BABS Quarterly

February 2009 Issue 2

Message from HoS

Dear colleagues,

It has been an eventful start to 2009. The budget has proved to be a major issue for us, as it has for the whole of the University. Despite the cuts I am confident that we can now move forward and the "strike" proposed at the Staff meeting will not be needed. Still, the onus of responsibility lies squarely with us to fully document our requirements so that BABS is not gutted by any future funding cuts.

You will know that the Vice-Chancellor has asked for an External Review Committee to prepare a report on the Faculty of Science. As part of this review the Committee has requested that I present a 10-minute SWOT analysis that concentrates on the forward strategy and planning for BABS. After the presentation the Committee will spend time discussing the best forward plans for the School. I have asked Peter White (as DHoS), Hazel Mitchell (Molecular Medicine), Marc Wilkins (Systems and Cellular Biology) and Rick Cavicchioli (Environmental Microbiology) to join me for this meeting on 25 March.

In addition, later that day a subgroup of the Committee will come and visit other members of the School. This subgroup will consist of Anne Glover (convener), Mimi Koehl and Willy Aspinall. Please make yourself available, as this is an important process.

I would like to welcome Michal Janitz to the School. Michal commenced employment in BABS on 6 February. His office is Room s123 on the First Floor of Samuels and his laboratory is Room s119. Michal comes to us from the Department of Vertebrate Genomics at the Max Planck Institute for Molecular Genetics in Berlin, where he was a Group Leader. He was awarded his PhD in 1998 (summa cum laude) in molecular genetics from the Freie Universität in Berlin, and in 1993 gained a MD in human medicine from the Medical School University Poznan, Poland. Michael has expertise in gene expression profiling, functional genomics, proteomics, next generation sequencing and bioinformatics.

Finally, good luck to all those submitting ARC and NH&MRC proposals!

Bill

RAT News

Research

- Grant success congratulations since the last BABS Quarterly go to: **Marc Wilkins**, a CI on a project recently awarded an ARC LIEF grant of $500k for the installation of a high performance computing cluster to boost Australia's computational research and training capacity; **Rick Cavicchioli, Ian Dawes, Staffan Kjelleberg, Brett Neilan** and **Torsten Thomas**, part of a team awarded a $950k LIEF grant to enhance existing genomic technologies; and **Peter White**, whose group has received $184k in funding for 2 projects from the Australian Centre for Hepatitis and HIV Virology Research.

- Research partly carried out in Chris Marquis's lab featured in the January research highlights in Nature Nanotechnology online: http://www.nature.com/nnano/reshigh/2009/0109/full/nnano.2009.18.html

- **Nico Wanandy**, sponsored by the Bio/Polymer Research Group, attended the Tissue Engineering & Regenerative Medicine Intl Symposium in San Diego in December. His presentation was nominated for an award in the Industrial Awareness category.

- PhD students **Ignatius Pang** and **Tim Couttas** were awarded poster prizes at the recent Australasian Proteomics conference in Lorne.

Admin

Recent fire's silver lining: A comprehensive listing of after hours emergency contacts and hazards has now been compiled and lodged with UNSW Security. Please notify the School Office of any updates.

3 Schools Project: Most staff would be aware of the current evaluation of the operations of the student offices of BEES, SOMS and BABS. This project stems from a discussion among the three Heads of School during 2008 about whether or not there would be synergies and advantages to be gained by co-locating the three individual offices. The HoS wishes to allay any concerns that there has been any a priori decision made, and to confirm that all viewpoints on the viability of such an amalgamation are being carefully considered.

Teaching

As part of a 2008 initiative to upgrade essential equipment In our teaching labs, the School recently took delivery of 2 fluorescent and 60 bright field microscopes which will greatly enhance the student experience in BABS classes.

