

# MONTHLY UPDATE

## DEPARTMENT OF BIOCHEMISTRY

June 2019

It's the middle of June already! May disappeared in a rush with a busy end to the teaching semester, graduation celebrations, postgraduate symposium and of course lots of research, including grant & paper writing. The Departments sustained research excellence was formally reflected in a very good PBRF result – it was very good to see so many people at our celebratory morning tea. Thank you to everyone for engaging with the process and for preparing strong portfolios.

A very good development over the last 18 months has been the formation of a Research Fellow/Postdoc group and now a research ARF/technician group. In our large Department these groups provide a focus for interactions and help strengthen our community. Robyn Lee, the convenor of the ARF/tech group has included a summary of the ARF/Tech group on the next page. I also highlight the lead role that the RF/PDF group is taking in organising the second joint research retreat with the Microbiology Department. Put Friday 22nd November in your diaries.



Over the next few weeks many of us will be busy with marking and finalising grades, as well as preparing for the next semester. The run-up to Semester two will be rather more hectic than usual this year, with significant revamp of several papers. Notably, Peter Mace is overseeing the development of a totally new laboratory course and accompanying lab book for BIOC 222. Meanwhile, Lynette has been directing a rewrite of the BIOC 192 lectures (see below), and Annika and Alan have been dealing with the lab book rewrite. It's going to be a bit of a race to get the lab book finished in time so that all ~1500 copies can be printed before the start of the semester. Likewise, the race is on to finalise the lectures, with most lectures being redone to fit into the new HSFY curriculum.

Next week we will welcome Elise Velenski in her role as administrator to BIOC 192, please make her welcome as she finds her way around the Department. I also want to take this opportunity to formally wish Julie well in her retirement (starting in July). Her flexible approach and willingness to go the extra mile to support staff and students in the Department has been greatly appreciated, however, I know she is looking forward to having more time for her garden and grandchildren.

Next week will be busy with several visitors to the Department - remember to mark their seminars in your diaries - but I hope the next few weeks will prove a little quieter, and allow everyone to have some uninterrupted research time.

*Catherine*

### BIOC 192 refresh

To fit in with changes to the HSFY curriculum, the lecture and lab courses for BIOC 192 are being rejigged for 2019. Lectures are being reduced from four to three per week, in just two time slots.

The three modules are: Proteins (familiar content), Molecular Genetics and Biotech (largely new) and Energy Balances (slightly trimmed version of metabolism).

There are new Integrated Content Lectures (ICL), where several papers cover a topic from their perspective. Kurt is leading our ICL on precision medicine, in particular relating to HIV, with support from POPH and HUBS. POPH are leading a diabetes ICL to which we will contribute.

*Lynette*

### Reminder

The Department logo is available in a number of different conformations, in formats for use on powerpoints, posters, lab books, or whatever use you may find.

See Bronwyn, who will provide you with the appropriate version for your needs.



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## ARF group

With the increase in numbers of research staff in the Department we recognised a need for gathering together all of the ARFs and research technicians and forming a collaborative group. ... And so it came to be...

The ARF/Research Technician group includes the research staff from all of the labs in the Department. Our group is evolving in purpose, but, generally speaking, it exists to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and resources between the labs. We will meet about once a month and share info about new skills and equipment available in our labs, internal and external resources available to us (eg, funding sources for conferences, seminars, career development), and other relevant stuff as it comes up.

At our last meeting we had Brian Donnelly come and talk to us about retirement, superannuation, kiwisaver, and the importance of reading our contracts and knowing what our entitlements are. It was a very interesting and informative meeting. At the end of July we are having a representative from the University Mental Health and Wellbeing unit come to talk to us about coping with stress in the workplace, identifying and helping others (eg students) who may be having issues, and the services available to staff and students within the University.

If you are an ARF or technician and haven't received emails about these meetings, please let me know: robyn.lee@otago.ac.nz, and I'll add you to our list.

*Robyn*

## PhD/MSc completions:

Congratulations to the following, who have completed all the requirements for their postgrad degrees.

Steph McGimpsey (MSc – Gardner Lab) Steph will be an ARF in the Gardner lab before heading off to take up her Woolf Fisher PhD scholarship to Cambridge in August.

Matthew Chisnall (PhD – Macknight Lab) Matthew is in England with his partner.

Gabbie Wood (MSc – Ledgerwood Lab) Gabbie is working for AROTEC Diagnostics Limited in Lower Hutt.

Priyadarshini Philem (PhD – Lamont Lab) Priya is working on a paper from her PhD research while looking for a job.

## Health & Safety

Over the last year I have been managing a laboratory contact list as a means to keep the research laboratories updated on new procedures, and I will organise a short session later in June to cover some changes. Please let me know if you would like to be included in this group.

