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- Total area: over 2 700 km²
- Population: 7.4 million
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¹ THE Young University Rankings, 2017 ² QS University Rankings: Top 50 Under 50, 2018 ³ QS World University Rankings, 2018



Building Bridges to Success



Charikleia Stoura

PhD Student in Civil Engineering
Recipient, Hong Kong PhD Fellowship

A specialist in the field of vehicle-bridge interaction in railway systems, Charikleia's research focuses on the dynamic response of trains moving on high-speed railway bridges during earthquakes. The primary goal of her work is to evaluate the safety and reliability of high-speed railway train-bridge systems. As high-speed rail networks expand worldwide, this area of research offers a whole host of opportunities in both the academic and industrial fields. In just her second year of study, her work explores areas of civil engineering that are little-studied and is showing great promise for future publication.



Becoming an HKUST Student

Following the completion of her undergraduate degree, Charikleia decided to leave Athens to pursue her studies outside of Europe. Looking for a more challenging environment that offered greater academic and employment prospects, she came across the work of Associate Professor (and fellow Greek) Ilias Dimitrakopoulos, her future supervisor and mentor. Her interest piqued by his research, she successfully applied to study an MPhil at HKUST. Such was her satisfaction with her MPhil experience, both academically and socially, she elected to continue to pursue her studies at HKUST and began a PhD.

"HKUST could offer me all the opportunities I was looking for: a competitive, but friendly working environment in one of the top universities in the world, an international society and, of course, the chance to meet and work with people with different background and mentality."

Providing a Support Base

As one of the world's top-ranked research institutions, HKUST has offered Charikleia a fantastic platform to pursue her vehicle-bridge interaction research.

"Research life in HKUST is incredible. HKUST provides all students with the necessary supplies and equipment in order to conduct their research. The students do not have to worry about the resources, something that is not granted in other universities, thus can be devoted in their research."

Alongside the extensive resources for cutting-edge research HKUST provides its students, she has found the quality of teaching to be top-notch and developed a close working relationship with her supervisor. A focused researcher with similar interests, Charikleia has found collaborating with Professor Dimitrakopoulos to be both fruitful and inspirational.

"I find that his work is very interesting and delicate, which motivates me to do the best that I can in my research."

Of critical importance to their productive partnership was his advice to apply for the prestigious Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme. A generous grant offered by the Hong Kong government, it has allowed Charikleia to flourish at HKUST, and she considers securing it to be the most impressive achievement of her budding academic career.



Becoming a Mentor

With little experience in teaching before she arrived, HKUST's requirement that postgraduate students work as teaching assistants has proved to be a gratifying experience. Moreover, during this learning experience, Charikleia developed a whole new set of skills she never thought she would possess.

"In the first place, I was insecure about my teaching skills, but after some tutorials, I became more confident and I found it challenging and enjoyable at the same time."

She has found that her position as a postgraduate student is extremely helpful for her students. Lacking the intimidation factor of being a full-blown professor, she can more closely interact with her students and bring the best out of them.

"As a new postgraduate student, it was not many years ago that I was taught the same courses. I was aware of the difficulties that students may face during their learning, so I tried to be better and make my teaching more efficient every time."

A Changed Perspective

Originally planning to use her PhD to secure a lucrative career in industry, Charikleia's time at HKUST has caused her to rethink the opportunities available to her once she finishes her studies.

"Personally, before I came to HKUST, I wasn't really thinking about academia after graduating. I saw myself in the research and development department of a company, so that I would have the chance to continue my research. However, seeing all the great work of the professors and the way the university facilitates and promotes research, I have started thinking about a career in academia."

Charikleia embraces the broad range of opportunities that studying at HKUST offers her. While she finishes her PhD and continues to develop her post-PhD plans, she is keen to take advantage of the university's extensive international connections and institutional relationships.

"What is for sure is that I would like to visit other countries and universities in order to have the chance to challenge myself in different and dynamic working environments, before I decide what kind of career I would like to follow."

