"I am hopeful for a number of major outcomes for the University, including establishing personal contacts and friendships with staff of partner US universities ...."
Heart repair hope with revolutionary stem cell research

Researchers from the University’s School of Biomedical Science are collaborating with health professionals from the Hunter Medical Research Institute (HMRI) in stem cell research that saw a revolutionary trial at the John Hunter Hospital last month.

Newcastle’s John Hunter was one of three sites taking part in the international trial that could help up to 30 percent of patients with end stage coronary artery disease.

Conjoint senior lecturer and cardiologist Dr Suku Thambar said the treatment, involving the injection of adult stem cells into the heart, offers new hope to patients who are ineligible for traditional treatment such as angioplasty and surgery. These patients suffer severe angina and experience pain from daily activities. Their only treatment option is medication.

The trial involved injecting stem cells taken from a patient’s own bone marrow into parts of the heart which are alive but lack adequate blood supply. Researchers will examine how well these cells stimulate new blood vessel growth in the heart (known as angiogenesis).

“Studies in the United States have been shown to be effective in animals,” Dr Thambar said. “But this is the first human trial of its kind in Australia.”

Dr Thambar is a member of the Hunter Heart-Lung Research Guild, which was established two years ago to promote cardiovascular research. Guild Director Dr Tony Quail, from the School of Biomedical Science in the Faculty of Health, said a group of researchers – Dr James Edwards, Dr David Cottee, Dr David Burgess, Mr Robert Blake and Emeritus Professor Saxon White – are working with Dr Thambar on a model of myocardial ischaemia in pigs.

“Parallel to the human project run by Dr Thambar, we are examining how stem cells might improve blood flow to the heart in circumstances when it is poor,” Tony said. “The US studies have provided evidence that it works in animals but we are examining the mechanism – how it works.”

The stem cell procedure was trialled on heart patient Jim Nichol, of Belmont, at the John Hunter Hospital in April, under the guidance of Dr Shmuel Fuchs, Director of Myocardial Angiogenesis from the Cardiovascular Research Institute at Washington Hospital Centre in the US. Newcastle Mater Misericordiae Hospital’s Dr Phil Rowlings, who processed Mr Nichol’s bone marrow, was also present during the procedure.

Using a state-of-the-art cardiac imaging system to create a 3-D map of the heart, researchers injected stem cells into the wall of the heart via a catheter. The imaging system enabled the procedure to be performed with great accuracy.

The trial involves researchers in Newcastle, China and Hong Kong, with Newcastle patients the first to undergo the procedure. The trial is a blinded study, which means all patients will undergo the procedure but only some will receive the stem cell treatment.

The Hunter Heart-Lung Research Guild, which is a group within the HMRI, has applied for funding through the National Health and Medical Research Council and the National Heart Foundation to continue their research into the reason stem cells seem to stimulate blood flow to the heart.

Science and Engineering Super Challenge wins funding

The University has been successful in attracting funding to continue with its Science and Engineering Super Challenge for high school students.

A grant of $20,000 has been awarded to the program from the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training to run the Super Challenge, which aims to raise science awareness in high school students by setting them science and technology challenges.

Participating teams from the Hunter Region, the Central Coast, the North Coast and the Central West will compete in two finals during Science Week. A/Professor John O’Connor from the Faculty of Science and IT said the Challenge is a hands-on experimentation and development exercise demonstrating scientific principles and approaches.

“The students are set a series of tasks which involve combining knowledge and creativity to find the optimal solution to a challenge,” John explained. “Figures from the Department of Education and Training show that in most schools which participated in the Challenge, year 11 student numbers in Physics and Chemistry rose 25-50 percent while, for a selection of schools that did not participate, the numbers declined 25 percent. They are having a very positive effect.”
Restructure encourages Indigenous autonomy

R

estructuring has provided opportunities for the University's Indigenous teachers and researchers to have a greater level of autonomy and self-determination, according to Professor John Lester, head of the new School of Aboriginal Studies.

The new School unifies Aboriginal Studies, Umulliko Indigenous Higher Education Centre and Wollotuka Aboriginal Education Centre. The School will share the newly constructed building, known as Wollotuka, with the Yapug Indigenous enabling program and the Aboriginal health liaison group.

"We've kept the name Wollotuka because the staff at the University and the Aboriginal community recognise and associate strongly with it," John said. "It has history on campus but it also signifies the importance of sharing – it means meeting, eating and greeting place – and reinforces an idea that the University is an extension of normal life, not some ivory tower on the hill where you go to learn."

John says that the new structure offers a lot more managerial responsibility to the Head of School than previously existed and mixes academic and administrative responsibilities more as well.

"There is a real feeling that the University can't live in isolation in an academic utopia any more due to market forces and politics. We need to be very conscious of the economy we now live in. To succeed we need to not only continue the academe, which we do well, but to create a viable economic base for that to continue."

John says the Aboriginal Studies School will share the burden of reductions in budgets but he is confident that the level of support at the senior management level in the University will ensure it is resourced at an adequate level to continue to grow. The economic climate makes the task harder but doesn't stop the school from moving forward, he said.

"We're beginning to experience success in research terms, picking up some substantial contract work, such as the NSW Department of Education and Training Review of Aboriginal Education Policy. As part of a strategic approach, we've invested at Umulliko in raising the student research profile and we've moved from having three students undertaking postgraduate studies into Indigenous issues to having over 30 Masters and PhD students. This year will see the first three Indigenous PhD students at Newcastle complete their studies."

The University now has a core of talented new Indigenous researchers, which creates the capacity to tender for substantial projects. The researchers come from all over Australia and across a broad range of discipline areas. They are often jointly supervised between specialist disciplines and Aboriginal Studies.

The completion of the Wollotuka building is an exciting development for the new School that has no parallel anywhere in Australia, John says.

"The University architects have created a spectacular building that meets Indigenous requirements in an outstanding fashion. We encourage people to drop by and have a look."

John says that the new School is collaborating to develop an overseas coursework Master's program. They are working with the Saami Indigenous people of Finland through the University of Oulu and with the University of Kansas, on a ground-breaking Master of Indigenous Studies program.

"Each University would hold the degree and offer students a choice of external placement at either one of the other institutions for 50 percent of their program," John said. "The idea is innovative."

The School of Aboriginal Studies will continue to collaborate across disciplines, which John says they have done successfully at both undergraduate and postgraduate level in the past, and which will be cemented by the new structure.

John came to the University as Director of the newly formed Umulliko Indigenous Higher Education Centre in 2000. He has a 21-year background in Aboriginal education beginning in teaching, and moving to State and national policy development. In 1986 he became the first Aboriginal principal of a TAFE college in Australia when he was appointed at Griffith College. He was then Principal of Grafton TAFE College. His appointment as the first Indigenous Aboriginal Studies Chair at the University recognises his outstanding contribution in Indigenous education.

