University of Otago
Te Whare Wānanga o Otāgo
New Zealand

Department of Anatomy
School of Biomedical Sciences

ANATOMY OTAGO

THE INSIDE STORY

Issue 49, December 2023

Dr Natasha Flack, PhD student Courteney Westlake and Dr Rebecca Bird prepare some of the 140 meal packs for undergradaute Anatomy and Forensics students to collect in the lead-up to their exams.

Food for the soul, and for the exam

An initiative to provide good wholesome food for struggling students in the lead-up to semester two exams was well received by the department's undergraduate students.

Dr Rebecca Bird explains further, *"We were hearing from some of our Anatomy students that they were struggling to have enough money to eat, and they were needing to pick up extra work which in turn interferes with their ability to study. Everyone is feeling the economic squeeze right now, but our students are particularly affected. They are just generally having a tough time."*

Led by Drs Natasha Flack and Rebecca Bird and supported by the department's Equity, Diversity and Belonging Committee, the department's staff and postgraduate students donated lots of food items and over $1,700 in cash which went towards purchasing more food to fill around 140 meal packs.

The packs included fresh and dry ingredients to make a variety of different meals, including pasta-bakes, stir fries, and nacho meals. The students were also able to choose a fun snack item to take away with them, because even if you're on a budget you still deserve a little treat!

Continued on page 2

From the HoDs desk

Professor Christine Jasoni

It is with delight and a huge helping of pride that I write this Head of Department piece for our Anatomy Department newsletter. It is difficult to put words to all the incredible activities that our staff and students have undertaken over these past months. Activities that showcase the Departmental ethos of caring, sharing and belonging. As many of our readers will be aware, our University is in troubled waters, which threaten our livelihoods as staff as well as that of our students. Nevertheless, the Department of Anatomy has overcome the inertia threatening us. We have done so by teamwork, collegiality, dedication and aroha for each other and our students. This accounts for the continued success - as witnessed in these very pages - of our staff and students in their pursuits of research and teaching excellence.

It is no small feat managing a Department of this size, but our staff and students - both those embedded in postgraduate study within the Department as well as those we teach - make the pleasure vastly outweigh all other factors. It would not have been my first choice to have stepped into this role during these times, but in looking back on what other Heads have faced, it seems "there's always something." And as with all the other occassions, I think I can safely say that the Head of Department role is just made that much easier by the attitudes of collegiality, flexibility - the we can make it work attitude - and positivity of staff and students. I thank you all for making my job such a pleasure. The Department of Anatomy is the best Department ever!

Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini
My strength is not that of an individual, but that of the collective.

Ngā mihi,
Christine

Service remembers, honours donors

Around 250 people gathered in Christchurch in October to remember and honour those who have altruistically donated their body to the department for medical science teaching and research. Christchurch-based medical students provided music throughout the service along with their own touching messages of respect, appreciation and thanks for the wonderful gifts that have supported their learning of anatomy.

Dr Richard Storey, a past Otago graduate and now an Orthopaedic Registrar in Christchurch, gave the main address. He spoke of being a grateful recipient during his early days studying anatomy, and the respect a young student has toward their donor which forms the foundations for respect and care for their patients in the journey to become a medical health professional. Photos from the service are on page 12.

Next year's service will be held in Dunedin.

Food for the soul, and for the exam

Continued from page 1

Those students who needed to, called into the department to collect a meal pack. The demand was so great that the initial supply ran out halfway through the first week.

Students were also invited to call into the department on the morning of each Anatomy/Forensics exam for a 'toast breakfast' so that they had a chance to eat something healthy on their exam days.

"The generosity of the people in the department has been amazing" Dr Bird says. *"And the gratitude from the students has been huge. Many who collected care packages or popped in for breakfast on their way to an exam said that they felt cared for and supported by the department and that really was the kaupapa behind all this, to show the students that we actually care about them as people. They're not just a student sitting in the classroom."*

End-of-Year Awards success

Anatomy wins big at School of Biomedical Sciences Awards

The Anatomy flag flew proudly at the School of Biomedical Sciences (BMS) End-of-Year Teaching and Research Awards, with six staff recognised for their outstanding achievements. Our congratulations go to:

Teaching Support Sustained Contribution Award
Awarded to Fieke Neuman

Emerging Teacher Award
Awarded to Dr Mike Garratt

Distinguished Academic Teacher Award
Awarded to Associate Professor Steph Woodley

Research Support Outstanding Contribution Award
Awarded to Emma Gowing

Emerging Researcher Award
Awarded to Dr Alana Alexander

Pacific Peoples Research Award
Awarded to Dr Erik Wibowo

Left to right: Dr Alana Alexander, A/P Steph Woodley, Emma Gowing, Fieke Neuman, and Dr Mike Garratt (absent Dr Erik Wibowo)

Double award for Research Fellow

Congratulations to Dr Caroline Decourt who received two awards at the recent OUSA (Otago University Students' Association) awards. Caroline received the New Supervisor of the Year Award for 2023, and the Health Sciences Division Award.

