parents and sister, and my immediate
Head at the University of Malta, that I was able to finish my studies successfully. That support continues to this day, and in this way I manage to organize my home and work lives. This of course means long working hours, even during evenings and weekends. However, I also now have the support of a fantastic team, staff members of my Department, who take up more than their fair share of the work, and are also ever present to discuss, debate and decide on Departmental issues.

Throughout my many years at the University of Malta, I have also built up a network of colleagues in other Departments and Faculties who share the same vision and work ethic, and collaborate with me, my colleagues and my students on a regular basis. This informal getting together of like-minded academics has greatly supported my work, and especially the research of my postgraduate students, and I can safely say that much less would have been achieved without their enthusiastic collaboration. This sharing of goals has also led me and my colleagues to be able to reach out to non-university departments and organisations, where we meet on boards and committees, and provide advice on a regular basis to professionals in our field, many of whom have in the past been our students.

My words of advice for young academics (both male and female) at the University are (1) to be passionate about their work (2) to live a balanced life and (3) to seek out in the early stages of their career a mentor (or mentors) who can guide the young academic not only professionally but also personally. Sharing of ideas and ideals with colleagues, both inter- and intra-departmental, is also key to a successful career.

Ms Maria Cutajar

B.Ed.(Hons), B.Sc., M.A.(Open)

Junior College Senior Lecturer II

Department of Information Technology & Computing

Junior College

I consider my career as an integral part of my life journey, a unique trajectory through time. Nowadays I don’t look back on this aspect of my trajectory and the different events and situations that I lived through as “obstacles” slowing me down or as conveyors helping me forward in my career and my life in general. I prefer to accept all experiences as enriching elements contributing to my self-development.

Favoured or unfavoured, all experiences are learning opportunities. This is the spirit in which I write and share these few autobiographical comments.

Graduating in educational studies in the nineteen eighties, I went into full-time employment as a teacher with the education department and a steady relationship with he who is now my husband of twenty-three years. Before
the graduation I started to attend lectures of an evening diploma course which was already in its third year and which was later to become an undergraduate degree programme - the Bachelor of Science (Mathematics, Logic and Computing). When still reading this study programme, I found myself as a teaching staff member of the new post-secondary school of Banking and Computing where I gained my first five years' experience teaching Computing at post-secondary level. It was during this time that I was married and had my two children.

With the responsibility of two very young children and a husband starting up his own business, working from home in parallel with his full-time job, my feeble attempt to carry on with postgraduate studies proved impossible to cope with. Shifting employer but not the job, for a decade I focused on teaching practice, raising my children and supporting my husband in his entrepreneurship. I resumed academic studies when my children were into their secondary school years and my husband started to move his business activities to other premises away from home.

A University of Malta scholarship helped fund my studies on open and distance education with a leading UK university. It was through this experience that I started to give some of my students a form of e-learning experience. Supported by an MGSS scholarship I am now a confirmed Ph.D. candidate exploring aspects of the student experience of e-learning.

I find myself constantly adjusting my balancing act of work, study/research and family. Being organized and self-directed are significant issues but so too are the multitude of other influencing factors such as the needs of related stakeholders within the family and without, and academic achievement. Worth mentioning is the expense of professional development (and academic studies in general): I doubt whether I would have been comfortable forking out the exorbitant tuition fees over and above the substantial amount of money required to pursue formal learning, if it wasn’t for the scholarships I won. Additionally, I enjoy a supportive and conducive attitude at home. There are also several others in my life who support me in my academic development.

My focus remains on knowledge, knowing and becoming. As a teacher at the Junior College I seek to serve students simultaneously through my teaching practice and my doctoral research work which, directly and indirectly, feeds back into my practice.

Whatever gender, status, age, race...we are all humans, each with a unique combination of skills, talents and potential. We all have a lot to give and take -
we are all teachers and learners to each other. It is not how ‘high’ one appears to be advancing (or has advanced) in her career and in her life at large, but how happy one is in pursuing it, the extent to which one feels she is living a balanced life by pursuing it, and how fulfilled one feels as a person and in relation to the world at large.

Dr Ing. Claire De Marco
B.Mech.Eng.(Hons), P.G.C.E., Ph.D., C.Eng., MRINA
Senior Lecturer
Department of Mechanical Engineering
Faculty of Engineering

I obtained my doctorate in the UK during the period 1989 – 1992. I was employed with the UK university where I studied and therefore I was able to finance my tuition and living expense from my employment. Finances were a bit tight to say the least, but I managed. In the first year I was living on campus with many other international students; living was made considerably easier because of this. After marrying at the end of the first year, my husband joined me in the UK where he also undertook further studies. In fact, I was quite lucky that I did not have any major obstacles (as far as I can remember). The only issue I had to contend with was that I had a work permit, and a three year fixed term contract, since Malta was still outside the EU, and I had to finish my Ph.D. within the three year time limit – which I achieved even with some time to spare.

On my return to Malta – many years after attaining my Ph.D. and doing a post doctorate, I joined the University as a Lecturer at the Junior College, in the Department of Mathematics. I lectured both Pure and Applied Mathematics. I remained at the Junior College for 5/6 years at that grade. I then successfully attained the Post of Lecturer in the Engineering Department. About six months later, I applied for promotion to the grade of Senior Lecturer. Since I had the necessary qualifications and requirements, regarding publications ....my promotion to Senior Lecturer was attaine. Within the Department/Faculty I have not had any hurdles due to my gender.