John's qualifications include a Diploma in Teaching from Armidale CAE, a Bachelor of Arts from Macquarie University and a Master of Educational Administration from the University of New England. He is currently undertaking PhD studies at Newcastle.

The School will celebrate the opening of the new Wollotuka building in October, beginning with a two-day conference, Time to Listen, on education and culture. The conference will be conducted in an Indigenous way, using talking circles, and will be followed by a four-day cultural festival.

"The festival will include corroborees, Indigenous comedy, drama, art exhibitions, film and food festivals, and music," John said. "It will culminate in a contemporary music concert on the Saturday night."
People count in Social Sciences

Head of the new School of Social Sciences Professor Mel Gray has invested many hours meeting with her staff.

Describing herself as a 'servant leader', Mel says she is attempting to serve the needs of staff to make them happy and to ensure they are partners in the new venture.

"I need them to feel a part of the new school," she explains. "I don't think that any system works unless people feel part of it and I want Newcastle to have the best School of Social Sciences in Australia."

The School brings together the disciplines of social work, leisure and tourism studies, and sociology and anthropology - three disparate groups with separate cultures, according to Mel.

"It is quite an exciting and challenging time, finding synergies between the disciplines and working together to mould and shape the new School. We want to not only fit in to the new University structure but to add value to it. If we can be a part of the overall University objectives but also find our own direction - our own style and characteristics - then we'll have motivated people who will come up with creative and innovative ideas. That's what I'm hoping to accomplish."

She spent the first six weeks as Head of School meeting all the staff individually to find out their strengths, capacities and interests. Then using the University's strategic priority areas, she set about trying to build the structure that best suits the needs and talents of her staff.

Mel came to the University as Head of the Department of Social Work in 1999, from the University of Natal in Durban, South Africa, where she had spent 20 years including five as the Chair and Head of Department in Social Work. She has served on the Board of the International Association of Schools of Social Work since 1996, developing wide international networks, and hopes to see a boost in overseas student enrolment in the School.

"We currently don't have that many and I'd like to see more involvement of overseas students, particularly at postgraduate level. The School has two research centres within it including the Centre for Asia Pacific Social Transformation Studies (CAPTRANS) and I think there's potential there for students from the region to become involved."

The School could look at the social development area with a view to contributing to research, offering training or degree programs, Mel said.

"It's an area in which we could make quite a contribution and which offers exciting opportunities for multi-disciplinary input and possible collaborations, perhaps with the School of Policy."

Mel would like to see the disciplines in the School co-locate and hopes that will happen in time. She has instituted a regular Tuesday morning tea in the Behavioural Sciences building as an opportunity for staff to meet and looks forward to having all the disciplines together.

"I'm trying to consolidate the School office and want all the administrative staff together in one place. I think it's really important to create a culture within the School where every discipline is crucial to the system and as far as possible general staff can support academics as well as students. General staff also need variety in the work they do and I would like to create structures that see all the working groups and committees in the School being serviced by general staff, who go to the meetings, do the follow-ups, develop databases and make sure the records are accurately kept."

Mel wants to be proactive in ensuring that the School's programs are effective. She has ensured that a representative from each of the School's disciplines sits on each of the committees that have been established to look at the best ways to structure courses that build on the strengths of the new amalgamation. She also encourages communication about the way the School will operate and what it is trying to achieve.

"I'm very optimistic and see lots of opportunities coming out of this process," Mel said of the new structure. "The Pro Vice-Chancellor Terry Lovat has been very supportive of my approach. In the end people count, not numbers."
Teaching & Learning

Drawing on nature

The University is offering a unique wildlife illustration course that includes a two week research field trip.

Herbert Heinrich from the School of Design, Communication and IT says the intensive course is meant for students of the life sciences, visual arts and design who are interested in developing the practical skills associated with wildlife illustration.

"We have planned the course to be offered during the mid-year vacation so as to provide the least interruption to other courses, and the University has allowed a 10 unit credit towards a degree program on completion of the course."

The Drawing on Nature course begins in Newcastle at the University design studios, where students will be introduced to field recording and studio techniques. A specially equipped bus will then take them on a 3000 kilometre 12 day journey through outback NSW, visiting habitats from riverine and wetland to arid environments, as well as the world heritage Willandra Lakes district. Students will develop their observation recording skills, sketching in pencil and watercolour as well as using photography.

The third part of the program is back in the studio using material collected during the trip and developing finished artwork. The course is expected to cost around $3500 including full catering for the field trip, and accommodation ranging from motels to an outback homestead.

Current art students are welcome, but there is also an opportunity for international students or non-award enrolments from outside the University with an interest in wildlife. The tour starts in mid-June and inquiries should be directed to Herbert on 4921 6250, email heinrich@mail.newcastle.edu.au

Artwork produced by staff and students of the Wildlife Illustration course

Inflation and unemployment

The relationship between inflation and unemployment and the attendant implications for economic policy were the subject of a workshop convened by the University's Centre of Full Employment and Equity (CofFEE) in April.

Economists have long debated the idea that inflation and unemployment are trade-offs. The current government adopts the position that there is no sustainable trade-off and so monetary policy should aim to keep inflation low. They argue that this strategy does not worsen unemployment, which they claim is determined by structural forces like individual attitudes to work. Opponents, including CofFEE's researchers, argue that the use of monetary policy to maintain low inflation comes at the expense of high unemployment and the attendant costs associated with it.

The workshop attracted some eminent speakers including Professor Malcolm Sawyer from the Leeds Business School in the UK, who discussed the role of investment in influencing inflation and employment outcomes. David Graen, Head of the Economic Research Department at the Reserve Bank of Australia, presented estimates of the inflation-unemployment relationship in Australia and argued that the economy was still placed to bring unemployment down. Associate Professor Peter Kriesler and Professor John Nevile, from the University of NSW discussed the way that the current account may constrain trade and therefore the level of aggregate demand and employment.

CofFEE Director Professor Bill Mitchell discussed the Centre's latest econometric research on nonlinearities in unemployment behaviour.

"The evidence suggests that unemployment rises sharply in an economic downturn and takes many years to fall," Bill said. "The costs of driving the economy into these 'non-linear thresholds' are huge."

Bill noted that the workshop was timely, particularly in the context of the upcoming federal budget and given the implications for public policy and the types of measure governments use to reduce unemployment.

"Many economic commentators are predicting increases in interest rates of up to 1.5 percent over the next 12 months as strong economic growth brings inflation," he said. "But as the economy has failed to generate enough employment growth to significantly reduce the unemployment rate, an increase in interest rates will see the unemployment rate climb again."