Visit the University's Otago Bulletin to learn more about these awards, and all the lovely things the students had to say about Caroline.

Dr Caroline Decourt and Prof Richard Blaikie (Research and Enterprise)

Anatomy Student Awards - 2023

Congratulations to the following students who were awarded prizes for their sustained achievements throughout the year in Anatomy undergraduate and postgraduate studies.

Professor Gareth Jones Prize - 200-level BSc
Awarded to Oliver Salisbury - best BSc (Anatomy major) student who gained the highest grades in 200-level ANAT and BIOA papers.

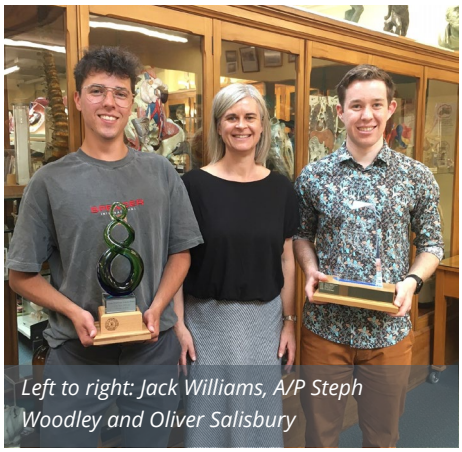
Professor Gareth Jones Prize - 200-level BBiomedSc
Awarded to Fleur Trent - best BBiomedSc (Reproduction, Genomics and Development) student who gained the highest grades in 200-level ANAT and BIOA papers.

Dr Elspeth Joan Gold Prize - 300-level Anatomy
Awarded to Page Govender - best overall grades in 300-level ANAT and BIOA papers.

Associate Professor Gina Forster Prize - postgraduate
Awarded to Jack Williams - postgraduate student with the overall highest grades in 400-level papers.

Postgraduate Paper Prize
Awarded to Allison Miller for her journal article in which she was the first author: A. Miller et al, (2023) Formalin-fixed paraffin-embedded (FFPE) samples help to investigate transcriptomic responses in wildlife disease. *Molecular Ecology Resources*

Page Govender



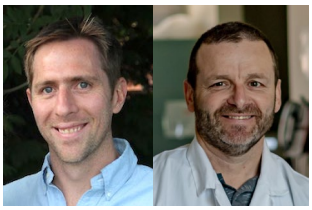
Left to right: Jack Williams, A/P Steph Woodley and Oliver Salisbury

$13.9m research funding success

Anatomy researchers have been successful in gaining almost $14m in funding from various research bodies. The funding will help support new research projects in the department. Our hearty congratulations go to ...

Professor Greg Anderson and Dr Caroline Decourt - $1,199,989 HRC Project Grant
"Curbing the reproductive hormonal axis to control PCOS"
This research aims to develop clinically translatable protocols to help treat Polycystic ovary syndrome.
Visit the Otago News website to learn more.

Professor Greg Anderson and Dr Caroline Decourt - $942,000 Marsden Grant
"A neuronal circuit for stress-induced infertility"
The research will look at how stress adversely impacts female fertility.
Visit the Otago News website to learn more about this project.



Dr Mike Garratt, Professor Greg Anderson and Professor Rebecca Campbell (Physiology) - $336,759 Global Consortium for Reproductive Longevity and Equity (Buck Institute)
This collaborative research will focus on how nutrition affects female reproductive ageing processes.
Go to the University Otago Bulletin Board to learn more.

Dr Teodora Georgescu - $360,000 Fast Start Marsden Grant
"Prolactin-mediated suppression of fever during pregnancy"
The aim of this research is to better understand the implicatons for maternal and foetal health of the loss of fever responses during pregnancy.
Visit the Otago News website to learn more about this research project.

Professor Dave Grattan and Dr Joe Yip - $941,000 Marsden Grant
"Pregnancy hormones modify synchrony of neuronal activity within a defined neuronal circuit"
Dave and his team will investigate how hormones modify activity of a declined neuronal network during pregnancy and lactation.
Visit the Otago News website to learn more about this research.

