

MONTHLY UPDATE

DEPARTMENT OF BIOCHEMISTRY

March 2021

It's hard to believe that Easter is upon us already. Summer is just a distant memory and the teaching semester is well underway (thankfully not online this time). We had a record number of summer students this year many of which have stayed on to join us for their honours or MSc studies. Indeed, our 2021 postgraduate numbers are healthy and our most popular research labs are bursting at the seams. Talk of a biochemistry outpost or mezzanine floor has been mentioned seeing as the Health Sciences Master plan has us staying put in our building until the mid 2030s.

We are thrilled to welcome two new academic staff members this year. The first to join us is Dr Louise Bicknell who arrived from the Department of Pathology this week as a Senior Lecturer with her entourage of 7 staff and students. Louise is joining the Hughes/Lamont/Brown empire and can be found in office 2.25. Please put your head in the door and give her a warm welcome. Later in the year (after he has negotiated MIQ) we will welcome Dr Nathan Kenny from Oxford Brookes University who will be joining us as a lecturer. You may recall our news feature on Nathan last year after he was awarded a Rutherford Discovery Fellowship. Both Louise and Nathan are graduates of the Otago Genetics programme.



Some of you may have seen the ODT "born on this day" snippet on our founding father, Norman Edson the first Professor of Biochemistry. Our Norman Edson prize winners for 2020 were Jennifer Palmer (400-level prize) and Janneke Zwager (300-level) prize. The George Peterson prize was awarded to Maria Larsen and Gareth Jones while the Merv Smith went to Tyler McCourt. (see our webpage news for more information on these prizes and the winners). Keeping on with prizes, Megan Taylor has just won the 2021 Freemasons Postgraduate Scholarship for Otago students. Congratulations to all, we look forward to hearing of more student success during the year. Our new Mike Murphy and Rob Smith Scholarships for 400 and 500 level students have been well subscribed to and we look forward to announcing those soon. And with the Australian bubble in the pipeline maybe an Australian conference and lab visit will allow applications to the Marjorie McCallum travel fund to start up again. We also look forward to the return of some much loved local conferences including the Queenstown Research week (queenstownresearchweek.org) and the NZSBMB under the auspices of the FAOBMB meeting (faobmb2021.org) in Christchurch this year.

Building refurbishment continue slowly! At least our 2nd floor seminar room is almost ready and will be christened with a staff meeting soon. The tearoom refurbishment is still ongoing but we are ever hopeful that it will be completed soon. While we wait for our fancy glass door to arrive, we have slapped some paint on the seminar room side of the temporary wall and will be mounting some BIOC themed posters, suggestions for brightening up the tearoom side are welcome! Refurbishments are ongoing on are 3rd floor with the west end now pretty much a construction site. There will be some decant of folk down onto the ground floor over the course of the year as refurbishments proceed.

We had a mihi whakatau recently for the BMS's new Rautaki Hononga/Kaitakawaenga (Māori Strategic Framework Facilitator), Peter Williamson with Ben Te Aika giving Peter a warm te reo welcome and staff and our Māori students following with their mihi. We look forward to establishing and maintaining strong ties with Peter.

A big shout out to our Love to Ride Aotearoa team who clocked up 3393 km for the Department in February with Peter Mace being the office champion. We topped the five BMS Departments, 600 km ahead of Microbiology. Well done bikers!

Our majors' event last week was well attended, and there was a great turn out from our 400 level students to help welcome their juniors to the Department. Keeping on with social events, our first happy hour this year will be on Friday April 16th when we will welcome the new 400-level cohort to the Department. The 2021 happy hour schedule can be found on page 2 of the newsletter.

Happy Easter!

S.P.A. McConnaughy



PhD/MSc completions:

Jackie Foster has completed her MSc with Sigurd and Sally and is now working in product development at Donaghy's, where she has already been promoted, even as she completed changes to her thesis.

2021 Happy Hours

April 16th
30 April
28 May
11 June (Quiz Night)
6 August
3 September
24 September
1 October (potentially Brewing competition - home brewers start preparing!)
26 November

New arrivals

We have a new client service staff member in **Aliya Rosli** who has been learning the ropes from **Sonya**, who will be leaving us at Easter time to pursue PhD studies.

In the prep room we have new staff **Shereen Murugayah**, **Romana Bittner** and **Cait McLea-Mitchell**.

Claudia Rossig is taking up a research position in the Day lab.

Haoyu Xiong (Diermeier Lab) is leaving to take up a research opportunity elsewhere.

Gene Zhu (Catherine's Lab) has gone, to China to look after his Mum during Covid.

Shannon Taylor (Dearden Lab) is leaving to take up postgrad study in Cambridge.

Dr Liz Duncan is visiting the Department from the UK for a few months

Building & Equipment

The building has been in a state of flux lately, and it seems this may be the new normal for a while.

The service shafts are now clear of asbestos, so all work to phone, network, power, plumbing systems etc, should be feasible again. Related to that is the fume-hoods. Quite a lot are still out of commission, but progress is being made on them now, with some coming back online into use in the past weeks.

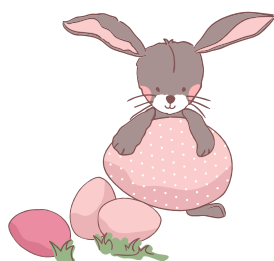
Great to have the Dearden/Marshall lab upgrade done, with the temperature now comfortably controlled by the centralised HVAC services. The new HVAC chiller is yet to come on line, but will soon be capable of much more efficiently and sustainably regulating our air and heat in the building. Gradually we will say goodbye to the many heat-pumps dotted around the department

The Seminar Room, Reading Room and Kitchen are nearly functional. The workers are waiting on bench-tops for the kitchen. One thing to look forward to there is a coffee upgrade. The seminar room is a bit dark while we wait for the folding glass doors to arrive, but otherwise it is all go now. Once we shift back into the tearoom, 2.17 will start to be remodelled for office and writeup spaces.

The third floor is fairly full on at present, with the hallway and labs 3.13 and 3.15 having been gutted. There is even some talk now about planning the required upgrade to the eastern end of the 3rd floor, and maybe the Krause Lab will be in the cross-hairs after that.

Finally, we are also getting upgrades to the toilets. The ground floor men's has been completed and the first floor men's and women's are in process.

So lots happening. Please be careful around areas where this work is happening.



Our new colleagues, the Bicknell Group.

L-R Emily Neilsen (Hons student), Mischa Ruegg (MSc student), Meghan Mulligan (PhD student), Dr Dario Zimbalatti (visiting student), Dr Louise Bicknell, Rosie Sullivan (ARF), Bridget Fellows (ARF)