

# MONTHLY UPDATE

## DEPARTMENT OF BIOCHEMISTRY

October 2017

Firstly I want to start by thanking Bronwyn for putting together last months update – including writing the perspective. She did such a good job I am sure you will hear from her again! I especially want to reiterate her congratulations to Peter Dearden, Andrew Cridge, Tom Harrop, Monica, Wayne, Kurt and Paul Gardner who were all involved in successful applications – it was an exceptional MBIE round for the Department.

This month I am thinking about budgets and space, so wanted to share a few thoughts and invite suggestions. Space seems to have consumed considerable time since I became HOD as we have renovated much of the building and there is no sign of the renovations stopping! For now, ongoing renovations/upgrades as well as research success and the need to accommodate two new research groups in 2018 means that the Biochemistry building will be very full and some reorganisation of groups will be needed. Over the next month I will be leading a review of space needs, but for now I want to signal several changes. Firstly, as some of you will be aware Raelene Abernethy has moved to Microbiology, as her roles for Ag@Otago and the Webster Centre are both managed through that department. New homes also need to be found for Edwin and Neka as the office on the stairs will become the main office for Genomics Aotearoa. So while we look forward to welcoming the GA team to the building I am on the look out for empty offices!



In terms of renovations, redevelopment of the first floor is progressing very well with the old CPR area well advanced. However, the space occupied by Alan Carne's group is yet to be upgraded as they are waiting to move to the teaching laboratory for the summer while their area is refitted – hopefully before Christmas! After Christmas the builders will move to the third floor with a refit of the Merriman offices, and the end of the OGBF scheduled to occur then. This renovation will provide new offices for the Merriman group and will also accommodate Paul Gardner and his group, so we hope rapid progress is made. Expect some further reshuffling as we make adjustments to accommodate everyone.

The Department budget has also been occupying much of my time recently. While we have completed the budgeting process for 2018, this has been more difficult than normal because the University is in the process of changing its funding model. Irrespective of these changes, research grant funding, student recruitment/numbers and PBRF success are important.

As 2018 is a PBRF assessment year it will be important that staff prepare strong portfolios. On November 1st Michele Coleman will give a general presentation on PBRF and a second presentation tailored for ARFs, Postdocs and other new staff that have not prepared a portfolio before. I particularly encourage all staff that need to prepare a portfolio in 2018, but have not prepared one before, to attend these presentations.

The end of semester is approaching very quickly with exams around the corner. I know it is a stressful time of year for students, but as we review feedback from current students and graduates on our various programmes, it is clear that the vast majority of them are very happy with their courses and degree programmes – so well done to everyone for ensuring students have a good experience in the Department.

Lastly I want to extend a welcome to staff and students who have recently joined a number of research groups in the Department. I hope you have an enjoyable time in the Department and that you enjoy research success!

All the best,

*Catherine*

**SAVE THE DATE**  
**Joint Microbiology and**  
**Biochemistry Departments**  
**Research Day**  
**1st December.**  
**MORE INFO TO COME**

## Website

Since we moved from our old site to the “corporate CMS” site a couple of months ago, we have continued to adjust and (hopefully) improve our web presence.

One new initiative is the Department research blog, “The Sheet”. There are links to the blog posts at the bottom of our homepage, and links are posted automatically to our Facebook page and will soon be to our Twitter feed as well.

So far Miriam Sharpe has written all of the posts, and they have all been “layperson translations” of recent research papers. There is scope for the blog to be much more than this, however, and we would like to invite input from anyone who has an idea (and the desire to write) about other types of appropriate content. For instance, Sigurd has expressed an interest in writing the occasional science book review, and we look forward to his first contribution.

We would also appreciate suggestions of papers that would lend themselves to being written up by Miriam.

Contact Miriam or Bronwyn with your suggestions, we are both in Room 234, on ext 7704.

## PhD/MSc completions:

Congratulations to the following students who have completed all the requirements for their MSc degrees:

Kimberley Dainty - Anita's student is now working as a Research Assistant for Eliminate Dengue at Monash University in Melbourne

Erin Ritchie - Richard says Erin is travelling for the moment.

Yida Jiang (Nina) - Iain tells me Nina is working in Hamilton as a process technician for a biopharmaceutical company, she intends to be back in December for graduation.

Johnny Casey - Johnny is now working as a sales rep for MediRay. Lynette says this combines his science skills with the sales skills he developed working at Torpedo 7 during his studies.

## Health & Safety

Summer students will be starting soon so please make sure they have been trained, and specifically trained to use equipment, e.g autoclaves and centrifuges, that they will be using.

The next IBSC meeting is the 24th October, cut-off date for submissions is noon on the 16th October.

## Purchasing

The Physiology Department has Sigma FCS/FBS of NZ origin available to buy at only \$425.33 per 500ml bottle. We can purchase from there if you have run out.

## New arrivals

James Chalmers – Research Assistant in the Patrick Lab

Katie Peppercorn - PhD student in the Tate Lab



Katelyn Powell – Postdoc in the Dunbier lab



Sadlee Shehreen, PhD student in the Brown Lab

## The 2017 Nobel Prizes

**Peace:** to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN).

**Literature:** to Kazuo Ishiguro “who, in novels of great emotional force, has uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world”.

**Chemistry:** to Jacques Dubochet, Joachim Frank and Richard Henderson “for developing cryo-electron microscopy for the high-resolution structure determination of biomolecules in solution”.

**Physics:** divided, one half awarded to Rainer Weiss, the other half jointly to Barry C. Barish and Kip S. Thorne “for decisive contributions to the LIGO detector and the observation of gravitational waves”.

**Physiology or Medicine:** to Jeffrey C. Hall, Michael Rosbash and Michael W. Young “for their discoveries of molecular mechanisms controlling the circadian rhythm”.