Professor John Reynolds - $10,180,560 MBIE Endeavour Fund
"A window into the brain: smart wearable technologies to target neurological disorders"
Led by Professor John Reynolds, a team of international researchers aim to develop a wearable device which will alter the way neurological disorders can be treated.
Visit the Otago News website to learn more about this project.

Cybersickness research published

Cybersickness is a disorientating motion sickness which can affect users and gamers of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR). Associate Professor Yusuf Cakmak and PhD candidate Alexander Yang undertook research using New Zealand eScience Infrastructure's high capacity computer to analyse EEG and ECG data in a bid to predict the signs of cybersickness.

Their research has been published by New Zealand eScience InfraStructure (NeSI) as a case-study. Visit the NeSI website to learn more about this fascinating research.

Spotlight on ...

Early Career Researcher

Dr Teodora Georgescu, Research Fellow

Dr Teo Georgescu is a Research Fellow in the Grattan Lab. Her research focuses on the intricate influence of hormones on autonomic adaptations throughout pregnancy and their transmission through specific brain receptors.

"There are so many different aspects of pregnancy that we're still figuring out. Pregnancy is a critical period, and when adaptations don't occur correctly, it can lead to complications later on" she says.

"The maternal brain undergoes numerous adaptations that ultimately safeguard the healthy development of offspring. I'm intrigued by how the brain manages physiolgoical changes in the body during pregnancy. I'm specifically fascinated by how hormones influence shifts in autonomic functions such as cardiovascular, breathing, and temperature."

Exploring this essential aspect of a women's life is genuinely fascinating to Teo. And she's loving the dynamic nature of research, and the fact that every day is different.

She was recently awarded the highly competitive Michael Harbuz Prize for Early Career Researchers at this years British Society for Neuroendocrinology (BSN) conference held in Exeter, UK. The prize is awarded each year to an outstanding member of the emerging generation of neuroendocrinologists.

Learning she had won the Prize was exciting. *"I have been attending BSN meetings since the beginning of my PhD and the usual attendees of these meetings feel almost like an extended family"* she says.

"It was lovely to receive this award and have the opportunity to present my recent research among many familiar faces. As well, over the years I have witnessed numerous outstanding researchers receive this award, so I felt immensely honoured to be recognised among such great scientists."

She attended the meeting, along with colleagues from Anatomy, but unfortunately caught Covid before she could give her lecture. She ended up giving her 30 minute talk to the conference via Zoom and was able to highlght the direction she hopes to take her career in.

She hopes to establish her own research lab to continue her focus on understanding the mechanisms underlying hormone action during pregnancy.

Although she has an exciting future ahead, she says she is also aware that research careers are not easy, and she is mindful to think about the exciting discoveries yet to be made when she is faced with grant failure and paper rejections.

"Understanding hormonal mechanisms holds significant promise for advancing our comprehension of pregnancy-related physiological dynamics, and it's so exciting to be part of this important area of research."

Awards recognise research excellence

Māori Early Career Award for Distinction in Research

Congratulations to Dr Alana Alexander who has received an inaugural Māori Early Career Award for Distinction in Research in this year's Otago Research Awards.

Go to the University Otago Bulletin Board to learn more.

James Cook Research Fellowship

Professor Siân Halcrow has been awarded a James Cook Reserach Fellowship from the Royal Society Te Apārangi. The two-year fellowship is awarded to researchers at the height of their careers who have achieved national and international recognition in their area of expertise.

Go to the University Otago Bulletin Board to learn more.

400-level students present research

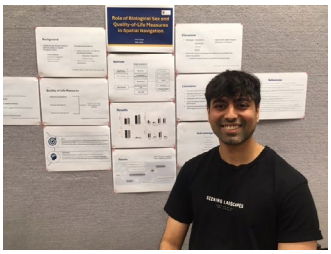
Poster Day is an important day for our 400-level postgraduate students. It is the day when they present their entire year's research in a poster format to their peers and staff of the Department of Anatomy. Not only do they need to plan, write, prepare and display their own poster, they are also assessed as part of their 400-level grades on their knowledge and ability to answer questions about their research methods and outcomes.

A big thank you to everyone who took part and made the day such a great event. Congratulations to Kennedy Stevenson who was awarded the 400-level Poster Prize. Kennedy is a PGDipSci student supervised by Professor Greg Anderson.

Following are the students who took part in Poster Day ...