The workshop was attended by economists, students and the public. Debate following the presentations was lively, with a focus on the public policy implications for unemployment. The workshop was the first in CofFEE's 2002 series. Details of further events are available on the website http://e1.newcastle.edu.au/coffee/

Paper wins US award

Head of the School of Engineering Professor John Fryer has won a prestigious award of the American Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing for a paper he jointly authored with his recently graduated PhD student Kerry McIntosh. The paper, which appeared in the Society's journal Photogrammetric Engineering and Remote Sensing, concerned developments and results from Kerry's thesis on methods to enhance low resolution images. This work has led to John becoming involved in using photogrammetric techniques for forensic investigations for the police and the public prosecutor's office. The paper won first honourable mention in the Talbert Abrams Award. A colleague of John's and past President of the Society, Professor Tom Lilliesand, accepted the award on behalf of John and Kerry, who were unable to attend the April presentation in Washington.
SORTI was established in the then Faculty of Education in 2000 in response to a growing concern, at national and international levels, about the effectiveness and impact of government funded research and research training, particularly research training. It is one of the few research centres in the world to examine advanced level learning.

The research, training workshops and consulting activities of the Centre are directed toward the understanding and development of research and higher order problem solving skills, and the impact of research training and research in a wide variety of contexts including the workplace. One of its core interests is research higher degree supervision - instructional models, factors contributing to success, and evaluation and assessment of outcomes.

Centre Director Allyson Holbrook says the PhD is thought to be the world’s oldest and most venerated of degrees, with its antecedents in the medieval period.

“The PhD retains the mystery that it had then – it’s almost as though it’s been an article of faith and no one questions it. On the other hand, you have a greater quest for accountability and quality assurance, as well as a need for students to understand what they are letting themselves in for if they undertake doctoral study.”

The Centre brings together researchers from the School of Education, other faculties, Research and Research Training Services, and national and international academics who visit the Centre and engage in collaborative projects. The expertise of members ranges across Psychology, Evaluation and Measurement, Policy Studies, Curriculum, English as a Second Language, History and Philosophy.

Some of its earliest projects focus on the examination of the dissertation, models of supervision, cross-cultural supervision and the problems faced by international students, the effectiveness of IT use by novice researchers, and expectations of research across disciplines.

The impact of higher degree research on schools in the discipline of Education is another of the studies undertaken by staff, along with case histories of research expertise and learning/training programs.

Allyson, who came to the University from Melbourne in 1987, is an historian specialising in the history of education and serves on the Council of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). She said that while there has been a huge global increase in the number of people doing PhDs, their candidature too often resulted in non-completion.

“One of the driving forces for the establishment of the Centre was my involvement, along with Professor Sid Bourke from Education and various others, in a study into the Impact of Educational Research, which was completed in 2000 and published last year. We carried out a mapping exercise to see what was happening in educational research in Australia, how much was being done, where, and its dissemination and utilisation.”

The group found that the research was having an important affect but not in the ways that were anticipated by the government. The dynamic of research was incredibly complex and government authorities needed to map what was going on and understand its outcomes in order to be able to maximise its contribution to the community. SORTI may have begun with an educational-specific study but its scope has broadened to consider all disciplines.

“We try to see ourselves as a cross-disciplinary unit and we offer workshops, seminars and consultancy on research and research training,” Allyson said.

“We are also working with others from across the University to develop a web-based research course in research management. We’ve only understood in recent years that there has been a change in the PhD demographic.”

The Centre’s research activities and other services are located in Newbold House in Mayfield. The historic property was acquired by the University last year and will eventually house a number of new research centres.
Connie’s rocky road to success

Concetta Hunt, who graduated with first class honours in Sociology and Anthropology at the Central Coast Campuses graduation ceremony last month, has had a rocky road to academic success.

Connie’s lecturers and her fellow students and friends will testify to the love of learning that has seen her progress through a Diploma in Social Welfare, to an undergraduate degree in Social Science, an outstanding result in her Honours year, and will lead to her commencing doctoral studies in second semester.

Connie began her studies following the death of her son John, a boy with multiple disabilities who was totally dependent on her for his care. Her devotion to John extended into an involvement in the disabilities area for about 20 years, including active involvement in several Central Coast respite care groups. She was a member of the steering committee that lobbied for the establishment of Glenvale Special School at Narara and was President of the School’s Parents and Citizens group.

In her honours year, Connie carried out an urban sociological and anthropological study of Sydney, focusing on the global processes at work — the change in industry and demographics that continually change the personality of the city. She says it has been a fascinating and wholly absorbing research area and one that has not only produced for her a fine academic result, but has enabled her to have a broader and clearer understanding of the world around her.

“My research points out that privatisation has brought in external control, so subtle that we don’t always realise that it is happening. This comes in the form of advertising, visual imagery, the way things are described and presented and how we as consumers perceive the messages and in turn present ourselves,” she said. “There is a shift from the earlier Sydney to the Sydney of the present day — a change in personality if you like. This of course has been affected by, and in turn affects, the cost of living, the cost of housing and rental, and places people in categories.”

Connie believes that people need to be given the opportunity to make choices on the way they would like to live and that the more we know about the changes that are occurring in our society the better it will be. Her examiners have recommended that part of her 30,000-word thesis be published in an academic refereed journal.

“I am looking forward to the next phase of my study,” she said, “Although I have realised that you will never know everything, my study has enabled me to ‘find myself’, and also to assess what contributions I can make to others. I have been challenged in a very positive way and a~ I can say to aspiring students is to not back away from the opportunity but grab it and say thankyou!”

“I suppose you can say that I am proud of myself. It’s not arrogance, rather a sense of achievement and an acknowledgement,” Connie says.

Unitunes support research

A team from the University joined other corporate citizens in a triathlon to raise money for the Hunter Medical Research Institute held on the Foreshore in February. The 2002 Sparke Helmore Corporate Triathlon included a 500m swim, 20km bike ride and five kilometre run and the University’s athletes performed well.

Financial Services Manager from the Faculty of Education and Arts, Damien Ryan, said Unitunes’ matching singlets ensured that the team stood out from the crowd.

“Thanks to the organisational energy of Jenny Williams, Unitunes was not missed amongst the corporate landscape of Newcastle,” Damien said. “We had a number of individual and team entrants, all of whom finished with respectable times. A great time was had by all, in cheering vocally for one another, and in the quiet sense of personal achievement in competing in and finishing this event. Well done, Unitunes.”
Online music technology programs exceed expectations

The University is becoming the leader in online music technology education in Australia.

The Conservatorium has over 50 postgraduate students from around Australia and the world enrolled in its Masters and Graduate Certificate in Music Technology programs, offered for the first time last year. Music Technology lecturer Nathan Scott says that the popularity of the programs had exceeded all expectations.

“Our courses are unique. The Conservatorium is the only institution that offers a distance education music technology program that is supported by email and the Internet. Programs such as this are not yet available elsewhere in Australia and there is very little offered overseas.”

As a result, the programs have attracted students from every state in Australia and from England, United States, Singapore, Denmark, Canada and Brunei. The Conservatorium has had to increase its staffing levels to cope with the demand.