Staff and Student Achievements and News

- Adding to his already impressive record, **Brett Neilan** travelled to Iran earlier this month to accept the Khwarizmi International Award from the Iranian Research Organisation for Science and Technology. The prize is sponsored primarily by UNESCO and is awarded to individuals who have made an outstanding achievement in research, innovation and invention in science and technology
- **Staffan Kjelleberg** has been re-appointed a Scientia Professor for a further six years in recognition of his outstanding research performance.
- **Rob Yang** is off to China for two weeks in April as part of the Australia China Young Scientists Exchange Scheme.
- **Matt Clemson** and **Wallace Bridge** had their breakthrough tissue-typing technology featured in an article in the Daily Telegraph on 26 February. The story included a photograph of a young cancer patient who needs a bone marrow transplant, highlighting the immense benefits of this innovation.
- The Bio/Polymer Research Group's work on Venomics was recently featured in the Sunday Telegraph under the heading 'Biting Back at Snakes', with a photo of **John Foster** and Helder Marcal.
- **Suhelen Egan** has been awarded a Graduate Certificate in University Learning and Teaching, an extension of the FULT course for new academics.
- The 2008 BABS prizes for Postdoc/Postgrad students have been awarded. *Publication in Highest Impact Journal* has been won by **Saloni Gill** with an IF of 11.194; and the *Highest Number of Citations* prize goes to **Rowena Bull**, who had an article cited 34 times during 2008.
- Congratulations to our December PhD graduates **Katherine Jackson, Sophie Octavia, Carol Oliver, May Aung-Htut, Marco Nousch, David Misztal** and **Rajkumar Kunaparaju**
- University Medal in Microbiology was won by **Lay Hoon Seah**, who did Honours in the Cavicchioli lab.
- University Medal in Genetics was awarded to **Suresh Nair**, an Honours student from the Dawes lab.

Profile of 2008 Honours student James Krycer - Winner of University Medal in Molecular Biology

I remember when I told my friends at the end of Year 12 that I was doing Science – they almost slapped me on the back of the head and asked, "Why 'Science'? You came out of high-school with a good UAI, why not law or medicine?" I've always had a thing for Science – the fact that there is still such a huge pool of knowledge out there to explore, knowledge that could improve the lives of millions of people.

Studying here at UNSW has allowed me to pursue my career in Science. BABS to me represents opportunity – the flexible Molecular Biology major allowed me to explore organic chemistry and statistical modelling for fun, and Biochem/Vacation projects gave me insight into research even before my Honours year! Without the support of BABS, particularly my lab colleagues, my supervisor (Andrew) and my other Honours assessors (Bill, Rob), I would not have been able to achieve the University Medal. My family and Shu, my significant other, also deserve many thanks!

So how do I feel about getting the University Medal? Absolutely exhilarated – it's always great to get a new coaster for my table (just kidding!). But on a more serious note, I should not be the only one to be recognised for achievement here. Congratulations to every student who passes their Honours year – you've made it through the first year of your (potential) research career.

Where to after my BSc? Well, it looks like I am never going to leave Uni, because I just started my PhD. Eventually, I want to go into medical research, motivated by my dream to help others, my extreme curiosity about everything, and the satisfaction you get when you finally solve a puzzle that you've been working on for ages.

Science is all about exploring the whats, whys, and hows of our world – you get to learn about whatever you want to learn about. You get PAID to learn about whatever you want to learn about. I'm surprised there aren't more scientists around.

Recycling with Purpose

Six boxes of pre-loved textbooks, all recent or the latest editions, have been sent to the School of Medicine and Health Sciences at the University of PNG and the Immunology Department at the PNG Institute of Medical Research.

An initiative of Andrew Collins, who has long-established links with PNG, the books were dispatched by Sue Jackson, who received the following message from the recipient at UPNG:

The books arrived safely and in excellent condition. I wish to thank you for your efforts and would appreciate if you could pass our sincere thanks to Andrew. I will acknowledge his efforts when I hand over the books to both our main university library and the medical school library next week. The volumes will be on high demand.
Lohi Matainaho

Andrew would love to see this idea spread, and believes there must be thousands of recent-edition books gathering dust that would be invaluable for people in neighbouring countries.

Andrew Collins's SSP, or, *An SSP Tour of the World's Trouble Spots!*

Greetings from Richmond, Virginia, where I am on the third leg of my SSP journey. We departed Sydney in early January, following a little-used route to the USA – via Sri Lanka and Israel.

