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uniken

Storm clouds ahead:
the future of our cities

- The rise and rise of COFA Online
- Vale Donald Horne
- Frank Brennan's call to graduates

UNSW

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Group of Eight

From the Vice-Chancellor

Over the past months it has been UNSW's turn to be under the spotlight, with an external agency auditing key policies and procedures.

The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) is a government-funded but autonomous body established in 2000 to audit, report on and promote quality assurance arrangements in the higher education sector. UNSW volunteered to take part in a trial audit in the agency's early stages, but this year faces the real thing.

Our AUQA preparation team, under the leadership of Professor Adrian Lee, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Quality Improvement), has been working for the last ten months, implementing a process of critical self-review and consultation across the campus. This has involved staff, student representatives, and members of the University Council.

A comprehensive Performance Portfolio was delivered to AUQA in July. To assist in the audit process, the team used UNSW's Quality System Map, a unique way to chart the workings of the University. The map is a simplified, high-level representation of UNSW's quality system: that is, how we do things to achieve our goals.

The next stage in the process comes later this month, when the AUQA Audit Panel visits the Kensington, COFA and ADFA campuses. The panel has identified more than 300 staff and students it wishes to interview over a four-day period. There will also be an opportunity for other individuals to talk to the panel, if they so wish.

AUQA's report on UNSW is expected to be finalised by the end of the year. While no funding is attached to the audit outcomes, they will be open to public scrutiny. But more importantly, as Professor Lee has continually emphasised, AUQA should be viewed as an opportunity. Already it has provided the stimulus for a more systematic and innovative approach to quality assurance, and a commitment to an ongoing process of critical self-review.

Our aim is to ensure that the AUQA audit is a positive experience for the University, with lasting benefits. I want us to be open about aspects that need improvement but also proud of our many innovations and achievements. ♦



Mark Wainwright

AUQA visit to UNSW

The AUQA Audit Panel, chaired by RMIT's Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students), Professor Joyce Kirk, will visit UNSW from 17 to 21 October.

The panel's assessment, as with the AUQA audit as a whole, will focus not on individuals, but on UNSW as an organisation and how well the institution's key processes serve its stated goals. ♦

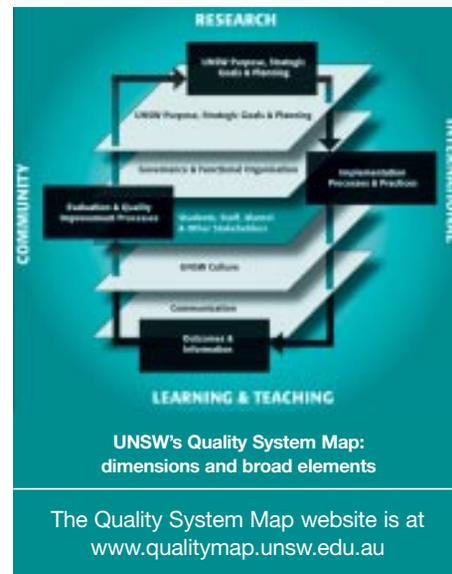
The Quality System Map

The Quality System Map (QSM) is the outcome of a major project led by the Quality System Development Group. Initiated in March 2004, the project involved contributions from more than 100 academic and general staff members.

The aim of the project was to identify the major elements that make up UNSW's quality system and describe how these elements work and are linked. The information gathered was produced as a 'map' to summarise how UNSW functions to ensure quality as it progresses towards its goals.

The QSM is a highly innovative development. It provides easy access to a wide range of information about how UNSW assures quality, helping to identify the strengths of our quality system and areas in which we need to improve. In 2005 the map provided a valuable framework for self-review for the AUQA audit and helped to shape the UNSW Performance Portfolio. It will continue to evolve, providing the basis for ongoing review and improvement.