Where do I begin! … Yes I have a family with three children now aged: 12, 10 and 8. The fact that I work at the University and work is flexible and VPN
Modelling Lives

access is established, work which is non-lecturing, can be done both at the University and home, at any time of the day during the week. The drawback or help, time wise, to this is that this connection makes it so easy to do more work out of working hours (a curse or a blessing?). The children nowadays have many different activities – “dutrina”, many sporting activities – between the three of them we have football, taekwondo, hockey, swimming. Most activities start at 4.45 p.m. to 7.30 p.m. These spread over six days of the week (even Sundays are occupied with tournaments on probably 20 weeks of the academic year). Children school activities and commitments also provide many conflicts, days when they do not have school – Teacher training days, parents days, concert days, mid-term holidays, half days during exam time, half days in the summer term when academics have many deadlines, and then there are the summer holidays – this is the most trying period! Household duties have their own schedules Therefore, time management is the most crucial element of my life. Perhaps the reason why I manage is because I have a supporting husband and children who know that things have to be done according to all the activities and commitments. Not an easy task.

On the whole the University is not a bad place to work. The administration within the Faculty, if possible, accommodates your request for lecture/tutorial/lab time, so that really helps. However, we are very understaffed for the number of students within the Faculty, and the number of final year student projects which tend to be lab/simulation/build/workshop are far too numerous. Funding is inadequate for us to have so many projects of this type. Purchasing of items for the projects and research are also excessively time consuming and the whole process is far too slow, even with the new AIMS system. Staff facilities within the faculty are a bit lacking, no common academic meeting room to meet and talk causally – the canteen is not appropriate for a quick coffee and chat. Offices are located in places wherever there is a small space left. My office is in the middle of all the lecture rooms and theatres, the noise is unbearable at times, doors banging on the windy days, smoke filtering through closed windows … I cannot even open my windows without someone looking in or getting puffs of second hand smoke. However, at least I have a good air conditioning system in my office.

In all fairness I believe that for women the University and my Faculty do not discriminate on gender. Also, family persons, both male and female, can find that the University system allows enough flexibility for family and work life to interact. The question is – do family members support each other enough? – is there a give and take? – And does society at large really accept that both parents work equal working times? What I say to other women academics – “you have worked so hard to achieve your qualifications, (normally academics really like their line of study/research and instruction), do not waste the talent you have been given, if I or others can do it, so can you …. It is up to you”.
Prof. Carmen Depasquale
B.A.(Hons)(Lond), M.A.(Tours), D.E.A.(Sorbonne),
Doct. es Lettres(Sorbonne), L.P.(Melit)
Visiting Associate Professor
Department of French
Faculty of Arts

When I had the necessary qualifications to further my studies in French at the University of Malta, the only course on offer was a BA General. So, I registered with the University of London as an external student for a B.A. (Hons) degree in French. At the same time, I trained as a secondary school teacher at Mater Admirabilis Training College. I taught French at Secondary School level, then at Sixth Form level for five years. In 1967, I was seconded to teach at Junior College.

I had to resign from my post ‘because I was going to get married’ and was allowed to carry on with the same teaching duties. However, my status was no longer of a permanent nature. Three children were born, I continued to teach at the University, but my appointment continued to be of a non-permanent nature as it was renewed year after year. At the time, maternity or parental leave was unheard of and I could carry on teaching (for some years on a half time basis) as I relied heavily on my parents.

An MA course in French did not exist at the University of Malta and I had to spend a year in France if I wanted to register for an MA course at any French University. It was impossible for me to abandon my family for a year.

Years later, I registered for an MA degree with the University of Tours as I was not required to spend a whole year in Tours. Still, it was impossible for me to further my studies in any French university unless I resided there. As soon as this requirement was lifted, I registered with the Université de Paris-Sorbonne (Paris IV) for a Docteur en Lettres modernes and obtained my doctorate in November 2000 avec les félicitations du jury, equivalent to cum laude. During this time, my visits to Paris were frequent and this was made possible through a scholarship I obtained from the University of Malta. These visits mainly took place during the holidays as I continued with my teaching duties except for a six-month sabbatical during the final phase of my thesis.
For the reasons explained above, my status was for a long time that of Assistant Lecturer. I was then promoted to Lecturer, Senior Lecturer and, in 2007, Associate Professor. My application for a full professor has been pending for over 4 years. I was Head of Department between February 2001 and September 2010. My status changed to that of Visiting Associate Professor as from October 2010.

Good planning is of utmost importance. With young children one cannot do without massive help, in my case, from my parents, especially when both husband and wife bring work home! As children grow older, especially when they leave home, working on papers and publications becomes easier, as such work can only be carried out on weekends and holidays!

“Where there is a will there is a way”. It is not easy for women to find a balance between the exigencies of family, social life and University life with its demands of teaching, research and administrative work. One should persevere, practise patience, have the right priorities and often, forget oneself!