Jacob Galacgac
BSc(Hons) in Anatomy
Effects of Neurofeedback on Stomach Activity and Heart Rate Variability

Supervisors: A/P Yusuf Cakmak and Dr Jerin Mathew

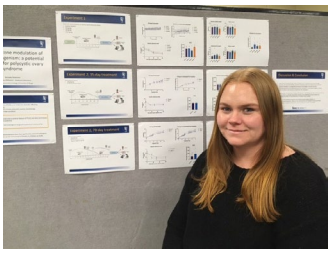


Amit Punja
BSc(Hons) in Anatomy
Role of Biological Sex and Quality-of-Life Measures in Spatial Navigation

Supervisor: Dr Erik Wibowo

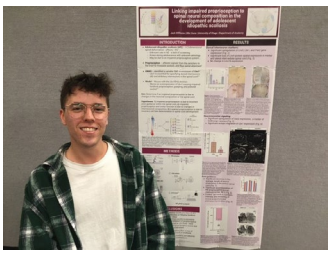
Jasmine Sahota
PGDipSci in Neuroscience
Non-Invasive Peroneal Nerve Stimulation's Effects on the Autonomic Nervous System at Different Frequencies

Supervisors: Dr Jerin Mathew, Prashanna Khwaounjoo & A/P Yusuf Cakmak



Kennedy Stevenson
PGDipSci in Anatomy
Spironolactone Modulation of Hyperandrogenism: A Potential Treatment for Polycystic Ovary Syndrome

Supervisors: Professor Greg Anderson and Dr Caroline Decourt



Jack Williams
BSc(Hons) in Anatomy
Linking Impaired Proprioception to Spinal Neural Composition in the Development of Adolescent Idiopathic Scoliosis

Supervisor: A/P Megan Wilson

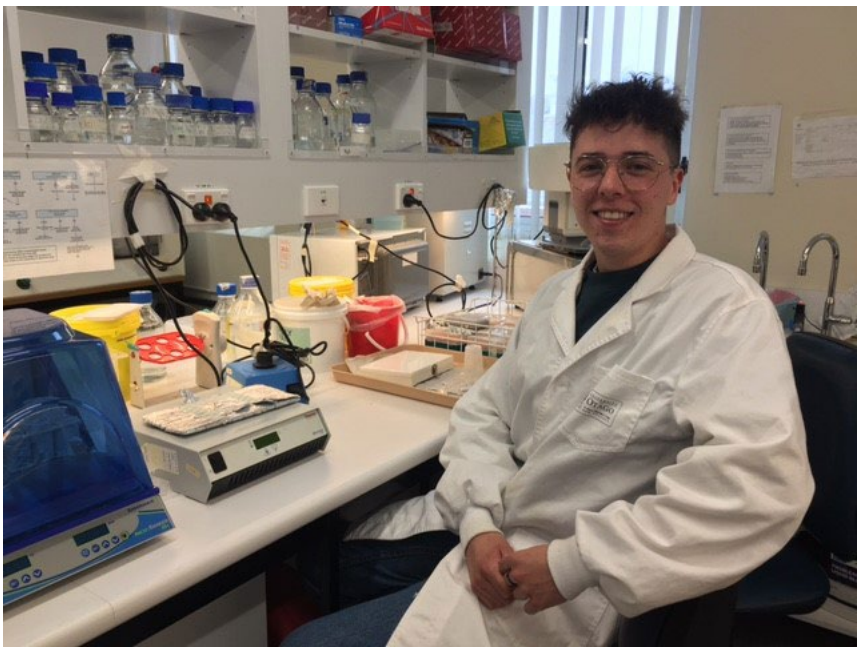
Postgraduate student profile

Jack Williams - BSc Honours

Jack is in the final weeks of a postgraduate Honours degree in Anatomy. Throughout his undergraduate Science studies, he chopped and changed many times when trying to decide what subject to major in. Medicine and Dentistry were high on the list, but so too were Physiology and Neuroscience.

It wasn't until he took the ANAT 243 Reproductive and Development Biology paper in his second year that he became interested in Developmental Anatomy ... and then he was hooked.