“There is a great need for education in music technology,” Nathan said. “Our programs enable teachers, performers, composers and sound engineers to update their skills and take advantage of new advances in the field. Most of our students are teaching or working as professional musicians.”

The success of the music technology courses, and many other online courses offered by the Graduate School, is due to the University's commitment to creating courses that are flexible and relevant.

Biochemist honoured

Professor of Medical Biochemistry at the University Dr John Rostas was given the honour of presenting the inaugural Lawrie Austin Lecture of the Australian Neuroscience Society.

The Society established the annual plenary lecture, named after Dr Lawrie Austin, one of the Society’s founders and one of the founders of the research discipline of neurochemistry in Australia. This lecture is one of the main events at its annual conference.

John gave his lecture at the 2002 meeting of the Society in February in Sydney at a conference that was held jointly with the International Society for Developmental Neuroscience. After the lecture he was presented with a framed portrait of Dr Austin. This original portrait will be used as the basis for a limited edition series of lithographs which will be presented to Lawrie Austin lecturers in future years.

Dr Austin’s daughter Anne was present at the lecture. John did his PhD studies in the laboratory headed by Dr Austin and his parents lived next door to him so John knew Dr Austin very well both professionally and socially. John Rostas is also the Director of the Hunter Medical Research Institute.

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Head of the School of Fine Art Professor Anne Graham explored the importance of objects to memory and a sense of place in an exhibition at the Fine Art Gallery last month.

The exhibition, Memory and Things, is part of a two-year research project to examine the capacity of objects to regenerate memory and a sense of identity, particularly as memory fails with age. Anne interviewed 14 elderly women who are residents of Westcott Retirement Village at Stockton and photographed their surroundings and the objects they value. Her exhibition includes photographs, objects and text from interviews.

"While I was researching two previous exhibitions, one based on the experience of female prisoners in Australia and the other on households in a housing estate, I began to think about the role of memory in constructing identity," Anne explained. "Then in 1998, I heard Dr. John Zeisel talk about the way in which environmental factors can reduce the symptoms of people suffering from Alzheimer's Disease."

Dr. Zeisel, cofounder of Hearthstone Alzheimer Care in Boston in the US, has won awards for his work in examining environmental design factors that can trigger memory in people suffering from Alzheimer's and restore their sense of who they are. Anne was particularly interested in the way in which the residents of Westcott, who had relocated to the retirement village, created a sense of personal space in their new accommodation.
Thirteen of the ladies who had volunteered to be interviewed, women in their 80s and 90s, came to see the exhibition. It was a special outing for them and they enjoyed seeing it, Anne said. "So many of the people who have seen it identify with the women's stories about growing up in and around Newcastle. Their memories recreate a unique sense of place, a sense of Newcastle."

Memory and Things is part of a larger research project into the mnemonic function of objects and materials as constructors of identity begun in September 1999 and funded by an RMC New Staff Grant. As part of the project, Anne has visited the Mass Observation Archive at Sussex University in the UK and attended Frontiers of Memory and Trace exhibition, also in the UK. The exhibition began on April 3 and will run until May 19.

Shirley shares common themes with Anne in that both artists are interested in memory and both seek to work with communities. Shirley worked for a year with homeless people who were selling Big Issue magazine, producing an exhibition entitled Suspended Sentences, which involved a tent that had 12,000 tags, each with one word on it, that were fragments of conversations she'd had with the homeless people, suspended from the ceiling.

"Anne came to see Suspended Sentences when she was working with the ladies at Westcott and we talked about how people survive and how they relate their experiences," Shirley said. "We were both trying to find consensual collaboration in our ways of working with communities - her project took two years, mine was a year - and we both use text in our work."

Shirley, who went to art school in Hull in Yorkshire and did her Master of Arts at Manchester Metropolitan University, has exhibited widely in the UK and in several countries in Europe. She has done several residencies at other universities, including one in Perth and when she leaves Newcastle she will spend some time in Papua New Guinea, where her anthropologist partner is currently working.

"The residency in Newcastle provides a different space for me to work in and more concentrated time to do it," she said. "It is a period of analysis and research in which I'm moving towards consolidating my position. I also get an opportunity to explore different landscapes - in Newcastle and in PNG."

Co-exhibiting with Anne in the Fine Art Gallery is visiting artist Shirley Diamond, whose work ... A Crumbling of Before and Afters, consists of millions of pencil-drawn lines on paper that intersect to produce patterns, angles and perspective that are intended to explore our notions of infinity.

"Infinity is a notion that will never be anything but an idea to us, yet we grapple with trying to make it tangible. We can be told how big it is but we can't truly understand it," she said. "In the same way that a massive salt lake is made up of billions of salt crystals, I wanted to give an idea of that massive accumulation of things."
Media training

The Public Relations unit from Business Services ran its first Media Training session last month in the Chancellery.

The four-hour session organised through Leadership and Staff Development was presented in two parts. The first—a theory session—involved understanding the media, where best to place your message, debunking the myths about the media, and the construction and use of media releases. The second was a practical session involving television interviewing techniques and procedures using a full television crew from the School of Design, Communication and IT.

Television and radio journalist and presenter Mark Warren led the practical session and took participants through interviews about their particular area of interest within the University. They then had an opportunity to see themselves on television and discuss how they appeared in front of the camera.

“We wanted to make it as real as possible so the participants could get the feeling of being in front of a camera and lights and hopefully erase some of the mystery and associated fear,” Mark said. “Television and its paraphernalia can be rather daunting to people suddenly confronted with it. We ran the session in an environment that showed what it took to set up shots, get the lights right and sound working, so the people involved would be pre-armed and prepared for the time they may be asked for an interview.”

The staff under the spotlight in the first workshop came from University Services, Social Sciences, the Pro Vice-Chancellor’s Unit in Education and Arts, University Library and Education Services, and Leisure and Tourism.

Media Training sessions are planned for throughout the year and are aimed at academics who may need to deal with the media because of their research or teaching, as well as general staff members whose work requires them to understand the workings of the media.

The sessions are run by the Public Relations Unit—contact Leigh Wallis on 4921 5473—and can be booked through Leadership and Staff Development—contact Faye McMillan on 4921 8634.

Professor wins British literary award

Drama Professor, Victor Emeljanow, and co-author Associate Professor Jim Davis from the University of NSW, have won the Annual Book Prize of the British Society for Theatre Research for their book on theatre audiences.

Their work, Reflecting the Audience: London Theatre Going 1840-1880, was chosen from world wide submissions as the best English language publication of original research of the history and technique of the British theatre, the highest award for British theatre reference works. The book has also been shortlisted for the George Freedley Prize offered by the Library Association of America.

“We know an immense amount about what has been performed by whom and where, but the question of who goes and why, is perhaps the most under-researched area in theatre,” Victor said. “We used every conceivable method to find out who was attending theatres in 19th century London—how they got there, where they came from and what they saw.”

