

# MONTHLY UPDATE

## DEPARTMENT OF BIOCHEMISTRY

August 2019

It is slightly frightening to think that we are already half way through the second semester, the year is flying by.

For me August has been a very busy month with much planning for next year. We have had to project student numbers and research income for next year, as well as submit our budget for 2020. Student enrolments and research success are the two parameters that determine our income and as such, my focus as HOD has been on growing these two areas. Since 2016 the number of Biochemistry majors at 200-level has more than doubled. This is fabulous news because it means Biochemistry has a strong cohort of graduate students coming through. In recent years, staff in the Department have also obtained significantly more research contracts (and money). The increase in research staff and activity around the Department will hopefully underpin future success!



Unfortunately, the wider University is operating in a constrained financial environment, meaning that increases in income have not translated into proportionate increases in money available to spend in the Department. However, we are in the fortunate position of being able to budget to sustain our current position in 2020. This means that while we still have to very much make choices, with any increased investment in one area needing to be matched by decreased investment in another area, at this stage Ethan and I have managed to balance the books for 2020.

I know that over the last few weeks everyone has been thinking about the next HOD, by the time this goes to press everyone will have provided feedback and I thank you for engaging with the process. Once the appointment has been made I look forward to working with the next HOD to finalise plans for 2020. It is a busy job and next year I am looking forward to having more time for research and putting my feet up!

Last week we were lucky to enjoy many great talks by the 400-level students. Very polished presentations by all and lots of nice results – and the future directions suggest that many of them will be busy doing the last few experiments before they start writing up later in September. It is also looking like the research laboratories will be busy over the summer as we have had lots of enthusiastic prospective summer students submitting applications to join us over the holidays.

I want to thank everyone (demonstrators, teaching staff, prep-room etc) for doing a great job for the students this semester. I know many people have been going above and beyond to ensure students are well supported. Your efforts are appreciated and we will take time to celebrate another successful year of teaching at the end of semester.

Lastly, I want to take this opportunity to wish Merenia (leaving this Friday) and Ethan (leaving in two weeks) well. They have both contributed significantly to the Department this year and, while we wish they were staying, both have exciting new opportunities and we wish them well.

*Catherine*

### Travel opportunities

A reminder to PhD students who wish to take advantage of the Marjorie McCallum Travel Award to visit an overseas lab, or attend a workshop, applications for the final round of awards for this year are due by September 2nd. Now is also a good time to start thinking about where you might like to go in 2020, the first round of applications closes at the end of February each year.

## Equipment

The second 2019 **Departmental Equipment Round** is now open with requests due to Torsten by Monday September 2nd.

This will be for new equipment items over \$3k and new items or replacements of equipment over \$20k.

Please send your requests to Torsten (torsten.kleffmann@otago.ac.nz) including the price and justification as soon as possible with a view to discussing at staff meeting on 12th September.

Students and research staff should discuss requests with their group leaders prior to submission of any request.

A reminder that the Olympus FV3000 **Confocal Microscope** with live cell imaging is up and running in the Hughes lab until the end of September. If anyone is interested in visualising their samples on this machine please see Greg Redpath from the McCormick Lab to organise a session. If you have biophysical applications both inside and outside of cells - such as FRET sensors or biosensors, it should be capable of imaging those too.

## Building

Following on from a successful couple of adaption rounds, Property Services are gearing up for another summer of renovations for us .

We have a plan for a large modern 90 – 100 seat seminar room on the ground floor. Catherine has pioneered a new model for use wherein we have priority access to book for the department, whilst also contributing it to “The Pool” whenever possible. This will begin construction in mid-October. It is hoped that the project will be completed by the end of the year.

There’s also a plan for the Reading Room, the kitchen and the existing seminar room that - all things going according to plan with the ground floor - will start early in the new year and be ready in time for the start of classes. The common room will be increased in size, incorporating the area that is currently Bronwyn and Miriam’s office (yes they will be moving to an as yet unconfirmed location). It will have tea and coffee facilities added along the wall nearest Chemistry, and the refurbished kitchen will have better flow and design. The seminar room will shrink slightly, be reorganised as a meeting room, and have a long folding door connection to the common room to better accommodate larger groups.

Big improvements which will impact on the lives of most of us day to day.

## Media Appearance

Peter Dearden appeared on TVNZ’s Q+A recently, propounding his thoughts about the findings of the Royal Society Te Apārangi panel on the implications of new gene editing technologies.

Peter is a member of the panel, which found that use of the new technologies has potentially great benefits for the country across many areas, and that the current legislation regulating gene editing is confused and out of date.

While accepting that the subject is an emotive one, Peter urged more New Zealand scientists to participate in public discussion about the benefits and possible risks of emerging gene technologies.

## Purchasing

Following a competitive tender process, the University has elected to use Novelli and The Print Room as the exclusive providers of Branded Apparel and Promotional Merchandise to the University. This contract currently excludes the supply of specialised protective clothing eg lab coats.

## New arrivals



Ann-Kathrin Gosch is visiting the Dearden Lab



Vanessa Braun is visiting the Hughes lab



Ke Wang is visiting the Merriman Lab