"The development of going from a single cell to a multicellular developing embryo fascinated me" Jack says thinking back to his second year, *"and it was a topic I'd not been exposed to before. I immediately looked forward to the ANAT 334 Developmental Biology paper, and it was everything I had hoped for. I loved the content, particularly looking at developmental diseases and neurogenesis."*



Postgraduate research wasn't really Jack's focus until the end of his undergraduate study. *"As I approached the end of third year the appeal of research became much greater, not only entering a year that's markedly different in structure, individuality and being able to apply knowledge in a practical setting, but also a huge advantage when applying for postgraduate entry into professional programmes."*

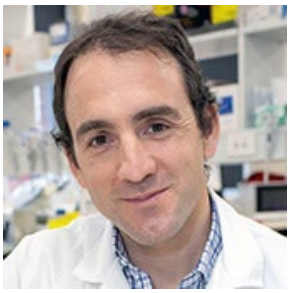
For his fourth year research project with Dr Megan Wilson Jack has been investigating the potential cause/s of adolescent idiopathic scoliosis (AIS). More specifically, the neuron composition/circuitry that regulates proprioception (body spatial awareness) in the spinal cord.

"I've really enjoyed the year – it has been a major step up in workload, time management and putting knowledge into practice, but the whole year has felt so rewarding. The first half of the year was much crazier than I'd imagined – assignments were never ending, yet all of them were interesting. I definitely didn't expect the level of presenting in front of fellow students and researchers, but it definitely builds confidence in yourself."

Jack now faces another tough decision ... continue on with research or move on to something completely different.

"I'd still love to get into Medicine as it's always been a drive of mine. Maybe I'll give it one more shot, and if not, I could definitely see myself returning for more research. Completing a thesis has been challenging but super rewarding. And I've been super lucky to be surrounded by the people in my lab group this year – they're an awesome bunch of people."

Mapping the genetic code of a pest



Genetic mapping of the brushtail possum could aid eradication in one country and guide conservation in another.

Dr Tim Hore and colleagues have successfully mapped the entire genetic code of the brushtail possum. Their research could help control populations in New Zealand where they are considered a pest, and aid in the conservation of the mammal in Australia where they are a protected species. Their research has been published in *Nature Communications*.

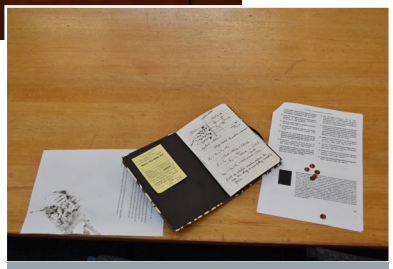
Learn more about this exciting research on the University website.
You can also visit the University's YouTube channel, or check out the articles in the Otago Daily Times and the NZ Herald.

CSI : Dunedin - the scene of the crime

In early November curious staff and students may have noticed the crime scene tape across the Anatomy Museum doors and worried we were in the grip of a crime wave. Don't panic – no real crimes here, this was set up by our Forensics programme for a series of visits by Pākiki kids – a local programme for gifted and talented students across Dunedin and wider Otago.

The students were introduced to our crime scene – one of our valuable prototypes had been stolen! Luckily our criminal was pretty clumsy, cutting themselves as they entered the building and leaving all manner of trace evidence around the museum. Students recorded what they found, developed some (sometimes outlandish) theories and then headed down to the labs to analyse the evidence.

They experimented with recreating the bloodstain patterns in the museum to reconstruct the events of the robbery, then analysed footprints, fingerprints and hairs found at the scene. With their help we were able to identify and apprehend the criminal – one Cal Freeman, a disgruntled ex-medical student. Our museum is once again secure.... until the next time we need to do outreach at least!



Can you spot the evidence?

Bio-Anthropology research in the news

Southern Cemeteries project brings Otago goldfields to life

Reserach undertaken as part of the Southern Cemeteries Archaeological Project is challenging long-held beliefs about life on the goldfields. The research team has been able to piece together the back-stories of 34 unknown settlers uncovered during excavations in Lawrence and Cromwell.

Go to the University website to learn more.

Teeth shed light on life, and dental practices, in late 1800s Invercargill

Professor Siân Halcrow and colleagues have published a paper in the *American Journal of Biological Anthropology that* sheds light on the life and dental practices of those living in Invercargill in the late 1880s to early 1900s. Excavations from an Invercargill building site in 2019 uncovered hundreds of discarded teeth which were orginally extracted from living people at the turn of the 20th century.

Go to the University website to discover more about this interesting find. Siân has also provided a link to other media stories about this research.

Ancient indicators of inequality - a study from Bronze Age China

Professor Siân Halcrow and colleagues recently concluded a Marsden Funded study looking at the emergence of gender based inequality in the rise of Bronze Age China (771-221 BCE). Using skeletal tissues from remains located in ancient cemetery burials, the team focused on childhood dietary differences between males and females. The team hope to continue their research with a focus on how gender and class advantaged or disadvantaged individuals.