The Quality System Development Group, led by Director Patrick Boyle, is a small unit within the Division of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Quality Improvement). The team's brief is to provide leadership, expertise and support for achieving UNSW's major quality development goals. ♦



The Quality System Map website is at
www.qualitymap.unsw.edu.au

Honour for former **Singapore PM**



Goh Chok Tong, the former Prime Minister of the Republic of Singapore, has been awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Laws. Mr Goh held Singapore's top job from 1990 to 2004, during which time he steered Singapore through some of its toughest moments including the Asian economic crisis, terrorist threats and the SARS outbreak, as well as guiding the Free Trade Agreement with Australia in 2003. Since stepping down as Prime Minister, he remains in the government as Senior Minister and is also Chairman of the Monetary Authority of Singapore, Singapore's central bank. ♦

New Dean of Medicine

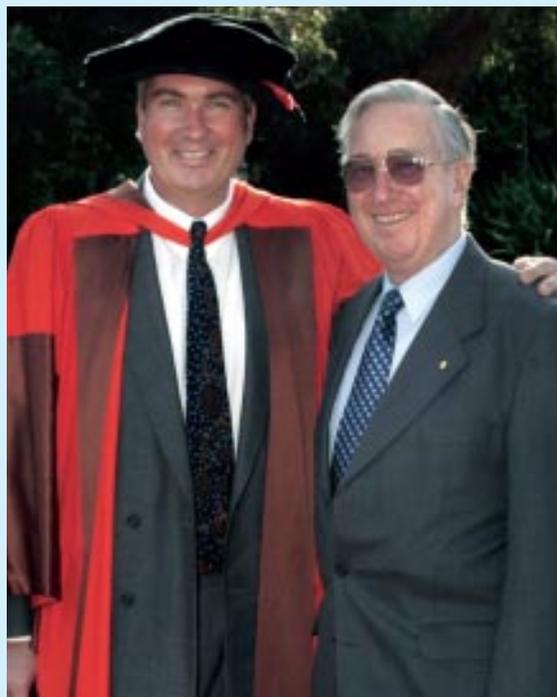
Professor Peter Smith has started as UNSW's new Dean of Medicine. Most recently he spent four years in New Zealand in the same post for the University of Auckland. He has also held the roles of Stevenson Professor of Paediatrics and Head of the Department of Paediatrics at the University of Melbourne, professorial appointments at the University of Queensland and Queensland Institute of Medical Research and management positions in the health sector.

A medical graduate from the University of Queensland, Professor Smith's research interests include molecular genetics and childhood cancer, cancer clinical trials and the measurement of quality outcomes in clinical practice and education. He chairs the Scientific Advisory Committee for the current Commonwealth inquiry into health outcomes for Australian Vietnam Veterans. ♦

Brennan and Brennan

Jesuit priest, lawyer and writer Father Frank Brennan received an Honorary Doctorate of Laws last month. Fr Brennan is the author of a number of books on Indigenous land rights, reconciliation, civil liberties and refugees, and is professor of human rights and social justice at the Australian Catholic University and the University of Notre Dame. His father, former Chief Justice of the High Court Sir Gerard Brennan, received an Honorary Doctorate of Laws at UNSW a week later, also in recognition of his eminent service to the community. Both were guest speakers at their conferring ceremonies.

An edited version of Fr Brennan's speech is on page 16 of this month's *Uniken*. ♦



Fr Brennan and Sir Gerard Brennan

Cullum Micallef/Law Society Journal

Trading hub

Australia has established an international hub for financial research and innovation, which has the potential to improve worldwide financial market efficiency and integrity. The unique database technology allows researchers access to information regarding hundreds of millions of trades and quotes from every market worldwide.

"The technology is a world first in both its scale and impact," said UNSW Associate Professor Mike Briers, CEO of the Securities Industry Research Centre of Asia Pacific (SIRCA). "We can see historical trades in 280 markets around the world. SIRCA's partnership with Reuters will mean we will also see the way news events impact upon them." Researchers will be able to analyse global trades, quotes and news items timestamped to the millisecond for the past nine years. ♦

Archival award

Dr Sean Brawley of the School of History has won the Australian Archives Margaret George Award, a fellowship providing financial and in-kind support for a research project based at the Australian Archives in Canberra, which Dr Brawley will undertake in the first half of 2006. His project will examine the famous O'Keefe case and Australia's broader relationship with Asia in the 1940s. The case of attempted deportation created an international sensation and led to the first successful High Court challenge to the White Australia Policy. ♦

Medical students to the rescue

UNSW medical students have taken a leading role in establishing a national group to help deliver medical aid to developing countries. The Australian Medical Students Association Developing World Group will draw on the experience of UNSW's Medical Students Aid Project (MSAP), the first such organisation in the country.