Ms Pauline Dimech
B.Ed.(Hons), B.A.(Rel.Stud.), M.Th.(Lond.)
Junior College Senior Lecturer II
Department of Religion
Junior College

Nowadays, the number of laity, and of women, who study Theology has grown. Back in 1988, when I started my Religious Studies, theology was only meant to be done by the laity up to Bachelor level. Today the Faculty of Theology is known to encourage female students to continue, though I suspect that this is done more for the funds involved, than for the genuine advancement of women. Someone like me, who has taken theology to academic heights, and who specialized in Systematic Theology (rather than Spirituality, Pastoral Studies and Religious Education), is considered odd. Finding the funds to study abroad has been very difficult, since theology is not a priority subject for the Government. It is the Seminarians, and the newly ordained priests, whom the Church encourages, and supports (even financially) for more intensive studies abroad. Consequently, it is males, and generally Catholic priests who take on the full time Teaching Posts at the Faculty of Theology.
When I first graduated in Education, in 1987, I started teaching at the Primary School in my own village. My transfer to a Girls’ Junior Lyceum went through two years later. There I taught English and Religion for nine years, and was also Guidance Teacher. For the last three of those years I applied for a transfer, hoping for a change in my career. I found myself teaching at the Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary in 1998. In 2003, I struggled with the Education Division, in order to be allowed the possibility to teach Religion abroad. I was finally granted approval in 2004. My salary abroad was reasonable enough, enabling me to save for a full-time Master Degree at Heythrop College, London, which I did the following year. I paid for this Degree in Systematic Theology out of my own earnings. It was very hard financially, but worthwhile. Since 2008, I have been teaching at the Junior College, and am now working on a Part-Time Doctorate with a foreign University. Again, most of the expenses have to come out of my own pocket. The hurdles concerning my theological studies have always been the greatest hurdles I have had to overcome. Being a female ‘teacher of Religion’ is not considered to be extraordinary, but being a female ‘lecturer in theology’ is!

Since I am not married, it is probably easier for me to balance work and home. However, I would not say that it is always easy. Being single does not mean being uncommitted. My housework often suffers, and I do not always eat healthily. I belong to the SDC (popularly known as the Museum), which means that I have other obligations, besides family and work. At work, I have sometimes felt that being a single woman was not always understood. I have sometimes had to take over extra responsibilities, or to suffer inconveniences, when colleagues of mine went on pregnancy leave, or when parents with younger children had their timetable adjusted, whereas my own needs and responsibilities were not always respected.

I am a Senior Lecturer at the Junior College and I love my job. I love being with young people, and I hope that my own love for my subject (and for what I believe in) is contagious. When I finish my Ph.D. studies, I would very much like to be able to give a course or two at University. At the College, we are not part of the Faculty of Theology. But there are advantages to belonging to a small and independent Department. I find that the central system of Administration at the College is a bit too bureaucratic. There are sometimes restrictions which I think are totally unnecessary. I believe that the right balance for dealing with the JC staff has yet to be found. It is not clear whether they are to be recognized as academics or as teachers. I would like to think that any restrictions that I have experienced myself have been due to this lack of clarity, and not to the fact of being a woman.

I would like to remind women who are interested in pursuing their theological studies that we need women theologians who would introduce new perspectives to our understanding of reality and of the Divine, and to provide innovative theological perspectives. I would like to emphasize that it is not the doctorate that makes us theologians. Prayer and suffering are the greatest teachers. However,
today we need women who are qualified academically, because we need women to be taken seriously, especially in a context where things are often managed by males. My advice is for women to discern – in prayer and before God – whether this is their vocation. And if it is, to be willing to suffer some unpleasantness, in order that a more balanced picture may be conveyed.

Prof. Helen Grech  
Ph.D. (Manchester)  
Associate Professor & Head of Department  
Deputy Dean  
Department of Communication Therapy  
Faculty of Health Sciences

Encouragement and support from colleagues and the family (particularly, my husband) helped me persevere. I wanted to be a role model for my daughters, in relation to being a working mother with stamina whose priority would remain the family. The full-time responsibilities at the University of Malta during my Ph.D. studies (which involved commuting between Malta and the UK during the recess periods) slowed the pace.

I worked as a Research Assistant on casual basis between 1991 and 1992. I was appointed Assistant Lecturer between 1992 and 1998. On completion of my Ph.D. in 1998, I was appointed Lecturer. I kept this post until 2005 when I was promoted to Senior Lecturer. and I was recently promoted to Associate Professor. During the past 20 years at the University of Malta I was responsible for heading a Division at the Institute of Health Care which more recently became a Department within the Faculty of Health Sciences. I now have an additional role as Deputy Dean.

Trying to strike a balance between family, work and studies/research is not easy, particularly when you have to deal with unforeseen circumstances. You end up working in the evenings, during weekends and recesses to catch up with the work load and meet deadlines, particularly since you need to cope with administration, lecturing and research.

Work at the University is challenging, interesting, fulfilling but exhausting for a woman with a family. You need to be flexible and juggle around your day in
order to honour work and family commitments. Looking back, I am amazed at how I managed to cope with 3 full-time jobs (i.e., family affairs, academic post and the research commitments).

Be passionate about your work and research. Make sure that you get family support as this will keep you going. Take pride in your achievements and be cautious so as not to over-load yourself. Try and strike a balance between work and life style as it may eventually reflect on your health status/wellbeing.