Sri Lanka is a really delightful country to visit, if we ignore the lingering civil war. In fact, there were few signs of trouble in those parts of the country we visited. Occasionally jets flew overhead en route to the north, and road blocks were a constant feature of travel outside Colombo. How then can I possibly say that this is a very friendly country? Well, we felt welcome everywhere we went, and I only hope that the troubles are almost over, as was claimed. In Sri Lanka I spoke at the nation's Medical Research Institute, as well as meeting with the country's allergists. As I am particularly interested in the relationship between susceptibility to allergic disease and exposure to parasite infections, Sri Lanka was a very appropriate place to visit. Three religions compete for souls in Sri Lanka – Buddhism, Hinduism and, to my surprise, Christianity (Catholicism) on the east coast – a legacy of the Portuguese occupation of the sixteenth century.

A theme seemed to be developing when we left Sri Lanka for Israel, where war had just ended in the Gaza strip, and where, of course, Islam, Judaism and Christianity compete for souls. We based ourselves in Old Jaffa, which retains some feel from its long Arabic past, and where the contesting communities seem to get along better than in most places in Israel. I spoke at the annual meeting of the Israeli Immunology Society, as well as working at Bar-Ilan University in Tel Aviv with my collaborator Ramit Mehr.

We were in Israel for two weeks. It was a very rewarding if sometimes troubling visit, quite unlike any experience I have had before. Was I the only non-believer in all Jerusalem? It seemed like it. And where will it all end?

I am now based in Richmond, Virginia – the capital of the Confederacy, and just south of Washington DC. After the defeat of the Confederacy 145 years ago, it was decided that in future, Americans would only wage war in other people's countries. So conflict is less apparent on the streets here, and only one religion really gets a look in.

I am now grant writing, and preparing for a trip to New Mexico, for a Keystone conference, after which I will be travelling on to Stanford, where I speak in about two weeks. I am hatching big things with my collaborator there, Andy Fire. Since the School shut down for Christmas, Bruno, two students and I have analysed 1.7 million immunoglobulin gene sequences from his laboratory! My visit to Stanford is in part to plan the next few million sequences. By the time I return in July, I expect we will have them!

See you then! Andrew

Attention all Happy Snappers!

BABS announces the launch of an annual photographic competition. Hi res digital images of people, labs, equipment – in fact, anything related to the School and its people – are being sought. There is no limit to the number of entries. Images may be a collage or edited with Photoshop - let your creativity show!

Selected entries will be used on the BABS website and in its marketing material with full accreditation given to the photographer.

The competition winner will receive a cash prize of AU$50 and the runner-up AU$25. Entries should be sent by e-mail to BABS@unsw.edu.au by Monday 23 March.

SO GET SNAPPING ...

Comings and Goings

Arrivals

- **Sven Delaney** will commence on 16 March as an Associate Lecturer, joining us from Adelaide University. He will take over Mark Tanaka's teaching responsibilities for the duration of Mark's QEII Fellowship.

Departures

- **Mike Edwards** officially retired on 9 February 2009. However, he has been appointed a Visiting Fellow and will continue some involvement in teaching and research in the School.
- **Tim Salmon** is leaving us to join the Science Faculty Computing Unit. We wish him all the best, and are pleased that he will still be involved with the School at some level.

Pitter patter of little scientists …

Our congratulations go to

Suhelen Egan and **Torsten Thomas** on the addition of Elena to their family.

Preetha Sujit (Ballard lab) on her new son Isaiah.

Michelle Gehringer on the birth of another son, Maxi.

STOP PRESS

In breaking news, congratulations go to **Brett Neilan**, who has just been selected as one of 11 finalists over 4 categories in the inaugural UNSW NSI Inventor of the Year Awards. The awards recognise and reward innovative technologies that could benefit the community and the environment and carry a total prize pool of $20,000. One finalist will be named a winner in each award category, together with overall Inventor of the Year, during a gala event on 23 April. Full details at http://www.nsinnovations.com.au/news/2009-02-25~Inventor_of_the_Year_2008.html