MSAP has sent medical equipment and medications worth more than \$200,000 to hospitals in developing countries since it began four years ago. "Doing this on a national level will mean that we will be able to help on a much bigger scale," Sunita DeSousa, a second-year medical student, said. To make a donation of money or equipment, go to www.msap.unsw.edu.au. ♦

A doctor of influence

Professor Mark Harris, director of the Centre for Primary Health Care and Equity, has been named as one of the 50 people who have had the most influence over Australian general practice in a list published in *Australian Doctor*. Professor Harris was cited for his work in preventative health and his role in establishing the SNAP (smoking, nutrition, alcohol and physical activity) program that supports GPs in helping their patients to make lifestyle changes. ♦

For the record

Terrorism, while a crime against many things, is specifically a crime against civility. That is not the worst of it, but it is central.

Professor Martin Krygier of the Faculty of Law – The Age

The rationale for the new [security] laws is to protect our democracy and freedoms. Yet these laws would pose a great danger to them – a danger even greater than that potentially posed by terrorism itself.

Professor George Williams of the Gilbert + Tobin Centre of Public Law – Sun Herald

Asylum seekers and temporary protection visa holders are not so much troubled by memories of past trauma but by terrifying images of the future.

Zachary Steel of the Centre for Population Mental Health Research – Fairfield City Champion

Personal income tax is something [Prime Minister Howard] can relatively easily turn his attention to, especially since they've got the money to do so.

Associate Professor Neil Warren of ATAX – Weekend Australian

I agreed to be at that forum because it's very clear that he's not just talking about tax cuts, he's talking about personal tax reform.

Professor Chris Evans of ATAX on his participation in a public forum on tax called by MP Malcolm Turnbull – Sydney Morning Herald

The present tax regime is less than an integrated whole; it has grown like Topsy and suffers from a series of ad hoc compromises.

Former UNSW Chancellor and former High Court judge Sir Anthony Mason – The Australian

The US is a privacy-free zone. The First Amendment to the US Constitution has been widely misused to assert that commercial speech trumps privacy every time.

David Vaile of the Cyberspace Law and Policy Centre on calls for protection of personal information – The Australian

Anti-intellectualism and fear of innovation are entrenched in financial institutions. It's stifling in these companies.

Dr Carol Royal of the School of Organisation and Management – Sydney Morning Herald

It raises the issue in people's minds of how are we actually going to do this in our practice, but it doesn't answer it.

Professor Nick Zwar of the School of Public Health and Community Medicine on a DVD launched by the Federal Government to prepare healthcare workers for an influenza pandemic – Australian Doctor

Dedication to a tolerant Australia: Donald Horne

By Elaine Thompson

Donald had no degree, no formal academic background in terms of publications, had been in advertising and journalism and wrote popular best-selling books: an attribute that made him suspect to academia. His continued popular success and absolute refusal to use footnotes infuriated many academic colleagues.

While distancing himself from many of their beliefs, Donald continued close friendships with Doug McCallum and Owen Harries, cherishing good arguments. With some other colleagues, at times nothing short of war prevailed with shouting matches over policy – a tactic Donald employed deliberately, having learned it from his time with Frank Packer when Donald had been editor of *The Bulletin* and *The Observer*.

In my first year Donald and I arrived at a school meeting with separate proposals for a new first-year Australian

politics course. Smart tactician that he was, Donald suggested we combine. We ran a then-unique course called Power and Democracy in Australia, from which I learned more than the students.

His contributions to UNSW were extraordinary, especially to students (many of whom of course repudiated him). He introduced a new way of understanding politics as public theatre and as public culture and introduced the idea of exploring reform, rather than dry so-called uninterested analysis.