Dr Anna Khakee  
B.A.(Lund), D.E.S.(Grad.Inst.,Geneva),  
Ph.D.(Grad.Inst.,Geneva)  
Senior Lecturer  
Department of International Relations  
Faculty of Arts

I had a good thesis advisor and a good co-advisor, who provided me with timely comments and together gave good all-round advice (on theory, methodology, empirical material, structure, style and language, etc.). This helped me tremendously. For financial reasons, I had to work as a TA for the first three years of my dissertation writing. This of course slowed the process considerably, but was an enriching experience in other ways. A set of scholarships then allowed me to spend a year as a guest student abroad while focusing entirely on my Ph.D. and on conducing field research. This was invaluable.

I was married but had no children before getting my doctorate. I used to joke that the dissertation was my baby, keeping me occupied day and night. My son was born three years after I had finished my Ph.D. and I would personally have found it impossible to complete a Ph.D. while being responsible for a baby.

After completing my Ph.D., I worked as a Researcher and then Senior Researcher at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva. Before joining the University of Malta, I also worked several years as a consultant to various institutions across Europe. Both these occupations boosted my list of publications. When I started in October 2011 at the University of Malta, I was hired at the level of Senior Lecturer: I have thus not gone through
any process of promotion(s) so far at the University. As a consequence, for me, more contextual information complementing the formal requirements stated in the Collective Agreement regarding the next step (to Associate Professor) would be very useful.

I have a very supportive husband, who takes joint responsibility for our son’s upbringing and for what needs to be done around the house. This has always been invaluable, as I couldn’t imagine leaving the upbringing of our son too much in the hands of others.

However, having a small child is always time-consuming, and it is obvious that I would be able to work more (and in particular publish more) had I not had a home/family life. But, on the other hand, I think that without a home/family life, I would have been a less humane colleague and lecturer to the students.

I feel privileged to work at University. It is an environment which I cherish, and I like both teaching and research in equal measure. My greatest concern is that which is shared by most academics everywhere I guess: finding enough time to do research. I am teaching a number of quite different courses, which makes it more difficult to maintain and deepen my core expertise.

Well, I am a Senior Lecturer myself, but for female academics at earlier stages in their careers, I would probably stress that it is important to have the courage and the perseverance to publish continuously, if possible at least one publication a year, even when it is tough. If one does not write continuously, I find that it is easy to lose confidence in one’s ability to do so.

Dr Janet Mifsud
B.Pharm.(Hons)(Melit.), Ph.D.(Q.U.B.)
Senior Lecturer
Department of Clinical Pharmacology & Therapeutics
Faculty of Medicine & Surgery

The main difficulties I had 20 years ago were the mentalities and the support infrastructure. Child care facilities did not exist in Malta, but I was very lucky that since I did my Ph.D. abroad these were available. It was also an added advantage that my husband and I did our PhDs in the same university so we could share taking care of our daughter if she was unwell. My Ph.D. supervisors were also very supportive. Family support in Malta was also very good. The main issues were after school care which still lacking in Malta - these are available in UK - and all the extracurricular activities schools organize which mix up schedules.

The main issues with promotions are the huge administrative nature of academic work at the University which is not well recognized. Academic work is not a 9 to 5 job – having AWRF resources for a laptop means that you
are expected to work from home – few realize what a long time it takes to prepare University lectures which need to be updated annually, and how much we have to work from home to get anything done. There are too many meetings, committees, etc. even over the summer months and in the holidays which leaves little time to publish which is what is considered to be most important for a promotion. The reality also is that the bulk of child care and house work is still generally considered female domain in Malta.

I think that the fact that we spend all our free time at home working on the computer – even Saturdays and Sundays – answering emails – everyone expects immediate replies to queries, students expect immediate meetings, creates conflict. This greatly impinges on our work life balance leaving us little time to relax. In addition our international commitments in connection with our academic work mean travel abroad and that leaves a lot of juggling of timetables and schedules.

It is interesting, always changing, one day is never like the next, students change, one is quite independent too within the constraints of the organization. It is a pity, however, that we find little time to mix with colleagues from other departments and faculties. Unless one goes up to the Common Room for lunch/coffee we never meet – and usually we are lecturing during lunch/coffee hours anyway. It is a pity and we are missing out on the advantage that we have a campus university...all on one site ... we have so much to learn from each other – how many of us know people outside our faculty?

Don’t be afraid to ask for advice if you are not sure of anything – better to be safe than sorry. Also try to preempt problems and don’t manage by crisis.
My first engagement at the University of Malta was as an Assistant Lecturer. Then, seven years later, on obtaining my doctorate, I applied for and was promoted to Lecturer. I was eligible to apply for promotion to Senior Lecturer after five years of full-time employment at Lecturer level. However, due to an extremely heavy workload (at the time I was coordinating and lecturing on both an undergraduate and a new Masters level course) somehow another 12 months went by before I submitted my application. I was promoted to Senior Lecturer within a few months of applying; but this meant that technically I had missed out on one year’s progression and salary at Senior Lecturer level.

