

MONTHLY UPDATE

DEPARTMENT OF BIOCHEMISTRY

July 2019

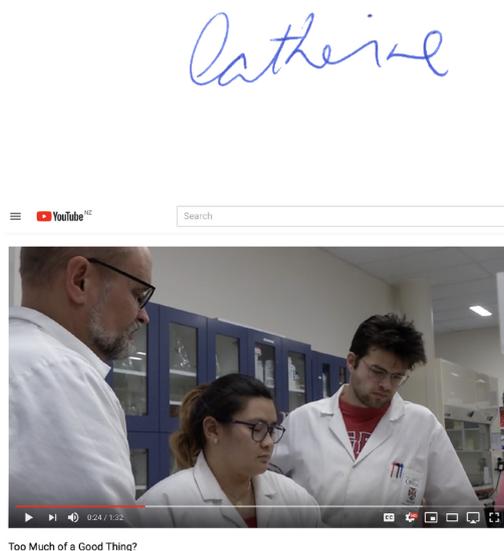
The last month disappeared all too quickly, with the HRC success afternoon tea a highlight. This week we welcomed the students back for semester two, so a very busy time of the teaching year is again upon us. At least all the rewritten lab books were completed on time, with Shar and Kaye pretending to be students and testing the BIOC 222 lab exercises under Nurit's supervision last week! A few last minute revisions were done, then it was off to the printers. Thanks also to Liz and Sigurd for all their effort with student advising.

We have the BIOC 192 Māori students' welcome on Monday 15th at 2pm, so remember the Staff Common Room will be out of commission for that afternoon, with a similar event planned for the BIOC majors welcome function the following Monday.

Semester break is a time for marking exams, writing grants (with many writing HRC EOIs - good luck) and manuscripts, but it is also an opportunity for outreach activities and I know many in the Department have been contributing in all kinds of different ways. See the rest of the Monthly update for some of the highlights, but special thanks to Miriam and all her helpers for putting so much time and effort into the recent teachers conference. Engaging and inspiring high school teachers will hopefully lead to their pupils being more enthusiastic about science, and perhaps some students will come our way in the future. I must also thank Shar for her work with the OUASSA students - great job as usual.

Steph has also been out speaking about her research, giving a talk at the City Library for the Neurological Foundation this week, while lab members recently visited some Dunedin public libraries teaching children about neurology and making neurons out of pipe cleaners. I also see that Sigurd, Sam, and Pauline have become movie stars! Apologies to those who have been busy doing things that I have missed.

Lastly, it was with sadness that we farewelled Julie last week - her cheerful presence will be very much missed. The week after next we will welcome Sonja Bohn to the front desk. We look forward to having her join the Biochem team.



Left: Steph gives her public talk for the Neurological Foundation

Centre: Richard helped run the agriculture elective for OUSSA schools students. They are isolating DNA.

Right: Pauline Uyseco, Sam Gifkins, and Sigurd starred in a science communications video. Details on YouTube, check it out. <https://youtu.be/91s2kNUiHB0>

Miriam's organisational efforts over the past six months came to fruition this week with six speakers from Biochemistry talking about their research at the national biology and chemistry teachers conference (BioliveChemEd 2019, held at John McGlashan College).

Peter Dearden was invited to give a keynote address, which was about the scourge of wasps in this country and the possibility of using a gene drive to eradicate them.

On behalf of the organising committee, Miriam selected five other members of the Department whose research areas are relevant to the high schools curriculum. Lynette Brownfield spoke about some of her ryegrass improvement projects and where things are up to with GM legislation in New Zealand, and four of our PhD students, Meg Taylor, Meg O'Malley, Sarah Mackie, and Cameron Reddington, gave overviews of what they are studying, and their paths into biochemistry. Miriam recorded the talks, gave the teachers an overview of the department's high school resources website, and arranged for the distribution of our shiny new Biochemistry bookmarks.

All talks were very well received by the teachers; they were all over-subscribed and there were many useful conversations with the audiences after each talk about both the nitty-gritty of the science and its social implications.

Miriam is currently preparing videos of the talks, which will hopefully end up on our YouTube channel (yes, we do have one!)



Lynette talking about ryegrass improvement.



Meg O'Malley spoke about non-coding RNAs in breast cancer



Meg Taylor's talk was about the role of hydrogen peroxide in cell signalling.



Cameron Reddington spoke about his research on the protein BAP1 and its role in cancer.



Sarah Mackie talked about the epigenetic control of genes involved in breast cancer risk.

Well done to **Maddie from Steph's lab** who won the Health Sciences heat of the Masters Three Minute Thesis competition.

Be sure to support her in the finals in Quad 2 at 5pm on the 1st August.