Alumna of the month

Introduction
Philippa Benton was a student in the UCL Department of Greek and Latin from September 2005 to June 2009 and graduated with a first class honours BA Classics with Study Abroad degree. She spent her third year as an Erasmus student in Siena, Italy.

What did you enjoy most about your time in Greek and Latin and at UCL?
The breadth of courses that I took in addition to the standard Greek and Latin language and literature. I was able to learn the basics of linguistics, see how Latin evolved right through to Medieval times, and explore the modern context of how and why Roman Love Poetry has been translated. And, of course, the ten months I spent as an Erasmus student at Universita degli Studi in Siena, Italy.
What was your career path like after leaving UCL?
Like many people I didn't have a clear idea what I wanted to do. I decided that a graduate scheme with a large organisation would give me a good grounding in the world of work. I was interested in working in the public sector and applied for a few things during my final year. By my finals, I had a place on the Ministry of Defence's finance graduate scheme for the autumn. I spent three years on placement, mostly in the MOD's procurement agency (Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S)) in Bristol, but I also worked in the Head Office in Whitehall. I worked on the finances of various military equipment projects, as well as at an MOD corporate level, all the while studying and doing exams for my CIMA accountancy qualification. Doing those exams, after five years of absolutely no numerical work, and alongside a full-time job was an eye-opener! But very satisfying when I finally qualified in January 2012. I took a step out of finance eighteen months ago to work in the DE&S Policy Secretariat, and am soon to move back to London to work in the Head Office again.

What do you like most about your current job?
Every government department has a Secretariat, which is the team that deals with Parliamentary and Ministerial business, as well as correspondence with the public and elements of media relations. It is often high-paced and high profile, reacting to the current issues in defence. This is especially true of the desk I work on – nuclear submarines! I enjoy the huge range of work, the unpredictability of each day, but also seeing my work published on Hansard, the Parliamentary record, or quoted in the news by “an MOD spokesperson”! 
What was your first-ever job?
Saturday job in a greasy spoon cafe!

What has been your favourite job?
Other than my current job, I really enjoyed my time managing the finances for the delivery of several different types of communications kit to the Army in Afghanistan. It was great to receive confirmation from the soldiers in Camp Bastion that the kit was working well, and realising that my endless hours tied up with spreadsheets in my Bristol office had played a part out there!

In what way did your studies help you in your subsequent work?
A BA Classics with Study Abroad might not seem directly useful for accountancy but, some of the more complicated financial reconciliations or accounting treatments require the same analytical skills as picking apart a lengthy sentence of Cicero or a completely baffling passage of unseen Greek verse! In my current job, my language skills and awareness of language structure and grammar has been invaluable for drafting concise and readable documents very quickly.

What do you remember most about your time in UCL Greek and Latin?
The stand-out experience from my degree has to be my year abroad in Siena. Not only because of the interesting courses I attended at the university there, but also because of the amazing opportunity to immerse yourself in a different culture and the sense of achievement when you realised you were finally managing to keep a conversation going with your Italian flatmate! Whilst my Latin and Greek may have slightly fallen by the wayside, I have kept my Italian going and I practise whenever I can. Back in London, though, I have fond memories of hours spent in Room 106 (the wood panelled teaching room on the first floor!).

Of what are you most proud about UCL?
That it is one of the top universities in the world.

What is your favourite part of UCL?
The location – the whole of London right on your doorstep! I also rowed for UCL so it was great to escape to Chiswick a few times a week, and to be part of the lively social life attached to UCL sports.
What, in your opinion, would improve UCL?
Perhaps a better focus on developing a stronger sense of belonging to UCL. Whilst there was definitely loyalty to particular clubs, societies, departments, I think the “UCL identity” could be improved.

Tell me something about yourself that most people don’t know!
Although I don’t row anymore (my weekends are too valuable now!), I do spend much of my free time running in preparation for whatever half-marathon, or marathon, is next on the cards. It is a great antidote to the hours spent in the office, even if it is grey, cold and wet!