It took me nearly seven years to complete my doctorate. Due to lack of local expertise, I enrolled as a part-time student at a university abroad whilst retaining my lecturing post at the UoM. In the initial years, when I was still engaged as a part-time lecturer, I split my year between lecturing and initial research periods in Malta, study and consultation periods at the university abroad, and reading and initial writing in a third country where my spouse was posted on government duty. This constant moving around was challenging. Halfway through my Ph.D. course I was engaged as a full-time lecturer, coordinating a particular subject area within the Faculty of Education. This increased my responsibilities multifold. Apart from lecturing, assessment and supervision of students’ field placements and dissertations, I was responsible for curriculum development, general day-to-day administration, committee work, liaising with external entities, pastoral work with students and organising a team of around 20 part-time lecturers, amongst others. This left very little time for data collection, reading, reflection and writing up. Eventually, another full-time lecturer was engaged in the area and this meant that some tasks could be shared. It also allowed for me to finally ask for a reduced load in order to concentrate on writing up and submitting my thesis.
Financial matters cannot be overlooked. Fees for the first three years of the Ph.D. course, when tuition costs were substantially higher and my personal income as a part-time lecturer substantially lower, were paid out of personal funds. This was a burden. Luckily, for the last four years of the course, when I became a full-time lecturer, I was successful in obtaining a UoM Scholarship.

What kept me going during this seven-year period? a) Loyalty to the subject area I was coordinating at the FoE; b) My desire to develop professionally and to carry out research which could eventually help develop and influence local policy; c) Supportive Deans, Heads of Departments and colleagues; d) My spouse’s psychological, emotional and financial support in order for me to achieve my personal goal; e) Two loving parents who assisted physically and emotionally to ease my very hectic everyday routine whilst in Malta.

The main issue with my job has always been one of time and accessibility management. A lot of administration and liaising with students and colleagues is done on the computer and via email at home in the evening and on weekends. Although during the last academic year colleagues and I made a pact not to contact each other over the weekend; this was not always possible from a production efficiency perspective and we sometimes let each other down. Working a 7-day week is not conducive to personal wellbeing.

I do not regret my choice of career. I feel I was born to be an educator in the broadest sense and therefore my university lecturing job allows me to satisfy this vocational inclination. Although the bulk of my work is in the FoE, I also lecture students in other Faculties and am often invited as a speaker at other local events. This diversity in audiences is welcome. Having had the opportunity to launch a Master’s programme was also very satisfying, as was the opportunity to go on teaching assignments abroad through the ERASMUS programme.

However, in my 16 years of work experience at the UoM, I feel that administration has been the bulk of my work, followed closely by lecturing and related duties. Very little time has been available for applying for research funding, or to carry out research projects. One of my biggest disappointments is not having periods during the year where one can concentrate on research, or more significantly focus on writing scientific papers for publication. I have lots of publishable material which has only been presented, though well-received, at international conferences, but is not in print. More efficient clerical support is required within our department given its current structure and administrative procedures. Additional teaching staff in our subject area would also allow us to embark on research projects and finance-generating initiatives which could be of benefit to the UoM and also to the local and international community.

In 2012-13 I shall be on Sabbatical Leave. I plan to use this time for ‘catching up’ on various professional endeavours.

What advice would I give to newly-appointed female lecturers? Work with clerical staff so that they are empowered to carry out certain administrative tasks. Learn to ask for time to deliver tasks requested by superiors, and do not
constantly strive to deliver work ‘yesterday’. Learn how to say ‘No’ or offer alternative solutions when a task requested will be personally over-taxing given the resources available. The ‘To Do’ list will never end, so be realistic in setting goals for yourself.

Do your utmost to carry out your duties effectively. Be open and fair with colleagues and students. The respect one can potentially gain from superiors, colleagues, students and the larger community, based on the high standards you seek in what you deliver and your treatment and expectations from others is perhaps one aspect of university employment which grants you most fulfilment.

Yes - do have ‘dreams’ for personal and professional growth, but know how to divide your work and family time. Be strict with yourself. Allow yourself time for leisure, pursuing hobbies and general relaxation. Fit in quality time with your immediate and extended family on a regular basis. Ultimately, THEY are most important!

Dr Kathrin Schödel
M.A., Ph.D.(Erlangen)
Senior Lecturer
Department of German
Faculty of Arts

I obtained my doctorate from a German university, and I enjoyed writing my Ph.D. mainly because I never stopped being fascinated by the topic. From my experience as a student as well as a supervisor, important factors in helping as well as slowing down the writing process are, of course, external circumstances, such as funding, teaching commitments etc., but also motivation and feedback. Constructive feedback is encouraging and motivating; a lack of feedback, but also advice which reflects the supervisor’s interests more than the Ph.D. student’s can be an obstacle. In my view, it is therefore important that a research atmosphere is created which encourages Ph.D. students to signal to their tutors if they need more feedback or if some of the advice they are getting is creating an obstacle for them (for instance, if their own research is actually going in a different direction from that suggested by the supervisor).
I have worked at different universities in Britain, Germany and now Malta, where I have only been for one year – so my career is perhaps not very typical. Hurdles were mainly created by the job market itself. Some forms of all too rigid hierarchical and bureaucratic structures have also been a potential obstacle to fruitful cooperation and professional development. On the other hand, supportive colleagues, whom I have found at all the universities I have worked at, have always been a great help and inspiration.