He created Australian Studies and developed a Masters degree in that area. All the time he produced book after book; campaigned as a public intellectual; led the fight over the dismissal of Gough Whitlam – loved every minute and embraced life to the fullest.

He chaired the Faculty of Arts for a while and turned that position into a

His contributions to UNSW were extraordinary, especially to students... He introduced a new way of understanding politics as public theatre and as public culture

Courtesy Penguin Books



powerhouse for reform. He went on to chair the Australia Council, again turning what had been a weak position into one of leadership and initiative.

Donald was then appointed Chancellor of the University of Canberra, again changing a ceremonial to a hands-on position. He spent two years running a program called Ideas for Australia, funded by the Federal Government in a specially created position for Donald.

In conjunction with Bob Carr he developed the NSW intellectual program for the celebration of the Bicentenary of Australian Federation, a program that proved outstanding if for nothing else than the lecture series broadcast repeatedly on the ABC called the Barton Lectures. Political pamphlets and books were produced and Donald continued his deep dedication to a tolerant Australia. ♦

Dr Elaine Thompson is Associate Professor in the School of Politics and International Relations. Emeritus Professor Donald Horne was a member of the school from 1973 to 1986. He died last month aged 83.

Looking for answers to the big medical questions

By Susi Hamilton



Susi Hamilton

Carolyn Geczy likes big questions. That approach has led to research which has seen her named by the National Health and Medical Research Council as one of the top ten researchers it funds.

"I would have had a much easier ride if I had stayed in the one area for my whole career," said Professor Geczy, of the School of Medical Sciences. "I don't just want to 'stamp collect', making small advances in the one field. I like the big picture."

Her work focuses on basic mechanisms of inflammation, and in particular the role of a new group of mediators, called S100 proteins, in inflammatory disorders such as asthma and allergy, rheumatoid arthritis, atherosclerosis and inflammatory bowel disease.

"We have found a new function for an S100 protein in asthma," Professor Geczy said. "It activates mast cells, which can then release histamine and other mediators that affect the airways in asthma and allergy. It may be very important in asthma with an associated infection in the lung."

Professor Geczy's work focuses on three of the 21 S100 proteins, and one in particular, S100 A12. Raised levels of the three S100 proteins have been found in serum from patients with several different inflammatory diseases as well as in patients with malaria. S100 A12 has also been detected in the blood of angina patients, although in that case the other two S100 proteins are absent. A diagnostic test for one of these S100 proteins, which may be a better indicator of risk in patients with cardiovascular disease, is under development.

"One particular protein produced by the liver during inflammation has been used as a marker for cardiovascular risk in patients with angina. What we find is that S100 A12 may be involved in the pathway leading to the production of the protein from the liver," she said. "Our new test detects the protein in both groups. When considered with clinical symptoms, it has the potential to pick up the warning signs earlier."

The NHMRC's choice of researchers, featured in a publication called *10 of the best*, was based in part on the outcomes of grant-funded research completed in 2002 and 2003. In the same month, Professor Geczy also

first woman president of the Australian Society for Immunology and the first female to graduate in science with first-class honours from UNSW and to receive a Commonwealth scholarship to do a PhD (in microbiology at UNSW).

Professor Geczy has had many career highlights, but the fact that she is an academic is itself an achievement.

"We came from quite a poor family and my mother was a single parent – in those days, that was rare," she said. "When I got a Commonwealth scholarship to go to university, my mother told me that I couldn't go because I had to help earn money for the family.

I have no regrets, and got there in the end because I had the belief in myself. If you want something badly enough, you will make it happen

received an international prize, the Women in Inflammation Science Award, at the 7th World Congress on Inflammation. The award was based on Professor Geczy's sustained scientific accomplishments and her impact on the advancement of women in inflammation research.

"I feel very satisfied that my work has been recognised," Professor Geczy said of the accolade from the NHMRC. "The work I'm doing on the S100 protein has been going since 1991. Virtually nothing was known about this when we began. Our lab has done much of the groundbreaking work in this area."