The researchers looked at theatre manager’s diaries, census returns, train timetables, hotel costs and police records. They found that Victorian theatre audiences were incredibly diverse and far more mobile than previously thought.

The book was published in November after almost 10 years of development and has become a reference work for drama students at universities around the world. A review in Jazz (University of Iowa Press) calls it ‘an innovative work that begins to fill a large gap in theatre studies’.

“In Newcastle we have PhD drama students following up this work into present day audiences,” Victor said. “For years an enormous amount of research has been done into who the television and radio audiences are but theatre directors often take the audience for granted, never bothering to find out who they are or why they came.”
People & Places

Deaths in custody commissioner visits Newcastle

A

decade after the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Indigenous people are still massively over-represented in the prison system, former Commissioner Justice Hal Wootton told a class of Aboriginal Studies students at the University last month.

Invited to speak to a third year class in the Contemporary Aboriginal Society program, Justice Wootton said that while the Royal Commission had resulted in some positive outcomes, the bottom line showed that the number of people being imprisoned and dying in custody has gone up.

“We made 339 recommendations with around 20 percent of them dealing with the care of people in custody, 10 percent about the investigation of deaths in custody, and 10 percent examining ways Aboriginal people could be dealt with by the justice system that would avoid them being in custody. The remaining recommendations reflected the view that we had all come to that you couldn't look at this high rate of death of Aboriginal people in custody in isolation. It was connected with the conditions of Aboriginal people including housing, education, health, land rights, self determination, etc.”

Justice Wootton explained that the Royal Commission was ordered by the Federal Government in response to five Aboriginal deaths in custody in six weeks between June and August 1987. In conjunction with State and Territory governments, the Government asked Commissioner Justice Muirhead to inquire into every Aboriginal death in custody in Australia since January 1, 1980. Once they realised the scope of their request – there were 99 deaths – the Government appointed three more commissioners, including Justice Wootton, who enquired into deaths in NSW, Victoria and Tasmania.

“Our investigations quickly showed that although the numbers of deaths seemed large, particularly in 1987, Aboriginal prisoners were not dying in custody any faster than non-Aboriginal prisoners. It was simply that there were so many Aboriginal prisoners – Aboriginal people were 29 times more likely to be in a police cell than non-Aboriginal people and 15 times more likely to be in prison.”

Justice Wootton said the Royal Commission had resulted in police taking much better care of prisoners in their custody, more thorough coronial enquiries into deaths in custody and more sympathy for Aboriginal people in judicial offices.

He believes that 'law and order campaigns' in Australia have resulted in the number of people, both black and white, being imprisoned rising to a 'quite extraordinary amount'.

“We are not quite as bad as the United States, where they have locked up some two million of their people, but we are heading that way. One thing that is clear is that the overall figures of imprisonment and death in custody have gone up. For example, the national rate of imprisonment at June last year was 1,801 Indigenous people for every 100,000 adults. The number was 147 for the rest of the Australian population.”

Justice Wootton said that Australian governments had been trying to improve things for Aboriginal communities for the past 30 years. They have provided housing, health services and schools. He said that there needs to be a discourse in Australia that encourages Aboriginal people to look at the reasons why initiatives are failing and address them.

Introducing Justice Wootton, Aboriginal Studies lecturer Vicki Grieves said he had been a supporter of Aboriginal peoples' fight for justice. A former Supreme Court judge, he was Dean of the University of New South Wales' law school when he helped set up the Aboriginal Legal Service in Redfern, which paved the way for many other Aboriginal organisations.

Career aspiration project for Kooris

Professor John Lester of the University's Unpulliko Indigenous Higher Education Centre, last month launched his report on a program which has significantly increased employment and education outcomes for Indigenous youth on the mid north coast.

The report documents and evaluates the first two years of the Forster Career Aspiration Project (CAP), which provides a model for the creation of school/work/further study and career transition programs for Indigenous students around Australia. The program also runs incentives such as wage subsidies, mentoring, and encourages broad ranging industry involvement.

Begun by the Indigenous community in 1999, the CAP program was a direct response to the lack of role models for Indigenous youth, the student drop-out rate, the under-representation of the Indigenous community in mainstream employment, and the lack of planning for educational needs for future employment.

The ground breaking CAP project is managed through Forster's Aboriginal Land Council and has been well received and supported within Forster High School. The capacity of the program to work on individual student profiles and also with local employers directly is proving fruitful.

John's research explores the impact of the CAP program on long-term employment and educational outcomes for Aboriginal youth in Forster.

"CAP is a great program – 45 percent of the kids in the project got part-time work, where three years ago virtually no Aboriginal people in Forster had part-time work," he said. "While each of the case studies I looked at were unique, there are certain principles of CAP that are transferable and which would be integral components of any successful program."
Architecture professors retire

The retirement last month of Professors Rob Cowdroy and Lindsay Johnston marked the end of an era in architecture at Newcastle. The two professors, who had amassed more than 40 years of service to the University between them, stood like opposing bookends in architecture for more than 15 years.

Rob was a high powered project director on large scale projects for international development companies before he came to Newcastle in 1975. He has scientific and management qualifications and his research has been into unconscious thinking and the creative process.

Lindsay, on the other hand, did his architectural training at an art college in Scotland although he comes from Ireland. He has a builder's licence and has won awards for the environmentally sustainable houses he has built himself as homes for his large family. His research has been in environmental architecture.

While they may not always have seen eye to eye during their working lives, the two men have one important thing in common – they both have been dedicated to improving the reputation of Newcastle's School of Architecture. And the variety of skills and opinions they contributed has helped to create one of the most highly regarded architecture programs in Australia.

Rob grew up in Sydney and studied architecture at the University of New South Wales. Inspired by a gifted teacher in high school, Rob maintained an interest in science and it was his knowledge of sub-atomic physics that helped him to get his first job as a project engineer with the Atomic Energy Commission. He combined his scientific interest with his architectural qualifications to design research laboratories to handle radioactive isotopes and plutonium.

This led him to specialise in the design of research laboratories for industrial and medical purposes. After a period in architectural practice, which didn't suit him, Rob became a manager on various projects including establishing the infrastructure for Macquarie University and consulting on a huge bauxite/aluminium mine and town at Gove.

"The scale and complexity of the Gove project fascinated me – I'd really found my niche. I moved to another company as Project Director working in the banking and investment area and it fitted like a glove. It was confrontational, there was intense pressure and it was very complicated. I worked on a lot of projects in Sydney, Melbourne, Jakarta and London."

Rob came with his wife and family to Newcastle to escape the pressure, which was having a detrimental effect on his health. He helped to set up the University's medical school, coordinating the teaching hospital and research laboratories. When he was asked to do some part-time teaching following the sudden departure of a member of the architecture staff, Rob decided to give it a try.