In my specific situation the main conflict between work and home lies in the geographical situation: I work in Malta, but some part of my private life is, of course, still in my country of origin, Germany. Modern means of communication, however, make the situation less problematic so that I can say that I do not experience any major conflicts between work and home at the moment.

Working at university is a great privilege, which I enjoy every day. Teaching students, who have chosen a subject they are interested in, and collaborating with colleagues enthusiastic for the various issues of their field, is exciting and offers a lot of variety and possibilities for development.

I would recommend self-confidence in following one’s own academic interests, not those seemingly expected by others.

Since job markets in general today demand a lot of flexibility, the main problem about an academic career, namely that permanent jobs often only come at quite a late stage, is perhaps less important now.

An ongoing dialogue with colleagues, for instance about teaching methods, career opportunities, and research, is both fruitful and enjoyable, and in my view, it is rather important that this is encouraged by more senior colleagues.

I have not (consciously) encountered any obstacles related to being a woman, and I believe this is at least partly due to institutionalized measures being taken to ensure gender equality. I was, for instance, able to participate in a mentoring programme for female academics in Germany. This particularly helped me in forming academic networks, which have traditionally been more male dominated.
Dr Sandra Scicluna  
B.A.(Melit.), B.A.(Hons)(Melit.),  
P.G.Dip.Probation Services(Melit.), M.Sc.(Leics.),  
Ph.D.(Leics.)  
Senior Lecturer  
Department of Criminology  
Faculty for Social Wellbeing  

I was supported by university, which was a great help financially. I always found support both at University and at home. Nothing obstructed me or slowed me down.  

I had no hurdles in getting promoted. I was employed as an Assistant Lecturer, started my Ph.D. the following year. After 6 years I got my Ph.D. and was promoted to Lecturer. After 5 years I became a Senior Lecturer.  

There are no conflicts between my work and home life. I like working at University. It enables you to have flexibility in your work and you can easily cope with other demands in your life.  

Go for it.... being female or male is not an issue.  

Prof. Isabel Stabile  
L.R.C.P., M.R.C.S., F.R.C.O.G., Ph.D.(Lond.)  
Associate Professor  
Department of Anatomy  
Faculty of Medicine & Surgery  

I was fortunate in having the unwavering support of my major professor while undertaking my Ph.D. studies at the University of London. I was one of several researchers in a very young department. It certainly helped that my supervisor was trying to make a name for himself in the field. I was provided with several opportunities to present my work both informally and at national and international conferences. I was single at the time and clearly that allowed me the freedom to stay up late at night nurturing my Tissue Cultures and travelling to other laboratories in Europe and further afield. Standing on
the shoulders of giants like Prof. Chard and Prof. Grudzinskas allowed me to hone my presentation skills. However I had given up clinical medicine to pursue my doctorate and I very soon found that my parents’ allowance did not go far enough. Eventually I had to supplement my allowance by doing weekend locums. This played havoc with my Monday morning experiments as in many cases I had been working non-stop since Friday morning (there was no European Working Time Directive in 1985!). In spite of these difficulties I successfully published all parts of my Ph.D. either before or just after the defense. Undoubtedly these dozens of publications helped me negotiate the next stage in my career progression, namely emigration from the United Kingdom to the United States. Having just married and moved to the US, for the first time in my life I was unemployed, and unemployable as a doctor, because of the lack of reciprocal recognition of MD degrees between the US and the UK.

I set about taking the USMLE exams but in the meantime I was able to find employment in a Research Center based on my doctorate. Months later, having passed all the necessary exams to practice medicine in the US but with our first child on the way, I decided to focus my efforts on my research career, again bolstered by the confidence given in me by my superiors. Over the next 10 years I rose within the career structure at Florida State University to Research Professor supervising my own Master’s and Ph.D. students. Three children later, I was leading a Research Center with a budget of approximately $5,000,000.

Personal issues forced my return to Malta, where I landed without a medical or academic job and no recognition of my position as Full Professor at Florida State University. Royalties of a hugely successful book series kept our family afloat financially until I obtained a very part-time position as Demonstrator in the Anatomy Department at the University of Malta. After a couple of years, the then Head of Department, Prof Camilleri Podesta, had the foresight to combine several part time demonstrator positions into one Full Time post. I applied and was fortunate enough to be selected for the Senior Lecturer post. In retrospect, I should have insisted on a position as Associate Professor, but cognizant of the fact that my late husband was unwell, and with three children below the age of 12, I did not wish to take any risks, especially since Maltese salaries are about one tenth of what I was earning in the US. After one year of probation, I applied for a promotion and was successful 3 years later! Quite honestly, I had no idea it would be so difficult for the University of Malta to recognize my previous work in the US. I was naïve enough to think that all you needed were a substantive
number of publications in the peer-reviewed literature (at that point I was up to about 120!) It was indeed an eye-opening experience. I am aware that some of my peers waited even longer than 3 years to achieve promotion and I do appreciate the need for the University of Malta to trust a third party organization with the screening and evaluation process. Nevertheless the three year wait was interminable. The only silver lining is that once promoted, the salary increase was back-dated to the date of application. This was very much appreciated.