She was the first woman to sit on the NHMRC Research Fellowships Committee, the

"This University was the only one which offered part-time studies. I really wanted to study commerce, but my options were limited to either engineering or science. I didn't want to do engineering, so I did science."

Amongst her biggest achievements are being the first person to make an antibody against a mediator of inflammation, showing how inflammation affects blood clot formation and her work on the S100 proteins.

"I got my professorship ten years later than if I had been a man because I had a family," she said. "But I have no regrets, and got there in the end, because I had the belief in myself. If you want something badly enough, you will make it happen." ♦

Unfair dismissal changes: how many jobs?

By Paul Oslington and Benoit Freyens

The impact of hiring and firing costs on labour markets has been intensely debated across the OECD in recent years, and in Australia the focus is on the impact of unfair dismissal provisions. The government has claimed unfair dismissal provisions stop firms taking on workers, and that the burden falls most heavily on small business. The prime minister has claimed that removing unfair dismissal protection for small businesses is the key to reducing unemployment below five percent; a figure of 77,000 new jobs created has been widely quoted by the government.

Despite intense debate we know little about dismissal costs. How large are they? What are the main components of the costs and their

downturns, technological change or other reasons not specific to the employee. Fires, or dismissals for cause, are involuntary terminations for reasons specific to the employee. These fires may be unlawful if for reasons such as pregnancy, or unfair (otherwise lawful but judged 'harsh, unjust or unreasonable'). An employee who considers their dismissal unfair can take the matter to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) or a corresponding state body. It is this right to appeal against unfair dismissal through the AIRC that the Howard Government is seeking to remove for businesses with fewer than 100 employees.

Overall, the survey data indicate that the average cost of an uncontested dismissal is

Calibrating such a model yields an employment impact of removing the conciliation and arbitration elements of the costs of unfair dismissal (but not the administrative costs common to all dismissals) at both federal and state levels of 11,600 jobs. If enterprises with fewer than 100 employees account for 51 percent of total employment, then the employment impact of the proposed unfair dismissal changes would be to create about 6000 jobs.

This is very small in comparison with the 157,000 jobs which the same method would suggest be created by removing mandatory severance and notice requirements for all workers. However, it would be irresponsible to quote this 157,000 figure as an estimate of the potential gains from changes in redundancy policy. The actual impact would be much smaller because bargained wages may rise to compensate, many firms would still pay for fairness and reputation reasons (as they did before redundancy pay legislation was enacted). The interaction between severance pay and bankruptcy provisions for small business would also need careful attention before any firm conclusions about impacts of retrenchment policy changes could be drawn.

Our estimate of about 6000 jobs is well below the figure of 77,000 jobs quoted by the government. Unfair dismissal regulations are currently politically sensitive in Australia. We feel it is important to evaluate the unfair dismissal changes separately from a number of other controversial changes to labour market regulation – it is possible that one change may not be supported by the evidence while others are beneficial. Neither of the authors had a political agenda in undertaking the research; our prior beliefs were probably that firing costs had a large effect on employment. The evidence suggests otherwise. ♦

Dr Paul Oslington, senior lecturer and Benoit Freyens, PhD candidate, are both from the School of Business at UNSW@ADFA. This article was first published in *The Age* newspaper last month.

Neither of the authors had a political agenda in undertaking the research; our prior beliefs were probably that firing costs had a large effect on employment. The evidence suggests otherwise

relative magnitudes? How do they vary across industries and occupations? Does the size of the firm matter? Finally, what impact do dismissal costs have on employment, and what is the likely impact on employment of the proposed changes to unfair dismissal laws?

Over the past three years we have been conducting an ARC-funded project on the employment impact of hiring and firing costs. To our knowledge, the study is the first in the world to use large-scale quantitative survey evidence on dismissal costs in conjunction with economic models of firm behaviour.