Go to the Royal Society Te Apārangi website to learn more about this interesting research.

Anatomists gather for Congress

Around 180 anatomists and clinicians from around the world gathered in Dunedin recently for the combined 10th APICA and 20th ANZACA Congress, hosted by the Department of Anatomy. The event was an opportunity for participants to share expertise and knowledge on anything anatomical - bioanthroplogy, cancer, cellular, clinical/functional anatomy, education, indigenous anatomy, neuroanatomy, translational research and more.

Guest speakers included Professor Susan Standring, Emeritus Professor of Anatomy at King's College London and Editor-in-Chief of *Gray's Anatomy* and Joint Lead Editor of *Gray's Surgical Anatomy*.

Hands-on workshops included sessions on ultrasound and curriculum development, creating 3D printable anatomical models, strategies to improve writing for publication, assessment in the digital era, embracing ambiguity in teaching, and hands-on dissection sessions. In addition, there were 7 focused symposia (two of these were chaired by A/P Ming Zhang and A/P Yusuf Cakmak), ethics panel discussion (chaired by Prof Gareth Jones), and about 60 oral and 70 poster presentations.

The education research poster presentation prize was won by Priya Aravazhi, a PhD student in the department who is supervised by Dr Natasha Flack, Professor Helen Nicholson, Dr Kelby Smith-Han and Dr Julie Timmermans (HEDC). Congratulations Priya!

Some of the members of the organising committee: A/P Yusuf Cakmak, Dr Latika Samalia, Dr Kanchana Subasinghe, Prof Steph Woodley, Prof Helen Nicholson, and Dr Phil Blyth.
Absent are Dr Natasha Flack, Mrs Leema Prasath, Dr Jerin Mathew, Dr Viraj De Silva, Dr Suranga Dassanayake, Dr Jason Xu, and A/P Ming Zhang

Dissecting skills on show

After a two-year hiatus the department's dissecting competition is back. The 2023 event was held in September. The competition is an opportunity for interested third year medical students to show off their dissecting skills and anatomical knowledge learnt through their practical dissection classes. This year the students, working in pairs or groups, dissected the knee. Each group could select the structures they would like to show in their dissection, and were encouraged to research and present an abstract on the anatomical structures shown in their dissection.

The department's first dissecting competition was held in 2006 after medical students expressed a wish to do more dissecting. This year thirty-eight students took part in the event. Their dissections, which will eventually become part of the department's stock of teaching specimens, were judged on technical difficulty, method of approach, the number of structures shown and labelled, and the presentation of their abstract and the dissection.

Congratulations to Anna Donaldson and Kate Hughes who were awarded first place overall for their dissection "Genicular Columbus - Exploring a U-knee-que-tive to total knee replacement".

Anna Donaldson, Dr John Egbuji (ELM Assessment Convenor), Kate Hughes, and Dr Latika Samalia

MBIE appointment an honour

Professor Louise Parr-Brownlie has been appointed a Departmental Science Advisor by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE). The Ministry's Science Advisors provide leadership and expertise to help guide policy in scientific matters, and are key communicators between the Ministry and the science community.

Louise (Ngāti Maniapoto me Te Arawa), a highly respected and accomplished neuroscientist, already has experience working alongside government policy experts and in the health research sector.

Professor Louise Parr-Brownlie, Departmental Science Advisor

She was the recent Director of the Ageing Well National Science Challenge, was a member of the Biomedical Research Committee at the Health Research Council, co-Chair of the health peer panel for the 2026 Performance Based Research Fund quality evaluation round, and a member of the Mātauranga Science Insights Panel for the Ministry for the Environment, to name just a few of her recent accomplishments.

MBIE hosted a mihi whakatau on Monday 9 October to formally transition her from the Ageing Well Directorship role to the Departmental Science Advisor role.

Louise was excited to be appointed to the science advisor position. She applied for the role to guide building a future-focused science sector that addresses inequities for marginalised groups, precarity for early career researchers, facilitates collaborations of people and sharing of resources, and to advocate for research to deliver impact for Aotearoa New Zealand. Louise will draw on her experiences and networks from Ageing Well, Anatomy, Physiology and Neuroscience fields, the Rauika Māngai and Māori communities to design a research, science and innovation system that is fit for purpose for the next 20 years.

She will continue her research into Parkinson's disease alongside her new role with the Ministry.

Visit the Otago Bulletin Board and the MBIE website to learn more about her appointment.

Hui for menstrual cycle health

The second annual hui of the Menstrual Health Research Network was held in Dunedin in early November. The focus for the hui was on whanaungatanga; building research relationships across diverse interests related to menstrual cycle health.