I was blessed with a husband who believed that my career was as important as his, and who shared our child-raising responsibilities. In that happy environment, I experienced no conflicts whatsoever.

I enjoy every single day. I love to teach and I find inspiration in the hundreds of medical students who have enriched my academic life. One of my colleagues used to say that at the University of Malta “no news is bad news”. I tend to agree. When one’s request in writing for clarification regarding administrative issues does not receive an acknowledgement, one needs time and energy to find out whose desk the matter is stuck on and then find a “saint” (I think the Maltese word is more suited) to resolve the matter. I am convinced that the administrative structures at the University of Malta could collaborate much better with the academic staff for the benefit of students. It is only by putting students at the center of all our decisions that we can truly offer a quality educational experience for all.

Never give up. Seek help and advice from your peers. Trust in your knowledge, skills and abilities. Believe in yourself. Be thankful to those who have helped you succeed and look forward to strengthening relationships that could be improved.

Prof. Yosanne Vella  
B.Ed. (Hons), M.A.(Lond.), M.Phil.(Lond.), Ph.D.(U.W.E.Brist.)  
Associate Professor  
Department of Arts & Languages in Education  
Faculty of Education

I was very much encourage by my then Head of Department Dr Joseph Mifsud to start my Ph.D. after about two years that I’d joined the university as an Assistant Lecturer in 1996. So his motivation was a factor. Another aspect which greatly helped me was that I already had a Masters and an MPhil and had already published, attended conferences, given papers, etc., so I was quite familiar with the academic world and knew exactly how to go about it. My MPhil tutor had been of little use so I was careful to select the right tutor for my Ph.D. and I couldn’t have made a better choice. She was a lovely lady and I was her
first Ph.D. student and she was 100% supportive and gave me a lot and a lot of attention and time. I also had two babies, a new born and a three year old, and a husband, and strangely enough this made me focus more, in the sense that I reasoned, I either concentrate fully and do this Ph.D. really fast or not at all. I in fact managed to complete it part-time in three and a half years by eliminating all distractions like outside projects, conferences, leisure, etc. and just worked on my Ph.D. and gave my lectures (which by the way in my time there were no half loads so I still taught all my units).

So in my case it was quite a positive story and nothing slowed me down; being super ambitious and driven in those days must also have helped.

Once I got my Ph.D. I concentrated on publishing with the aim of gaining the 17 reviewed articles needed for promotion to Associate Professor. It almost became a game for about 7 years I was very busy researching accumulating publications in reviewed journals, and ending up with a total of 32 publications. Again it was a positive experience because one year and a half after I applied in 2008, I was informed (to my surprise because I had heard of so many stories of people being refused that I didn’t think I would get it) that I had in fact been promoted to Associate Professor.

Strangely enough now in my middle age with two teenage children and a husband, I am experiencing conflict for the first time. Teenagers are very demanding and, unless a parent is very careful, they can easily derail. This fact combined with the reality that I’m getting older and therefore have less energy, leads to moments where I feel I cannot cope and I sometimes feel exhausted. The drive and ambition is not so sharp anymore and I feel I want to enjoy life more. I want more time with my husband, romancing and traveling, and more time for myself as a woman doing mundane things which I never had time for before, like going to a hairdresser or for a coffee with girlfriends!

It sounds like a cliché but I feel we as a university are becoming more and more bureaucratic with more and more administrative duties which take up a lot of time and energy and are not really of any academic value and for which I feel we don’t have the proper training for. There are aspects of academic life I really enjoy like conducting research and I still get a thrill when a paper of mine is published. I also enjoy teaching and learning from my teacher trainees and demonstrating the pedagogy in real school classrooms.

I never regretted having children while still continuing my research work and a full time job. Work alone is not enough and a family alone is not enough. Looking back je ne regrette rien! I chose the correct path. Some young female
lecturers have confided in me that they are thinking of not having any children because they are afraid they will not cope. In my opinion that is a mistake; a career on its own in the long run will not be satisfying. You need a man and children too.

Dr Marion Zammit Mangion
B.Sc., M.Biotech.(Kent), Ph.D.(Westmin.), Pg.Cert.H.E.
Senior Lecturer
Department of Physiology & Biochemistry
Faculty of Medicine & Surgery

In the mid-nineties the major obstacle to furthering one’s studies was a financial one. In my case I was awarded a rare scholarship from a University in the UK that covered both subsistence and bench fees.

There have been no hurdles till now. I was promoted to the grade of Senior Lecturer as soon as I fulfilled the criteria for reaching this level

There is no conflict between my work and family life.

I enjoy all aspects of work from lecturing to research and have a good support network.

Anonymous
Senior Lecturer

I received my doctorate independently, prior to employment in the University, after having been awarded a tuition scholarship by the overseas university where I was pursuing my M.A. studies and where I was teaching on postgraduate programmes. During my doctoral studies away I had excellent supervisory support throughout. I also had an excellent supportive family structure in Malta. I self-funded all my other study expenses and travel outside my scholarship, financing myself through lecturing and supervisory professional work. I performed excellently.

