

MONTHLY UPDATE

DEPARTMENT OF BIOCHEMISTRY

February 2019

Welcome back everyone, the year is now well underway with the campus getting much busier as undergraduates arrive back. I hope everyone had some fun over the summer break, whether at home or somewhere more exciting. It looks as though the weather is going to be great just in time for the students' return. Lots of sun and heat has its down side for us in the Department however, and I am aware that it has caused significant disruption to some recently, with overheated laboratories and ruined experiments. A number of people have worked hard to progress this (over several years!) and while we have some short-term fixes in place, there is definitely a need for better ventilation in Biochemistry.



Summer may mean a break from teaching, but it certainly doesn't mean rest. In addition to research, grant and paper writing, staff have been involved in a number of extracurricular/outreach activities over the break. Shar and her helpers have been busy with Hands On @ Otago and OUASSA classes, Peter Mace was co-convenor of the Otago Summer Structural Biology Symposium, and Mik Black and Murray Cadzow have coordinated several data analysis workshops. Those are just the activities that immediately spring to mind, there are undoubtedly others, and I would like to acknowledge the part they play in making our department the rich and vibrant environment that it is.

It was wonderful to see that Brandon Wright has made a video about his summer research project. I hope the other summer students had as much fun as Brandon seems to have had, and that we will welcome most back to the Department for the academic year. Engaging with the public, and communicating our research is a very important part of a scientist's job and something that we will prioritise in 2019. Please see Miriam if you require any help or advice on the best way to communicate your research.

As most of you will be aware, we have a Departmental Review in March. It has been nine years since the last one, and while preparing the self review document has been a big job for many (special thanks to Sally, Liz, Iain, Kurt, Richard and Emily) it has helped focus our thinking and identify priorities for the next decade. I am very grateful for the engagement to date from many in the Department as we have received many good comments and suggestions, so even without the review itself, we have some good ideas to implement in the short and long term.

The coming year is going to be busy. We are victims of our own success, with a very busy portfolio of research activities as well as record numbers of enrolments in our undergraduate papers, causing a few headaches when it comes to lab streaming. Ensuring that all the students have a good experience will mean we are even more reliant on demonstrators than ever. Thank you to all the graduate students who have offered to demonstrate, inspiring the next class of students is a very important job! Within the Department I am hopeful that we are entering a period of stability in terms of support staff. Early in January we farewelled Charity and Debbie, but we have been very fortunate to have Merenia Wright join us and Julie is slowly increasing her hours in Biochemistry. Fingers crossed that Merenia and Julie will remain and we can move to focusing on ensuring things work well and everyone has the support they need.

I hope research has gone well over the summer and that you have been able to finalise that key figure for the next paper or grant application!

Best wishes for the year ahead,

Remember our social media!

- A) Check out what's been happening and what's coming up on Facebook (Biochemistry.Otago) and Twitter (@OtagoBiochemist). It's a nice easy way to see upcoming seminars and other events.
- B) Let Miriam or Bronwyn know of anything we should share - we can't keep up with all news and events on our own.
- C) Subscribe to our events calendar or RSS feed. Links to do so are on the front page of our website.

Bronwyn & Miriam

PhD/MSc completions:

The following students completed all the requirements for their MSc degrees since the last newsletter

Nathanael Napier (Plant Biotechnology, Macknight Lab). Nathanael has a job as a research technician with Plant and Food Research in Palmerston North

James Marshall (Ledgerwood Lab) is living in Blumenau in Brazil, and deciding whether or not to do further study.

New arrivals ...



Merenia Wright, Administrator, Client Services, Biochemistry.



Aswin Thacharodi is a PhD student in Iain Lamont's lab.



Barham Golaki is a PhD student with Kurt Krause.



Prasanth Padula is a Post-doc in Catherine Day's lab.

... and recent departures



Emilia Peters is visiting the Tate lab from Berlin. She will be here for another month or so.



Kathleen Lucere, a new PhD student in Sarah Diermeier's lab.



For those of you who have not seen photos of Rinky and Harvinder's wedding. There were more outfits. Many many more outfits. Liz Ledgerwood has photos if you want to see them all.

Kaye Wilson Morning Tea

Shar is organising a "Bring a Plate" morning tea at 10.30am on Friday March 1st, everyone is welcome to participate*.

Kaye Wilson - 25 years in Biochemistry - 1.3.2019

**for those of you who are unfamiliar with the New Zealand custom of "Bring a Plate", it means bring a plate of food to share, generally food that can be picked up with the fingers.*