The survey covered 1800 small and medium enterprises from the Sensis® Business Index, representing a workforce of 33,356 full- and part-time employees. All states and most industries and occupations were included. We obtained 1438 responses, including 208 enterprises reporting redundancies in the past five years and 597 reporting fires (including 439 not disputed, 121 resolved through conciliation, and 38 which went to arbitration or the courts). Redundancies are defined as involuntary terminations coming from economic

\$3044 (representing 10.3 percent of annual wage cost); for a contested dismissal settled through conciliation \$12,818 (27.7 percent), and for a dismissal requiring arbitration \$14,705 (35.7 percent). Redundancies on average cost \$18,900 (35.3 percent of annual wage cost). These redundancy costs include procedural costs and any notice or severance payments. There is some variation by occupation and industry, but the most interesting finding is that there is no strong relationship between the costs and firm size.

Our next task was to estimate the employment impact. It is important to understand the conceptual basis of our employment estimates. In a simplified model of a profit-maximising firm, employment is set to equate the value of the marginal product of labour with the sum of wage and the expected present value of dismissal costs. Dismissal costs are not incurred with certainty, and their expected present value depends on the probability that a worker will be dismissed, the expected duration of employment, and the discount rate.

HIRING AND FIRING • UNFAIR DISMISSAL • SMALL BUSINESS • UNEMPLOYMENT
 FULL- AND PART-TIME EMPLOYEES • REDUNDANCIES • INVOLUNTARY TERMINATIONS
 ECONOMIC DOWNTURNS • TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE • DISMISSALS FOR CAUSE
 AUSTRALIAN INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS COMMISSION • REDUNDANCY COSTS •
 SEVERANCE PAYMENTS • OCCUPATION AND INDUSTRY • PROFIT-MAXIMISING • NOTICE
 REQUIREMENTS • BARGAINED WAGES • RETRENCHMENT • LABOUR MARKET REGULATION



Sunswift takes flight

The UNSW Solar Racing Team (SRT), the only developer of solar vehicle technology in Sydney, competed in the World Solar Challenge late last month. The student-designed and built solar car, *UNSW Sunswift III*, is the third solar car the SRT has developed in ten years.

"Using energy harnessed entirely from the sun, *UNSW Sunswift III* will be capable of averaging up to 100 kilometres per hour," said Ryan McCarthy, third-year Photovoltaic and Solar Energy Engineering student and SRT team leader.

The vehicle, which can seat two people, has approximately 11 square metres of solar cells with an intelligent electrical design that enables the vehicle to convert energy generated by the solar panels into electrical driving power at an efficiency rate of over 95 percent.

"At high speeds our car will use about the same amount of power as a household vacuum cleaner," Ryan said.

"*UNSW Sunswift III* was designed to achieve a combination of sleek aerodynamic and smart photovoltaic (solar cell) design.

The car's body shell and chassis is a carbon fibre composite structure which provides high strength at a very low weight."

The World Solar Challenge, the world's premier solar racing event, is a biennial event attracting entrants from around the world. This year 25 teams started the 3000-kilometre race from Darwin to Adelaide on 25 September. ♦

Sarah Wilson

Above: *UNSW Sunswift III* with the team: (back) Luke Macpherson, Tim Wardrop and Ryan McCarthy; (front) Martin Ly, Mark Bakovic and Daniel Jones.

A load of old rubbish

By Sarah Wilson

Reusing tyres and recycling polyethylene plastic is difficult but important for sustainability. PhD student Buzz Sanderson has pioneered a way to combine the non-biodegradable materials to form a high-strength product.

By chemically altering the plastic (the type milk bottles are made of) so it bonds with tyre particles, Sanderson has created, in collaboration with Associate Professor Alan Crosky from the School of Materials Science and Engineering, a material that could be used to make objects such as impact barriers, earth retainers and curb blisters.

"Due to the nature of the material, the tyre crumb/polyethylene composite doesn't have aesthetic appeal but it's suitable for making large bulky objects, particularly ones that need to absorb energy," Sanderson said.

"The tyre crumb/polyethylene composite has a much higher energy absorption rate than timber or

concrete and could make excellent impact barriers or fenders for roads, marinas or wharves."