There have been no obstacles therefore, other than the difficulty of displacement on return to Malta and the tedious struggle to acquire a resident teaching position in my field in the university. The particular hurdles experienced have been in finding a supportive platform for further research development and contribution in my specialism or an encouraging system allowing for it to be created. Such an environment has not been conducive to advancement. Needless to say, I have found this disappointing considering also the financial saving for the university in having acquired a professional with completed doctoral qualifications and
wide experience. The feeling has often been that of disempowerment by a surrounding dominant hierarchy having an influence regarding people’s progress that seems to be controlled by an underlying male culture, obstructing others out of self-interest, fear, or guarded conventional views. I have been aware of male counterparts of far less or adequate qualifications, competence or achievement, acquiring higher positions ahead of others more deserving. This, of course, could be put down to anything from gender, to preferential treatment, to protectionism in a faculty where male influence is very dominant. A crippling factor, perhaps related to this, has been a consistent lack of consultation in matters of educational or academic development where personal expertise could have been of value. On the other hand, sideling generally seems to take place even in decisions that directly affect or concern one as a lecturing professional in one’s own teaching choices for instance. Issues never seem to be put on the table for open discussion and democratic involvement. This comes across as a sense of dictating decisions already determined for one without any choice. Chauvinism comes in different forms, whether from direct lack of support or stifling opportunities for academic development, to poaching ideas, prejudiced and patronizing attitudes. Clearly, such obstacles are counter-productive regardless of gender, and only serve to hinder personal academic development while damaging the University’s integrity in general.

There have been no conflicts between work, home and family in my career. I have always managed to balance these different compartments of my life quite efficiently and with little trouble. Circumstances have made me a financial breadwinner, a situation not helped by exceedingly slow promotion. Balancing between family and profession does of course demand different prioritizing, but I have managed to keep these decidedly contributory and synergetic to one another. Fortunately, having a highly encouraging family environment has always been significantly reassuring.

My work at University remains constructive and positive even when power struggles around can consume energy and waste time. I have contributed beyond expectancy during my appointment and would have achieved far more without the obstruction of others in the faculty who either exploit their position or deliberately stunt opportunities that they may find threatening. My energy therefore, is focused on getting on with my work and moving forward without intrusion. I see myself as a highly successful and popular tutor, as well as a resourceful and productive contributor in my professional work and personal research, which has continued to advance with great satisfaction and success. It is time, however, that prevailing bigoted and dominant thinking gives way to fresh-minded individuals who are motivated towards betterment and positive change.

My advice to other female academics would be to stand their ground and invest confidence in their professional development and excellence to be able to advance, with the encouragement from the University, to senior management.
positions, currently heavily swayed by male academics. The University is a place to inspire young people who will form our future societies. Recognition and change should grow out of this opportunity to culture balance and impartiality, and replace systems that have become worn and outdated.

**Anonymous**
Senior Lecturer

I started my Ph.D. when I was 32 years. I waited until then because I was waiting for a scholarship. And I got two in one year!

With regards to promotion, I have to wait until my head of department gets his, and then apply for mine. I got my Ph.D. before him, unfortunately. I am the only woman in a department full of men, so I have to tread on egg shells and constantly assuage male egos.

A lot of conflict exists between my work and family responsibilities. My husband believes that raising a kid and taking care of the house is a woman’s job, even though he goes on TV spouting a lot of progressive blah, blah, blah. The fact that I have to take care of my kid from 1.15pm onwards means that when I have to do research, and meet MA students, I have to engage the help of my mother-in-law who is 81. I also find it very problematic to attend conferences abroad because my husband would make her life hell if I left her with him.

As an academic involved in the social sciences, I am a little disgusted with the political undercurrents blowing through the corridors of academe. These undermine the work ethos and affect students and lecturers negatively.

It took me ages to find a full time job at the university. Please do not give up hope when your every attempt to get into a particular department is rejected. Sometime, somewhere, a door/window will open.

**Anonymous**
Junior College Senior Lecturer

I have been teaching for the past twenty years, the last decade of which in an academic institution. My interest and commitment to teaching in general, and to my area of specialisation in the Arts in particular, were the main motivation behind my career journey. I have always worked hard to be able to meet the requirements of any new posts.

I applied for the opportunities that came my way in my line of specialisation. Selection procedure was always by means of interviews. I was always given a fair chance.
My career has never been a threat to my personal life. I am married and my husband is always supportive of any career choices or decisions that I make.

I find my work at University to be both challenging and rewarding. The reading and preparation necessary for my research interest keeps me abreast and motivated. I relate well with my colleagues and students and have never experienced any discrimination of any form. My contribution during meetings has always been well received; my participation in university and/or ‘extra-university’ events has always been welcomed. My work experience has always been very positive.

I hope that other females will have a similar experience where they may be able to pursue their research interests and work in an environment that is not a threat and does not compromise their personal life in any way, but welcomes any contribution they are able to offer. Everyone, including females, should pursue their career dream.
The intention [of this booklet is] to compile personal experiences of a number of senior female academics of the University of Malta about the way in which their academic career progressed. In this way it is hoped that these various contributors will help to serve as role models to their junior counterparts, with the ardent desire that they may be encouraged to persevere in the uphill struggle to achieve a successful academic career.

from the introduction by Prof. Marie Therese Camilleri Podestà, Chairperson of the Gender Issues Committee of the University of Malta

Gender Issues Committee
University of Malta