Rob helped to set up and develop the Bachelor of Architecture program centred around practice principles, and taught practice and management. A period as Head of the Department of Architecture was cut short by health problems and many of Rob's lasting legacies to the University came about during his years as member of the Research Mangement Committee (RMC), Chair of the Animal and Ethics Committee (ACEC) and as President of Academic Senate. These include helping the University to achieve recognition as a model of best practice in animal research ethics; to shift towards teaching being actively supported as a primary objective of the University; and to bring the Central Coast Campus closer to the centre of University thinking.

Rob is looking forward to an active retirement. An operation following the failure of one of his heart valves two years ago finally corrected the health problem that has dogged him for the past 30 years. He is relishing his new vitality and plans to get fit. He will continue his involvement in research, particularly with the Research and Development in Curriculum and Learning (RADICAL) Centre, which he helped to establish. He is also Visiting Professor at the University of Quebec and wants to polish his French-speaking skills. Rob will continue to supervise postgraduate students, particularly those researching in the area of unconscious thinking and creative inspiration.

Lindsay Johnston emigrated to Newcastle with his wife Su and his five children in 1986. He had previously worked in architectural practices in London and Dublin and spent four years with the Irish Government Construction and Planning Research Institute. He ran his own practice for 10 years in Dublin, was a consultant with the World Bank in Saudi Arabia, and worked on low cost housing and agricultural projects in Malaysia.

Lindsay served as Head of the Department of Architecture from 1993 until 1997 and was appointed Dean of the former Faculty of Architecture, Building and Design in January 2001, a position he held for 12 months until the formation of the new Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment in January 2002.

Lindsay specialises in low energy and environmentally sustainable building design, living by his green principles. His home, perched high on a cliff-top in the Watagan Forest, won the 1997 Royal Australian Institute of Architects' (RAIA) Environment Award for its autonomous low energy design and 'permaculture' principles. The design of the Four Horizons 'eco-lodges', three of which he has so far constructed on the 100-acre Watagan site, won the 2000 RAIA NSW Premier's Award. The eco-lodges, which were not only designed but constructed by Lindsay and Su (with some help from their family), use solar power and rainwater.
Pritzker winner to deliver master class

Renowned Australian architect Glenn Murcutt, who has won the prestigious 2002 Pritzker Architecture Prize, will lead a two week residential Master Class, organised by the University’s School of Architecture, from 7-21 July.

Metcott's award, considered the 'Nobel Prize of architecture', is an international acknowledgement of his contributions as an architect and teacher. It adds to his 25 awards received in Australia, including the Royal Australian Institute of Architects' coveted Gold Medal.

Other tutors for the Master Class include Newcastle graduates and conjoint professors, award winning and internationally published architect Peter Stutchbury and seminal Australian architect and educator Richard Leplastrier.

Week one will be held at the Arthur and Yvonne Boyd Education Centre ‘Riversdale’, a magnificent rural retreat south of Sydney. The Centre, designed by Murcutt (with Lewin and Lark) in 1999, has been acclaimed by critics as a ‘masterwork’.

Week two will be held at the University’s Callaghan campus, which includes early buildings by Murcutt and several award winning ‘green’ buildings by leading architects. The program will conclude with a weekend excursion to Sydney houses designed by Glenn Murcutt, Richard Leplastrier and Peter Stutchbury.

The Master Class is open to senior architecture students, postgraduates, teachers and architects and is limited to 32 places. The intensive design studio program will attract academic credits. Bookings already received include participants from the US, Britain, Scandinavia, South Africa, and Australia. Full information and booking form available at ozetecture@newcastle.edu.au

Campus facilities showcased on world stage

An invitation to Director of Facility Planning Philip Pollard, to speak at an international conference on sustainable construction underlines the University’s standing in providing innovative facilities based on environmentally sensitive design.

Philip will speak about the University’s facilities at the Steel in Sustainable Construction Conference in Luxembourg this month. Through sponsorship by BHP Billiton, Philip joins speakers including Amory Lovins, from the Rocky Mountain Institute, in the US; Gunter Pauli, Director of ZERI Foundation in Belgium; and Anders Wijkman, Member of the European Parliament and the Club of Rome, Sweden. More than 60 percent of conference delegates are from Europe, with the remainder from Asia, America, Africa and the Middle East.

The only other Australian presenter at the conference, Bob Perry, who is Director of Scott Carver Architects, will lead the Innovative Design segment of the conference followed by Philip’s presentation on the 17 May. Philip will talk about a series of ecologically sustainable buildings at Callaghan, and their performance based on energy efficiency. His presentation includes the ecologically sustainable design (ESD) features of the buildings constructed over the past decade. The University’s facilities demonstrate the application of ESD principles in a range of buildings from teaching and office space through to more complex constructions such as PC2 and PC3 laboratories.
Newcastle leads online

In an emerging global education economy, with universities around the world racing to implement the technology that will make it possible to deliver their courses online, more than one third of students at the University are using an online teaching system known as Blackboard.

“We have had such a growth rate in the use of our online teaching services, the University put more than $600,000 into upgrading hardware and software at the beginning of the year and we will also be upgrading to the latest release of Blackboard at the end of the year,” says David Morrison from the University’s Communication and Information Services group.

The University began online teaching almost five years ago and now has just over 12,000 students and 537 academics involved in the program. More than 350 courses are offered through Blackboard — some exclusively online, while others combine face-to-face and online teaching.

“We will also be integrating Blackboard with the University’s corporate systems to improve the processing of students and courses into Blackboard,” David said.

Business and Law Faculty lecturer John Dugas, who uses Blackboard to teach a range of online courses in the Master of Business Administration and Master of Applied Management programs, says the software is really useful and allows a lot of flexibility in the way teachers interact with students.

“Online learning is a different mode of learning, where we attempt to create online learning communities. Blackboard allows us to offer ‘virtual tutorials’ that provide for student interaction but don’t pin busy students down to being in a particular place at a specific time,” John said.

“For instance, we might ask students to respond to a question raised in a virtual tutorial but they will have up to a week to do so. They can do this from their workplace, their home, airport lounges or internet cafes.”

John says students can participate in discussions with other students and with the lecturer on a virtual noticeboard, communicate via email, and send assignments electronically. Assignments are marked onscreen and can be returned to students with comment without involving paper. While Blackboard also offers chat room facilities, John says that distance and time differences between his students, who come from all over the world including Canada, Africa and the UK, make a real-time chat group impossible.

According to John, who also chairs the Blackboard upgrade project team, learning to use the software is no harder than mastering a word processing or spreadsheet package. The University provides introductory and advanced training courses in the program and also offers individual support if necessary. Lecturers can see an alphabetical listing of students enrolled in their course and after entering a spreadsheet of assigned tasks, can record results electronically as they mark assignments. Multiple choice questions and quizzes can be marked immediately by Blackboard, the results entered into the spreadsheet and the student given instant, pre-programmed feedback.