Researchers gather in the Hunter Centre atrium

The event was attended by around 50 people with others joining online.

Co-organiser Associate Professor Jane Girling was pleased with the number of paticipants who took part from around New Zealand.

"The hui highlighted the ongoing need for multidisciplinary, community-led research that aims to improve the understanding and experience of menstrual cycle health and its impacts on individuals and the community."

She says the presentations and workshops were diverse and interesting, covering many different aspects and approaches related to menstrual cycle research.

"We had some wonderful guest speakers including Dr Jane McDonald and Dr Tania Slater from Te Tātai Hauora o Hine - National Centre for Women's Health Research at Victoria University, Roimata Tipene and Dr Olivia Perelini from Māori Health Pipeline, Te Whatu Ora Auckland-Waitematā, and Dr George Parker from Victoria University in Wellington."

Recent PhD theses conferred

Congratulations to our students who have had their PhD degrees conferred by the University of Otago. This is such a huge achievement and an important milestone in their research careers.

A special shout-out to Jessica Schalburg-Clayton whose thesis was marked as exceptional by the Division of Health Sciences. Congratulations Jessica!!!

Sara Ahmed (Anatomy)
"The development and characterization of APP/PS1/eNOS+/- mouse model of Alzheimer's disease"
Supervisors: Assoc Prof Ping Liu, Dr Hu Zhang (School of Pharmacy)

Upendra Bhattarai (Genetics)
"The Death Dive. Behavioural manipulation of earwigs by mermithid nematodes"
Supervisors: Prof Neil Gemmell, Prof Robert Poulin (Dept of Zoology), Dr Eddy Dowle

Aimee Chu (Neuroscience)
"Effects of disease processes and neuroprotective treatments on exosome cargo in Alzheimer's Disease"
Supervisors: Assoc Prof Joanna Williams, Prof Bronwen Connor (University of Auckland), Dr Amy Chapman (University of Auckland)

Michael Dunnet (Anatomy)
"Using DNA methylation as a biomarker and extensive sampling as a diagnostic tool for cellular identification"
Supervisors: Assoc Prof Tim Hore, Prof Ian Morison (Dept of Pathology)

Kushan Gandhi (Anatomy)
"Harnessing focused ultrasound for use in novel drug delivery strategies for neurological disorders"
Supervisor: Prof John Reynolds

Matthew Higgins (Anatomy)
"The temporal and spatial expression of Leprb mRNA in the postnatal mouse hypothalamus"
Supervisors: Prof Christine Jasoni, Dr Kelly Glendining (Dept of Physiology)

Mandira Katuwal (Anatomy)
"Genome assemblies and microbiome analysis: a key to controlling pasture weevils"
Supervisors: Prof Neil Gemmell, Craig Phillips (AgResearch), Dr Eddy Dowle

Pascale Lubbe (Genetics)
"Impacts of past and future climate change on Aotearoa New Zealand birds"
Supervisors: Assoc Prof Michael Knapp, Dr Nic Rawlence (Dept of Zoology), Dr Nicolas Dussex

Jessica Schalburg-Clayton (Anatomy) - Awarded "Exceptional Thesis" by the Division of Health Sciences
"Isotopes, agriculture, and climate changes: Exploring biosocial adaptation at Iron Age Non Bank Jak, Northeast Thailand"
Supervisors: Prof Hallie Buckley, Dr Charlotte King

Victoria Sugrue (Anatomy)
"Sex-influenced epigenetic aging and the androgen clock"
Supervisors: Assoc Prof Tim Hore, Prof Greg Anderson

Berivan Temiz (Anatomy)
"Discerning the mechanisims of Botrylloides diegensis during whole-body regeneration in single-cell resolution"
Supervisors: Assoc Prof Megan Wilson, Dr Michael Meier (Dept of Pathology)

Alexander Yang (Neuroscience)
"Development of interpretable neuromorphic AI systems for prediction, detection and clinical treatment of cybersickness"
Supervisors: Assoc Prof Yusuf Cakmak, Prof George Dias

News in brief ...

Tongan Language Week (3 - 9 September)

Staff and postgrad students had a lovely time meeting members of the Biomedical Otago Pacific Students' Association, and the Otago Tongan Students' Association when they visited the department for Tongan Language Week.

The group spoke about the four pillars (values) that guide their culture. Those present were able to learn some simple words and were even persuaded to sing a few songs in Tongan!

