



Season's Greetings

from the
Staff and Students
at the
Department of Biochemistry
at the
University of Otago

17th December 2013

It's been quite a busy year, and so far it is showing no signs of slowing down whatsoever. Presumably the winding down will start this week, at least by the time of our Christmas party on Thursday.

One reason behind why this year has felt so hectic could be the fact that it really has been a very busy year, and a year with much change.

To illustrate my point, here are just a few examples of significant developments (I am sure there are many others) listed in no particular order. Near the start of the year, on 21 February, we held our Research Retreat at St. Margaret's and received an inspiring message from Peter Dearden, outgoing Research Committee Chair, on how to improve our research outputs. Simultaneously many were involved in formulating their Marsden and MBIE grant applications as we worked to adapt to a changing external funding environment. Some were exhausted by these efforts and I received one e-mail stating that they were "just sick of the whole thing!", which was a sentiment shared by many!

Next, in April we received some freshly minted PBRF results in which we did very well. We have 9.54 "A" ranked researchers and are the top PBRF-ranked department in the School of Medical Sciences. There was no time to rest our laurels though, as on 1 May the National Science Challenges were announced. The Government pledged 133.5 M over four years and the scientific landscape over New Zealand was immediately changed. A huge amount of strategic planning has gone into the New Zealand universities' response to these challenges, the rules concerning which seemed to be developed on the fly. One Otago staff member suggested this was akin to "the tracks being laid as the locomotive approached".

But wait there's more! On June 10th of this year the CoRE rebid was announced with an EOI due date of 30 September and a final due date of 6 December. These renewals had been brought forward, in a move that some felt favoured existing centres, but regardless, many new CoRE groups put in their applications along with the rebidders. No wonder it's hard to find time to work on papers!

Russell Poulter continued to appear this year in news stories about the kiwifruit vine disease Psa. His paper tracing the origins of the outbreak to tissue imported from China made the New Zealand Herald's list of ten most important NZ science stories of 2013.

I (KK) was interviewed a few times this year with reference to antibiotic resistance, and was even mentioned (for no reason we could fathom) in an article on the Fonterra botulism scare on the satirical website "The Civilian"!

Peter Dearden ran a very successful national "Genetics Week", with genetics stories featured in print and on television, as well as a series of public talks and "hands on" experience for high school students.

It has been a good year for awards. Richard Macknight won the New Zealand Society for Plant Biologists' premier prize, the Roger Slack Award for 2013. Tony Merriman won the Australian Rheumatology Association's award for the presentation of Best Basic (non-clinical) Science Paper for 2013.

Several of our researchers have been successful in gaining funding from various bodies, with three Lotteries Health grants, three Marsden grants, two High Value Manufacturing and Services Research Fund "Smart Idea" grants, and an Australian Research Council grant, amongst others.

Some of you may not be aware that George Petersen had a major health issue this year, and it took a fair while for him to get back on his feet. He is now much better and can again be seen in the Department. It is great to have him back with us again!

Student numbers were very good this year, and we had excellent classes at 2nd, 3rd and 4th years. They were an inspiring group for all of us! Late in January this year we decided as a department to reorganise our third-year course, and this has resulted in the merger of BIOC 354 and 352, as well as the merger of BIOC 355 and 353. These were significant changes for many of our teaching personnel, and we hope these changes will revamp and modernise our teaching offerings as we seek to teach the most exciting and useful biochemistry to our students.

There were two Inaugural Professorial Lectures this year from our new Professors and both were outstanding. In October, we heard from Parry Guilford about the coming revolution in cancer therapy based on molecular research. And just last week, we heard from Julian Eaton-Rye who brought us up to speed on Photosystem II, photosynthesis and biofuels. [You can see Parry's IPL on iTunesU at https://itunes.apple.com/nz/podcast/ipl-cancer-problem-promise/id418963117?i=196840889&mt=2](https://itunes.apple.com/nz/podcast/ipl-cancer-problem-promise/id418963117?i=196840889&mt=2).

As always, there are a few personnel changes that take place during the year. After a series of one-year contracts, and standing room only tutorials, Annika Bokor joined us as a permanent Teaching Fellow. Our research staff had an infusion of youthful intellect when Rutherford Discovery Fellow, Peter Mace returned to us from California. On a sadder note, this year after decades of service to the University, Associate Professor John Cutfield has retired. He was given a splendid sendoff with a dinner on 7 September in the Staff Club, followed later in the year by a morning tea during which he regaled us with his unmatched wit and storytelling and confessed (in jest!) to several clandestine HSNO violations committed over the years! Finally in November he joined with graduate student Matteo Ferla, to host an outstanding quiz night that was huge fun for all of the participants, and won by a nose, in a sing-off by the Marshall-Krause group team.

We hope you enjoyed this summary of our year's events and look forward to hearing from you over the next year.

Email your news to: biochemistry@otago.ac.nz

or

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Best wishes for Christmas and 2012,

from

Kurt Krause and Bronwyn Carlisle, on behalf of

the Biochemistry staff and students

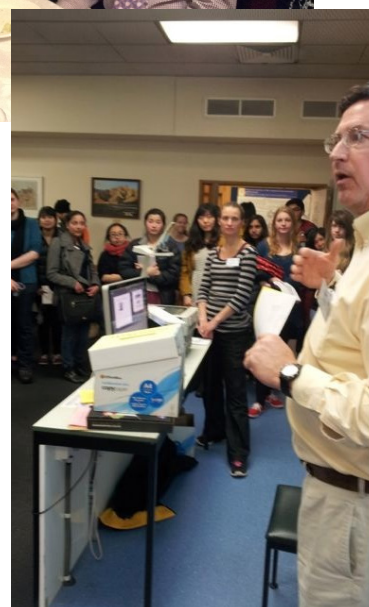
2013 Graduations

This year we have had a part in producing five PhDs (one Genetics, three Biochemistry, one co-supervised with Chemistry), four Biochem MSc graduates, six each of Biochemistry and Genetics BSc(Hons) graduates, eleven Biochemistry and 22 Genetics BSc graduates, two PGDipSci Genetics graduates, and five BBiomedSci graduates.

John and Sue Cutfields' Retirement Dinner at the Staff Club. It was George Petersen's first outing after recovering from his heart attack and we were so pleased to have him with us.



HOD Kurt Krause holding a 3D printed protein dimer



Teaching Fellow Annika Bokor ran another successful open day for prospective Biochemistry students

We had an orientation get together for this year's crop of Summer Students



Quizmaster John

Department Publications for 2013

- Awasthi, A., Woolley, A. G., Lecomte, F. J., Hung, N., Baguley, B. C., Wilbanks, S. M., et al. (2013). Variable Expression of GLIPR1 Correlates with Invasive Potential in Melanoma Cells. *Frontiers in Oncology*, 3, 225. doi:10.3389/fonc.2013.00225
- Bah, C. S. F., Bekhit, A. E.-D. A., Carne, A., & Mcconnell, M. A. (2013). Slaughterhouse blood: An emerging source of bioactive compounds. *Comprehensive Reviews in Food Science and Food Safety*, 12(3), 314–331.
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- Doecke, J. D., Simms, L. A., Zhao, Z. Z., Huang, N., Hanigan, K., Krishnaprasad, K., et al. (2013). Genetic Susceptibility in IBD: Overlap Between Ulcerative Colitis and Crohn's Disease. *Inflammatory Bowel Diseases*. doi:10.1097/MIB.0b013e3182810041
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