“Blackboard is yet another tool that lecturers can use to deliver course content and facilitate learning,” John said. “It is another tool, not the only tool, and the only mistake we could make in using it is to insist that all teaching be done this way. It offers the opportunity to learn to a certain population of students, who are isolated geographically or by the pressure of their working lives, and who need access to learning as an essential part of their personal and corporate productivity. The University is able to tap into this market and enhance its own productivity by using this tool.”

John said that the marketing efforts of the University of Newcastle Graduate School (TUNGS) and its company Gradschool.com (www.GradSchool.com.au), combined with the University’s web presence through the Weblearn system (www.weblearn.newcastle.edu.au/) have produced a dramatic growth in the number of students enrolling in the online courses.

“We currently have 482 fee-paying online course units enrolled and are expecting to have more than 600 in the trimester beginning this month,” John said. “When you do the calculations on return on investment, it is easy to justify the upgrades to Blackboard and to the hardware that accommodates it.”

Associate Professor David Wood, who coordinates the delivery of mechanical engineering programs through Singapore’s Productivity and Standards Board (PSB), says that the development of online learning methods in the context of distance delivery strategies benefits all students, not just those offshore.

“We have used Blackboard extensively in delivering our programs to polytechnic students in Singapore. We are always looking for ways to improve our offshore delivery but everything we do to enhance the learning experience of those students feeds back into our teaching at home.”

David is working on a pilot project to develop a CD-ROM for use in Singapore that will provide a self-paced follow-up to lecture material presented by Newcastle staff in intensive sessions in Singapore.

“The Singapore courses are taught half by locally-recruited lecturers and half by our own staff, who deliver two one-week intensive sessions for each course. The CDs will include some tutorial materials, exercises and quizzes to help students digest that lecture material when we are no longer there.”

The PSB collaboration, which currently involves the delivery of mechanical, mechatronics, electrical, computer, and telecommunications engineering, has been a great success, with over 200 students enrolled. Negotiations are underway to expand the program to China.

For further information about Blackboard and the University’s online initiatives, call Charmian Eckersley on 4921 5858 or John Dugas on 4921 6609.
Teaching by example

Mathematics lecturer and union activist Bob Berghout retired last month after nearly 35 years at the University.

"I arrived here in June 1967 after a research project I was working on in Florence came to a premature end due to a major flood," Bob recalled. "I married soon after arriving and I made my wife promise not to let me stay in Newcastle more than 10 years."

Despite his initial resistance to life in a regional university, Bob - who grew up in Sydney and studied at the University of Sydney - decided to stick with Newcastle.

"Not long after I came the Department of Mathematics became a Faculty in its own right. In the early 1970s, mathematics caught on as a qualification that students were keen to have and the Faculty went through period of very rapid growth and experienced an influx of staff."

During these halcyon days, Bob and his fellow lecturers taught about 60 percent of undergraduates at the University and there was a perception that maths was required as a basis for understanding a range of disciplines. Even students studying arts often excelled at mathematics, with arts students winning University Medals in mathematics.

"There were also incentives for people to do mathematics to become teachers as there was a shortage in the schools," Bob said. "In between then and now, the study of mathematics has declined and people have become sceptical about its value."

Whereas mathematics and physics were once viewed as glamorous subjects, Bob believes that medicine, law and biology have taken over that ground, with physics and maths seen as cold and lacking in humanity. He believes that the study of mathematics in Australia has declined to such an extent that it will be a major issue soon.

"As a society we're fast becoming pre-numerate. We've somehow gained the impression that because we know how to press buttons on a computer, we are a technological society. But in order to attach any meaning to what comes out of computers, we need an ability to program the things and a deeper understanding of the technology that drives them."

Bob and his wife Moya, who died of cancer two years ago, were committed political activists. During his involvement in protests over issues including Australia's involvement in the Vietnam war, the presence of US bases on Australian soil and uranium mining, Bob has been arrested several times and was even jailed on one occasion. He became involved in the union movement in the early 1980s, when the University's Staff Association amalgamated with the predecessor to the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), the University Academic Staff Association.

"The combination of the two groups couldn't have been avoided, particularly following the amalgamation of the University with the former Hunter Institute of Higher Education," Bob said. "The universities became far more managerial because the colleges didn't have a history of collegiate government. In the university, we took it for granted that staff had a say on all sorts of issues and a determinate vote on things."

Bob resigned as President of the NTEU in 1997 but was Secretary for the four years before his retirement and retains an interest in union issues. He plans to continue to sing in the University Choir, an involvement he began in 1990 and now shares with his wife Dr Anita Berghout-Vanderwal. As an honorary associate of the School of Mathematical and Physical Sciences, Bob will also continue his research into the history of mathematics. In addition to keeping physically active by bushwalking with Anita, he plans to work at reducing his ‘70 acres of lantana’ at Paterson to something more manageable.

"I'll miss teaching but I think there is more than one way to teach. We can also teach by what we do and say, and by how we live."

Starting young on IT path

Ten year four and five students from Garden Suburb Primary School visited the University last month to find out what it is like to study Information Technology.

The students met with Sue Carter, the General Manager (Commercial and State Government) of Computer Sciences Corporation, Gunilla Burrowes from the School of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, Professor Janet Aisbett from the School of Design, Communication and IT, as well as first year IT students.

Three of the 10 girls who visited had given speeches on what information technology means to them at several high level meetings, and had been invited to repeat these speeches to NSW Parliament. Professor Aisbett says the girls - aged eight to 10 - should be encouraged to continue their interest in IT.

"Gunilla and I have been working to see how we can encourage more females to enrol in IT degree programs at the University," she says. "We believe that encouraging girls from an early age and fostering their interest will help them stay focused on pursuing a career path in an area traditionally dominated by males."

The students toured laboratories and met with students with their Principal, Chris Diercke, during their University visit, before delivering their speeches to Sue Carter.
Information Technology Review

Information and communication technology has progressed from a tool to automate processes and provide easier access to information to a fundamental capability that transforms how an organisation transacts business and delivers services. Increasingly the University relies on information and communication technologies to realise its objectives in teaching, learning and research.

The recent organisational restructuring has created new stakeholder groups and new internal processes for IT planning and policymaking. The IT Portfolio Committee of Academic Senate is now the peak advisory body regarding IT within the University, covering both academic and administrative spheres. The Committee is chaired by Professor Bill Hogarth (Pro Vice-Chancellor, Faculty of Science and IT) and consists of the Assistant Deans (IT) from the five faculties and two representatives from University Services. The IT Portfolio Committee has instigated a comprehensive review to assess the current state of information and communication technology as implemented within the University and to develop an institutional IT strategic plan to guide future efforts. Funding for IT projects through the University’s IT Infrastructure Plan has been suspended pending the outcome of this Review.

The Committee has established a working party to coordinate the review and planning activities. It will undertake the detailed investigation, analysis and strategy development through adhoc review teams consisting of faculty and divisional representatives with appropriate knowledge and experience.

