

Recollections of Nina Thornhill's time at the Department of Electronic and Electrical Engineering, University College London (UCL)

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Abstract: David Selviah received his B.Sc., M.Sc. and Ph.D. degrees from Trinity College, Cambridge and joined UCL in 1987, shortly after Nina. David and Nina worked closely in the department education and administration. David's research focuses on optical devices, interconnects, algorithm and systems. He is a member of the Institute of Physics, Optical Society of America, European Optical Society and is a Chartered Physicist and Chartered Scientist.

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My knowledge of Nina gradually increased over a 20 year period from when I came to Department of Electronic and Electrical Engineering, University College London in 1987 to Nina's move to Imperial College in 2007. As a tutor, I regularly heard praise from my tutees about her teaching style, who said she was one of the best lecturers in the department.

On one occasion a gifted very young student was awarded a place in our department. He was placed into Nina's tutorial group as it was felt she would be best placed to look after and teach him. He achieved an outstanding final degree grade. Many years later he came back to visit me and said how important Nina's teaching and tutoring had been to his success as a professor himself and how he followed her teaching style in his lectures.

Every year Nina would prepare and update a table staff teaching and administration duties, which was very useful for finding out who to contact. I was appointed to be the second marker for several years on Nina's third year students' projects. Through this and the joint vivas (oral exams) we gave these students; I came to know of her interesting research and good supervision practices. I recall projects on conditional entropy methods to locate sources of vibration or sound at valves in the complex interlinked pipework of fluid processing plants.

I carried out Peer Review of her lectures for many years, where I would sit through a control theory lecture of hers and afterwards meet with her to give feedback. Actually, this was probably more of a process of me learning how to lecture better than giving very many comments on how she could improve. I recall how at the start of her lecture she would always list on the whiteboard the bullet points of what she was going to cover in the lecture. Then at the end she would come back to the list and tick off all of the ones she had covered and remind the students what she had said. I also recall her friendly, kind, helpful, calm character.

I recall Nina compiling a list of the skills we should examine in each exam question to make sure everything was covered.

Nina took on the role of IET Accreditation Co-ordinator, I think at the same time as she was Head of Teaching and Deputy Head of Department. I don't know how she managed to do so much administration at the same time, all very efficiently. In those days the Accreditation submission centred around a detailed report and appendices as well as many box files of coursework, exam papers and solutions. I would read, comment and modify the various drafts of the Accreditation report and learning outcomes matrix and Nina would explain to me what needed to be done by what deadlines. I remember how Nina put in an enormous amount of work on gathering the data and compiling the Accreditation submission in 2006-7. As a result, we won accreditation for all of our undergraduate degrees and there was a ceremony in the old Barlow Room to congratulate Nina in which she was given a lovely bunch of flowers.

When Nina left, she was so efficient that she left a set of fully indexed CDs of all of her past teaching and administrative duties, which were very useful in subsequent years.

Subsequently, I took on the IET Accreditation Co-ordinator role as Nina had taught me how to do it during the time I shadowed her leading to the successful accreditation of all of our undergraduate and masters degrees twice in the following 12 year period.

In 2011 when my past PhD student became a lecturer and now professor in my department, he found her lecture notes, sets of problems, solutions to the problems and PowerPoint presentations for her circuits course very useful. So, her legacy to teaching and administration continues to influence us today.

I wish her a long, happy, interesting and healthy retirement.