

Message from the Head of School

Dear colleagues,

Well, Strategy2025 is certainly gathering momentum. There is so much positive energy and activity around the strategy, that it's sometimes hard to keep up. So, the Strategy Office has provided a Roadmap:

<https://www.2025.unsw.edu.au/staff#roadmap>

(staff login required) so that we can all keep track. Someone did suggest a TomTom version, but I think they were joking.

Congratulations to everyone for surviving Semester 1's teaching and marking. Our course CATEI average was above that of the Faculty which is a great result.



As many of you will know, the start of Semester 2 will coincide with us farewelling Jani O'Rourke, who will be taking some well earned long-service leave before retiring. Jani has of course been an absolute stalwart over the many years since joining UNSW in 1978, initially in the School of Microbiology and

Immunology in various capacities and then as a Professional Officer for the last 14 years in BABS.

In recent years, Jani has made huge contributions to all of the School's major activities: teaching (especially in Med, Micro and SCIF); management of our technical team; organising open days etc.; looking after the culture collection; helping with research grants; designing new labs ... the list goes on and on. Louise is struggling to find all the hands needed to take over these many and varied tasks. We wish Jani all the best for life beyond BABS.

Speaking of grant applications, many of us are currently busy with rebuttals. I spoke to one academic who has 6 grants in and has to deal with comments from 24 reviewers (!) Good luck one and all!

Best wishes,
Andrew

RAT

Research

- Dr **Rich Edwards**, Prof **Marc Wilkins** and A/Prof **Mark Tanaka** were awarded a 2016 ARC Linkage grant of \$325k with industry partner Microbiogen.
- Prof **Hazel Mitchell** was awarded 2nd year funding of \$108.5k by the Broad Foundation for an ongoing project. Hazel is expected to participate in the Foundation's Meeting in New York in 2017.

Administration

- This month the School saw the return of Lecturer Dr **Anne Galea** and Accounts admin **Jia Wu** from maternity leave – welcome back!
- BABS received congratulations from VC Prof Ian Jacobs for its key contribution in achieving the highest ever compliance score in the recent SafeWork NSW audit – 90.9%. The HoS presented WHS Manager **Theresa Kahwati** with a safety stepladder (with SWP, of course) in recognition of her outstanding leadership in the audit preparation.



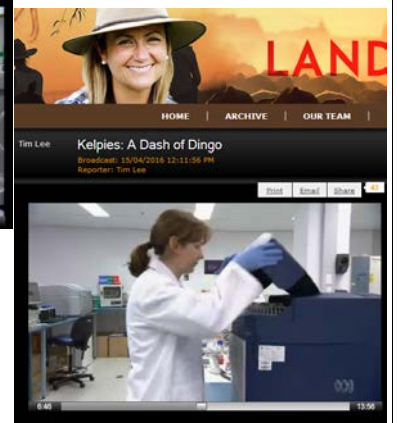
Teaching

- At the June staff meeting the HOS presented the Titans of Teaching awards for Semester 1 2016. For large courses, Dr **Nirmani Wijenayake** topped the rankings for Course Evaluation as well as Lecturing; for small courses A/Prof **Ruiting Lan** scored the same double whammy! Congratulations!
- June graduations saw long-time BABS student **Alfonus Alvin** have his PhD conferred – Dr Alvin advises he's been in the School for a total of 12 years to date!



BABS staff in the news

- Dr **Helen Speirs** and the late A/Prof **Alan Wilton** appeared in an ABC Landline program on Kelpies and Dingoes on 15 April. Helen notes the footage was so old her son didn't recognise her!
- Dr **Sarah Ongley**, postdoc and recent PhD graduate in the Neilan lab, was awarded Runner Up for Early Career Researcher Best Poster at the April CSIRO SynBio Symposium in Canberra for the project "Site-directed mutagenesis of the lyngbyatoxin non-ribosomal peptide synthetase from an uncultured Cyanobacteria".
- Dr **Mark Brown** has commenced a Visiting Position at CSIRO in Hobart as part of the Australian Marine Microbiology Biodiversity Initiative, led by Dr Lev Bodrossy at CSIRO and Mark at UNSW. He will direct data analyses for the AAMBI and the joint \$1+ million initiative between NCRIS agencies Bioplatforms Australia and Integrated Marine Observing System to sequence marine microbial samples for time-series around Australia.
- Prof **Peter White** was interviewed by the Huffington Post in relation to the impending new strain of Norovirus: "A new strain is coming to Australia, there's no doubt about that ... We just investigated a ship with 800 people on board – I won't say which ship – but there were 26 vomiting events including one in the swimming pool".