Pictured (left to right) are Medical student Shakira Fukofuka (Tongan/Māori); Anatomy Science student Takirau Shutz-Tala (Tokelauan/Māori); Biomed Hons in Anatomy student Zsaleya Sword-Tua (Cook Island Māori); and Anatomy Science student Betty Feiloakitohi (Tongan/Cook Island Māori)

Fakamālō atu 'i ho taimí mo e anga'ofá! (Thank you for your time and generosity!)

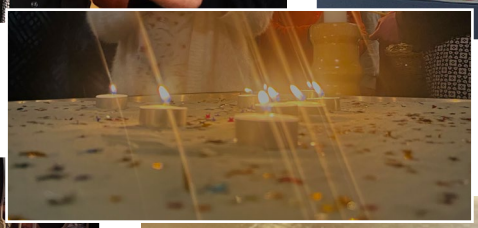
Celebrating Diwali (9 - 14 November)

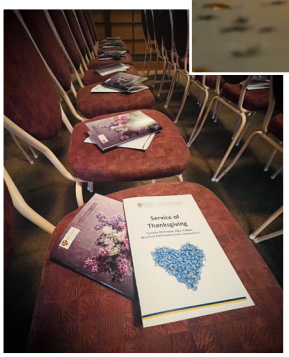
The Department celebrated Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights in November. The festival, celebrated over five days, symbolises and celebrates the victory of light over darkness and good over evil.

A delicious array of sweet and savoury foods were prepared for the celebrations. Those involved in organising the celebrations were:
Back row: Dr Suranga Dassanayake; Dr Viraj De Silva; Dr Niranjan Ramesh; Dr Jerin Mathew; Front row: Dr Kanchana Subasinghe; Dr Latika Samalia; Duminda Karunarathne; and Professor Christine Jasoni

Christchurch Thanksgiving Service (10 October)

Some images from the Thanksgiving Service held in Christchurch. Thank you to Dr Viraj de Silva for sharing these photos.





The last words go to ...

Djuna Elkan, Prosector

Djuna Elkan can usually be found in one of her happy places ... tucked away in a small room prosecting (think dissecting) an arm or a leg, or maybe it's a torso today. She is the department's one and only Prosector. She spends hours painstakingly prosecting away minuit pieces of tissue to reveal the amazing anatomical structures that lie beneath.

Djuna gives us a bit more insight into what makes her tick, and answers some of the really big questions like ... does she prefer Vegemite or Marmite?

Anatomy Prosector Djuna Elkan

What is your role in the department?
I am the Gross Anatomy Team Prosector.

Where did you grow up?
I grew up in Berkeley, California, USA. Fun fact, my parents still live in the same house I grew up in!

Did you play sport or a musical instrument?
I started flamenco dancing from the age of 3 to 9 years. During that time I tried ice figure skating (~5 years old) and began competing around 9 years old. I figure skated competitively (double jumps, et al.) until the age of 16, when I decided to change my sport to rowing. I rowed for my high school team, Berkeley High Yellow Jackets. After university I really got into synchronised ice skating, where I helped build the Ice Symmetrics Masters Synchronised Skating Team in Oakland, California.

After moving to New Zealand in 2018, I joined Cutting Edge Mixed Age Synchronised Skating Team and have been competing with them internationally for the past 5 years. And yes, I can still do an Axel at the age of 31!

What are your hobbies and interests?
Still ice figure skating and more recently ice hockey! I now coach all levels of ice skating (hockey and figure). I've also found a love for cooking, biking and running!

What book/movie/activity can you recommend?
"Stiff" by Mary Roach. If you're ever interested in what we (the Gross Anatomy team) do, it is a great book to open your eyes to the wonderous world of body donation.

What type of music do you enjoy listening to?
A bit of everything really. Although I am a sucker for songs I can skate to!

Vegemite or Marmite?
100% Marmite .... Vegemite, to me, tastes too earthy...

Peanut butter ... smooth or crunchy?
Smooth, if I want a crunch I'll add my own peanuts, thank you!

Cat or dog?
They're both great, but cats, man. They can be idiots and annoying, but they're really good cuddlers and keep you on your toes.

You're hosting a dinner party. Name three people (dead or alive) you would like to invite and why.
My mum, dad and gran (passed). Growing up we'd always leave grans place with giant grins and our sides sore from laughing so much. Mum and dad still live in California, so I get to see them every few years, but I do miss them dearly. Gran passed in 2019 at the grand age of 98 through assisted dying! I would love to spend more time with her, but she was ready to go and I'm so happy for the time I did have with her.