

MONTHLY UPDATE

DEPARTMENT OF BIOCHEMISTRY

December 2019



It is Christmas again, and as we look back 2019 has been a tremendously busy year in the Biochemistry Department. We have had several occasions to celebrate staff, teaching and research successes during the year, the most recent just last month when we celebrated the Marsden results. Staff promotions are always something to celebrate and in the last round Richard Macknight was promoted to Professor, while Peter Mace and Paul Gardner were promoted to Associate Professor. These changes take effect in February, and reflect the excellent research and innovative and enthusiastic teaching that Richard, Peter and Paul undertake. Sadly, Tony Merriman has announced that he is moving to the University of Alabama in 2020, although he will keep a position in the Department, along with some staff.

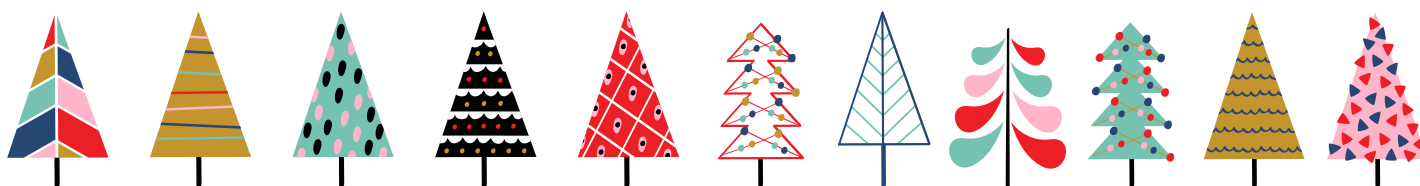
Our staff successes are not only celebrated within the Department; the School of Biomedical Sciences recognised five Biochemistry staff and associates this year for their outstanding contributions to both the Department and the School, with Tanya Major winning Best Emerging Researcher, Phil Wilcox winning the Kaupapa Māori Research Award, Peter Dearden and Andrew Cridge winning the Commercialisation Researcher Award, and Tanis Godwin the Research Support (Focused Contribution) Award. I am sure that there will be many more awards coming our way in future years, as over the weekend I reviewed/wrote more than 70 academic staff appraisals for PPFs, RFs, PDFs and ARFs. I think this is the largest number I have reviewed and I came away impressed by the many talented and hard working staff in the Department who are tackling a huge variety of quite ambitious projects.



November and December have been a very busy time for conferences with staff and students attending a number of different meetings. A special thank you to the postdocs and research fellows from Biochemistry who helped organise the joint Bioc/Micro “Research Celebration” for research staff and students of the two departments. Most in the Department attended, and I hear it was a great day. Unfortunately I was overseas at a Keystone Meeting in São Paulo, Brazil – while the conference was very good, the risk of being shot or mugged was a little too high for me to fully enjoy my time away! Many others have been to meetings around New Zealand such as the Genomics Aotearoa symposium in Wellington and the Asian Transcription meeting in St David’s, where Chris, Iain, Lim, Sarah, Paul, and Lynette spoke. I know Kurt is currently carrying the NZ flag at the Asian Crystallographic meeting in Singapore.

November has also been a busy time for outreach. Miriam and a number of helpers have visited Purakaunui, Waitati, Ravensbourne, St Leonards and Sawyers Bay Schools, introducing children to the different molecules in our bodies using animations and hands-on activities. The kids pretended to be amino acids and held hands in the right order to make a protein from scorpion toxin, and investigated the action of actinidin in kiwifruit on jelly.

Since the last newsletter we have also wrapped up marking for 2019, returned grades, and celebrated the graduation of many students. The graduations last week were a highlight with many students, along with their families, choosing to gather in the staff room to celebrate with staff on Wednesday. This was a very enjoyable occasion although we realise some graduated on different days and others’ travel plans were disrupted. Despite these issues everyone seemed to have a good time, and we even had the opportunity to catch up with some Biochem alumni who were celebrating the graduation of the next generation of biochemists in their families.



Building work update: The seminar room on the ground floor is progressing according to schedule and will be available for the start of semester 1 – I know staff are very much looking forward to teaching the Biochemistry 300-level classes in there next year. Meanwhile redevelopment of the second floor is delayed and won't start until mid-Feb, although they do need to turn Stephs old lab into a temporary tea making facility before then. This means we keep our tearoom over the summer, but the start of semester will see us facing another round of disruption! Keep your ear muffs close!

So this is the last Monthly Update from me! I started this format as a way to help communication within the Department when I became the HOD at the start of 2015. I will pass the HOD baton to Sally on February 1st and she says she will continue with it, so I look forward to reading Monthly Updates instead of writing them!

It has been a privilege to be the HOD for the last five years and to see the Department go from strength to strength with many staff and students doing amazing things. Most tangibly research income is significantly up and increased numbers of students have been signing up for a Biochemistry major. As a result it seems likely that a vibrant research and teaching environment will continue. It has been five busy years and I look forward to working with Sally in the future to ensure the Department continues to be successful.

I hope to see you all at the End of Year party on Wednesday. Best wishes for a happy and relaxing Christmas break.

Catherine

Important dates

Reopening dates for 2020 . Unless stated otherwise, people finish on the 20th Dec.

Remember building access is set to weekend mode from 5pm on Friday 20th Dec to Monday 6th Jan.

Stores: Nigel is here until 23rd Dec. and back on 3rd Jan.

Office: Sonja is back on the 3rd Jan, office will be open.

Linda is back on the 6th Jan.

IT staff: Darren & DJ are both back on 6th Jan.

Workshop: Peter Fleury & Peter Small are both back on the 6th Jan.

Purchasing: Lynn is back on the 13th Jan.

Safety: Jackie is back on the 13th Jan.

Accounts: John Crowley is away until the 20th Jan.

Any financial queries while John is away should be directed to debbie.acreman@otago.ac.nz

Anything ordered after Friday 13th will not arrive until the new year.

Ordering will resume on 6th Jan **provided** you place it through the internal ordering system or email purchasing.north@otago.ac.nz