In broad terms, the review seeks to:

1. assess the current state of information technology within the University, with respect to the needs and expectations of stakeholders, and relative to best practice elsewhere;
2. identify the opportunities and risks;
3. develop costed IT strategies to address those opportunities and risks; and
4. prioritise the strategies based on available resources and other constraints.

The Working Party’s area of interest will extend from the technical infrastructure through to the delivery of services at all major University locations. The review will include comparison with best practice elsewhere. External expertise will be used during the review to both help assess the University’s systems and services from a sector-wide perspective and to contribute to the review methodology itself.

Cross-disciplinary teams will be established to review particular subject areas and develop appropriate strategies. The subject areas may overlap. Initially the following subject areas have been identified:

- Networking and communications
- Computer laboratories
- Help desk and desktop support
- Software licensing
- Unix support
- Corporate information systems and web support
- High performance computing and research
- Teaching and learning
- Training and recruitment of IT staff
- Alternative solutions

The review teams began operations in late April. Initial activities are concentrated on assessing the current state of IT and gathering stakeholder needs through interviews, focus groups, online feedback and surveys. The findings will be consolidated and published for comment via the website during the review process. The intention is to have the key findings available in May and the recommendations available by mid-year. This will enable the IT Review to inform the University’s planning and budgeting cycle for 2003 and beyond. This is an aggressive timeline and will rely on the timely contributions and support of many staff within the faculties and administrative divisions. For further information or to make a submission to please refer to www.newcastle.edu.au/IT-Review.

Sports Union farewell

A proud tradition spanning more than 40 years was celebrated at a dinner held last month to farewell the University of Newcastle Sports Union.

The Sports Union, which had its antecedents in the formation of sporting clubs by students at the University of NSW College at Tighes Hill in the 1950s, amalgamated with the Forum Sports and Aquatic Centre this year to form NUSport. Chair of the NUSport Board Trevor John, who was the final Sports Union President, said the new body provides the best of both worlds – an opportunity to forge new relationships through the Forum and other facilities, and a continuation of the proud traditions of the Sports Union.

Six former Sports Union Presidents were photographed at the dinner, held in the Brennan Room on April 6. They are (from left) Doug March, Greg McIntyre, Alan Oates, John Pryer, Ian Webster and Trevor John. Other presidents who were absent from the photograph are Godfrey Tanner, Brian O’Shea, Barry Butcher and Bernie Curran.

by Mark Piper
$640,000+ in new scholarships

Ten students commencing studies this year shared in more than $640,000 worth of scholarships under the University’s Accounting and Finance Scholarship Scheme.

The scholarships were launched in 2000 as a partnership between the University and industry sponsors, and aim to make industry experience a part of the broader education to enable young professionals to be effective in the workplace immediately on graduation.

The scheme provides participating students with industry placement while they complete their degrees, and each scholarship is worth at least $64,000 over the life of the program. This year's successful students are from Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Northern New South Wales and the state's North Coast.

Eight sponsors are now involved in the scheme, with the following sponsors providing places for commencing students in 2002: Forsythe, McCosker Partners, Lawler Partners, Cutcher and Neale, and KPMG.

Staff discount on hearing aids

Although hearing impairment is one of the most common disabilities in the world, there is still stigma attached to wearing a hearing aid, according to David Wigney from the University’s Hearing Clinic.

“Glasses are considered fashionable and hearing aids aren’t. There’s the idea of the wise blind man and the deaf fool. Glasses are associated with intelligence and hearing loss with old age.”

David, an audiologist who lectures in the School of Language and Media’s speech pathology program, says that 250 million people worldwide suffer from moderate to severe hearing impairment. Hearing aid manufacturers claim that four out of five people who could benefit from wearing a hearing aid don’t own one. In a recent hearing study of people aged 55 and over in the Blue Mountains, David and his research colleagues found around half of those who reported mild hearing loss don’t have an aid.

“The main cause of hearing loss is damage to the hearing nerve or cochlea, often caused by noise. Unlike glasses, which mostly restore a person’s vision to perfection when worn, hearing aids can make things louder but none restores perfect hearing.”

Despite their limitations, however, hearing aids have come a long way in the past decade. They are now individually programmable to target a wide range of hearing losses. It is typical to lose hearing in the high frequency range first and hearing aids can now selectively amplify sounds. Where once they were restricted to amplifying either treble or bass, some of the latest versions can incorporate a seven-band graphic equaliser. Some may also include directional amplification to improve hearing in background noise and voice recognition systems that amplify in response to speech.

“The industry focuses on getting hearing aids smaller for cosmetic purposes. John Howard and Bill Clinton, for instance, both wear hearing aids but because they fit completely inside their ear canal, you can’t tell.”

The University’s Hearing Clinic is in its third year and operates from the speech pathology area of the General Purpose Building on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The Clinic offers an initial audiogram and consultation to staff for $60, which is deducted from the cost of a hearing aid if required. The Clinic also offers staff a 20 percent discount on the cost of hearing aids.

David, who is a speech pathologist as well as an audiologist, and associate Melanie Wheatley from the Australian Hearing Service, offer their services to the public through the Hearing Clinic. For an appointment to have your hearing assessed, contact Alison Farrar on 4921 7338.
Fair gives health snapshot

"NUSport staff have been involved in running quite a few health fairs for other groups including the Railway Service Authority and the Australian Taxation Office. The anonymous information we collect on staff gives a snapshot of their health and highlights areas of concern for employers. Foxtel introduced a corporate health scheme and set up a gymnasium in their headquarters in response to a similar assessment of their staff. There are easily quantifiable benefits to this sort of process and corporations can see the results in increased productivity, better morale and reduced insurance premiums."

Sam says the NUSport assessors were "completely blown away" by the enthusiastic response of University staff to the Health Fair. They were run off their feet from the time the gymnasium doors opened at 10am until they shut again at 3pm. As well as NUSport staff on duty at the Fair, there were University groups that collaborate with them including Occupational Health and Safety staff who disseminated information on ergonomics and safe work practices, and staff from the University's new discipline of physiotherapy, who have opened a physiotherapy clinic at the Forum.

"We are hoping that this won't be a one-off affair that happens annually but one that is held on a more regular basis," Sam said. "The Fair is aimed at offering advice and information to everyone, regardless of their age, gender or fitness levels, to help them recognise areas they might need to improve and to suggest ways of doing it."

Staff attending the Fair were eligible to win 12 months membership of the Forum, which was won by Ron Day from Newcastle Graduate School of Business.

The University took a snapshot of the health of its staff at a Health Fair held in collaboration with NUSport at the Forum Sports and Aquatic Centre last month.

Hundreds of staff members were measured, pricked, assessed and appraised by NUSport staff in a series of activities to test lung function, blood pressure, strength, flexibility, nutrition, cholesterol and stress levels. NUSport General Manager Samantha Martin says the Health Fair grew out of University concerns about the health and well-being of their staff.

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