A reminder that H&S, and compliance training is held each Thursday at 10am in Room 207 – let me know if there are new staff or students planning to attend.

## Chemical Waste

We have had two chemical waste pick-ups in May, and this has allowed for re-organisation of space in the chemical store. Newly labelled shelving has been set up for laboratory chemical waste, which I hope is straightforward. A waste ID sticker is required, and the hazardous waste form completed then emailed to me. This form is available on the Biochemistry Intranet, and is also useful for laboratory chemical inventories. Please get in touch if you need any help.

*Keep warm, Jackie*

## Building & Equipment

### Medical School car park



To facilitate the transport of “stuff” across campus, the Department has a carpark over at the Med School (photo above). It is behind the southernmost wing of the Lindo Fergusson Building, and can be reserved by Biochem staff and students using the Department's online booking system.

We have had a bit of building work happening on the ground floor this year with development of the Genetics Hub and Prep Room (see photo on next page) that are expected to be completed in July.

Most of the new labs are temperature controlled by air passing over radiators filled with chilled or heated water, depending on what is required. However some areas have never had these services piped to them – most notably the western end of the first floor, and most of

the ground floor. With the university's renewed focus on energy efficiency and longer term service goals, they are extending these services in the building now.

The other photo seems to show boring old pipes, but no, stay with me, these are interesting. The stainless ones are heating and the larger blue plastic pipes are cooling. As well as the building temperature they are considering the rate of flow of fresh air, balancing the need to keep the CO<sub>2</sub> levels down, but not quite to the levels of outside, because that would mean flow rates so high that the heating or cooling are working over-time to maintain comfortable temperature levels. The "energy czar" (as Kurt has dubbed him) has pointed out that sometimes the temperature is about right, but because CO<sub>2</sub> levels are too high, people can feel uncomfortable and have difficulty concentrating.

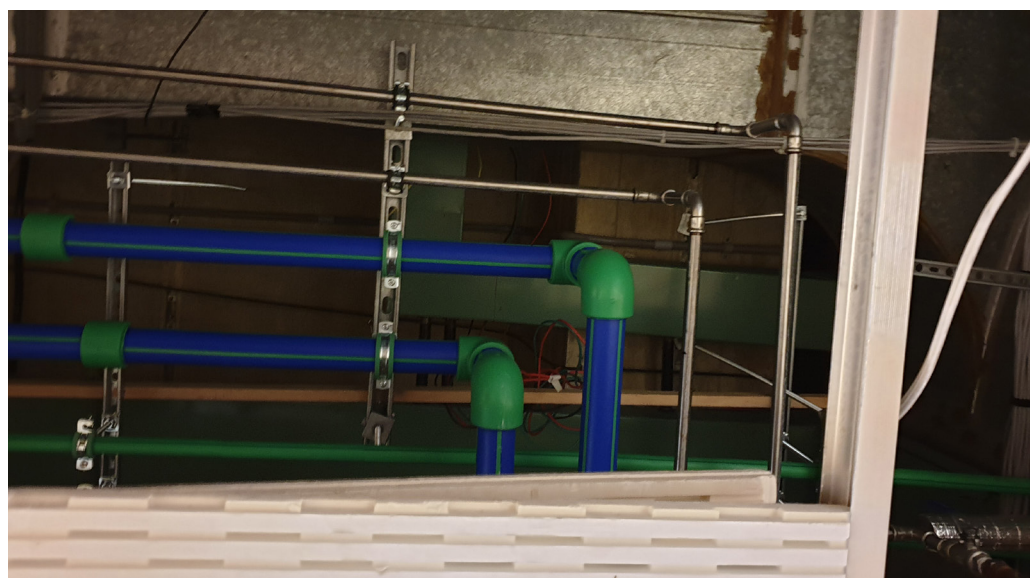
The Autoclave on the ground floor had an issue relating to its age recently. Since we now process the bulk of our lab waste inhouse, we have identified a need for a new one. If you have any need for extra functionality or if you anticipate increased use of the ground floor facility please let me know.

We have in the pipeline a few improvements; the kitchen/ reading room/ seminar room area; a new seminar room on the ground floor, and repurposing lab 2.17. These have all flowed from successful adaptations rounds in the past couple of years and June is the time for new submissions, so if you have some ideas please let me know. The main criteria are: Excellence In Research; Excellence In Teaching; Outstanding Student Experiences; Outstanding Campus Environments; and Commitment As A Local, National And Global Citizen.

*Peter Small*



*Genetics lab and prep room.*



*Interesting stainless heating pipes and larger blue plastic cooling pipes.*