Teaching Bioinformatics in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia – Postdoc Dr Åsa Perez-Bercoff, Rich Edwards lab

Last November an email from Yonas, a former student colleague from my PhD days in Dublin, included a surprise invitation to be one of three teachers in a 10-day bioinformatics course at the Armauer Hansen Research Institute (AHRI) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Yonas is a postdoctoral researcher there. The course would be held from mid- to end-December.



While tempted and flattered, at first I said no – while I had previously been a teaching assistant in a Linux and Perl course for biologists, I had never written my own lectures or lab exercises before. I thought the notice was too short to organise teaching material and my travel visa. However, my friend reassured me that I was good at teaching what biologists need to learn to get started in bioinformatics. Yonas had been a student in the Linux/Perl course I had helped teach, and I had taught him different bioinformatics tricks outside of the course as well.

With added encouragement from my sister and Richard Edwards, my postdoc supervisor at BABS, I accepted ... and so I went on one of my greatest adventures to date. I discovered that teaching is fun when students are motivated and keen. The class ranged from people with a Masters Degree in Cryptology, to wet lab biology PhD students and even a professor in virology. I visited the Armauer Hansen Research Institute and the All Africa Leprosy Rehabilitation and Training (ALERT) Center medical facility, where the bioinformatics course was held.



Åsa with 'Lucy'



I met many enthusiastic researchers and general staff members of AHRI and other research institutes from around Addis Ababa and the world. I also got to meet Yonas again for the first time in 5 years, and finally met his wife and kids, about whom he had always spoken. I enjoyed Ethiopian cuisine, coffee, music, dance, and unique architecture – such as old churches that were unlike any I'd ever seen.

As an evolutionary biologist I was especially excited to visit the National Museum of Ethiopia where the remains of 'Lucy' (*Australopithecus afarensis*) are kept. Ethiopia is fascinating; I hope to return to teach as well as explore this wonderful country, with its warm people, great cultural and natural history ... and the coffee is out of this world!

PhD student Simone Li first author on *Science* paper

In April, **Simone Li** was first author on a paper in *Science*, one of the pre-eminent journals in the discipline. In 2012, Simone Li commenced her PhD as the first Australian student to participate in the prestigious EMBL International PhD Program located in Heidelberg, Germany. She is being co-supervised by BABS Prof Marc Wilkins and Marc and EMBL'S Dr Peer Bork.



BABS 2016 iGEM team



The International Genetically Engineered Machine Foundation (iGEM) runs an annual competition in Boston each October for students interested in the field of synthetic biology. This year's team is only the second from UNSW to enter this prestigious global competition, the first being last year's BABS team (who returned with a gold medal!). This year, team members have decided on a project to create synthetic outer membrane vesicles in *E. coli*.



Follow their progress on fb: <https://www.facebook.com/unswigemteam/>

Adrian Lee Travel Scholarships

This Scholarship is a School-funded initiative to provide eligible postgraduate research students with the opportunity to undertake study, learn new techniques, collaborate or explore opportunities for collaboration with other labs, universities or research institutions. The value of the scholarship is \$10,000 and can be used for travel, reagents or project costs, accommodation and other related travel costs. Congratulations to the 2016 awardees!

- **Daniela-Lee Smith**, Supervisor Marc Wilkins
Heck Lab, Biomolecular Mass Spectrometry and Proteomics, University of Utrecht, Netherlands
- **Kate Montgomery**, Supervisor Belinda Ferrari
GNS Science, Wairakei Research Centre, Taupo, New Zealand
- **Bat Jugder**, Supervisor Chris Marquis
Manchester Institute for Biotechnology, University of Manchester
- **Nicholas Lister**, Supervisor Paul Waters
City of Hope - Beckman Research Institute, Los Angeles
- **Angela Soeriyadi**, Supervisor Brett Neilan
Bergen, Norway and Berlin, Germany



BABS Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/UNSWBABS>

Our 'likes' tally for this quarter is 846 vs. 795 in March.

And a great fb post from a student in praise of BABS teaching: "First year BABS1201 notes getting me through Med School metabolism lectures!! A big shout out to the wonderful Louise Lutze-Mann and Anne Galea"

Pitter patter? ... No, thud, thud, thud!



No new BABS babies this quarter, however, along this theme, **Rich Edwards** undertook his first Sydney Half Marathon in May, raising sponsorship money in aid of the Premature Babies ward at The Royal Hospital for Women at Randwick, where his daughter was born earlier this year.



If you would like something included in the next BABS Quarterly please email Michele at m.potter@unsw.edu.au