Using a process called Reactive Injection Moulding (RIM), Sanderson has developed a way to fuse tyre crumb and polyethylene – the first time this process has been explored. By mixing the two materials together, Sanderson has found a way to minimise landfill and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

"Australia produces one car tyre per person per year – that's about 20 million tyres per year," he said. "The vast majority end up in landfill and they do not biodegrade. If we can harvest them as a resource and derive a second or third use, it is a win for the environment."

Sanderson recently visited Australia's first alternative waste technology facility for household waste, the Eastern Creek Urban Resource – Reduction, Recovery and Recycling Facility (UR-3R), which opened this year and receives all household waste, other than

recyclables, from Fairfield and Blacktown City Councils. This amounts to 175,000 tonnes of waste annually, or 11 percent of Sydney's household waste.

The UR-3R facility prevents about 80 percent of the waste it receives from going to landfill by sorting and recycling materials. The facility uses a process that reclaims metals, glass, paper, green electricity and compost. Sanderson would like to see this extended to plastics.

"We are ultimately looking towards household waste as our polymer source in tyre crumb composites," Sanderson said. "At the moment most post-consumer plastics end up being commingled and on a one-way trip to landfill.

"It's a matter of finding a way to recover enough polyethylene plastic out of the commingled plastic mix. If we can do this, we can stop even more waste going to landfill. We have to change our thinking from these being waste streams to these being resource streams." ♦

Storm clouds ahead: the cities of our future

The **City Futures Research Centre** officially opens this month. Dedicated to developing a better understanding of our cities, their people and the policies that shape them, the centre will cover research on such topics as high-density living, housing affordability and energy and water. Centre director Professor Bill Randolph spoke to **Mary O'Malley**.

The Aussie dream of a house on a suburban block is set to become a distant one – and planners and the public alike are unprepared for the social consequences. That is the concern of Professor Bill Randolph, director of UNSW's recently established City Futures Research Centre in the Faculty of the Built Environment.

The centre, specialising in research on Australian cities, says the country is on the cusp of a seismic change that may fragment society so severely that we risk the development of American-style ghettos.

In Sydney, a third of households live in medium- to high-density housing. Melbourne and parts of Queensland are not far behind. Within the next 30 years, 45 percent of households will be living in flats. Professor Randolph says that while compact cities will rein in many of the problems associated with urban sprawl, the move towards a high-rise society raises a host of social issues.

One of the most worrying trends is that the market will drive demographics, with little input from state planners. Unlike the mainstream housing market, the higher density housing is predominantly sold into the investment market. High-quality apartments tend to be offered in higher income areas, while poor-quality blocks spring up in less affluent suburbs.

Professor Randolph recently noted that many European cities have four-, five- or six-storey blocks with courtyards, different sizes of flats and a big mix of people. "But here there isn't the same diversity; it's a lot more compartmentalised.

"Some pretty dreadful blocks are being built in some areas and this is likely to become a significant problem. If you've got a block with 150 flats mostly rented out to people with limited incomes, you're talking about a degree of concentration of social disadvantage which we've not experienced before.

"This is an issue that planners have yet to fully comprehend, in their desperation to find sustainable alternatives to urban sprawl."

Professor Randolph points out that planning cities really means planning for people, not just dwellings. Sydney, the most developed of Australia's high-density markets, has a new Metropolitan Strategy, yet nowhere do the social issues seem to be critically considered.

He said the high-density vision for Sydney ignores the problems that are already emerging in the existing higher density housing stock in the more disadvantaged parts of the city – Auburn, Canterbury, Bankstown and Fairfield to name a few.

"Councils and communities will be left to their own devices to deal with the problems of the run-down and marginalised populations now living in the outcomes of urban consolidation over the last 30 years," he said.

The strategy also appears to ignore the impact of the new release areas in drawing away much of the demand from middle and higher income households in Western Sydney, leaving the older higher density middle belt of suburbs even more skewed towards those on lower incomes – the very areas that are expected to soak up more higher density housing.



Policies also appear to assume a limitless demand for such housing from young, more affluent households across the urban area, when any analysis of the social composition of housing demand, especially for rental housing in the areas where the majority of the higher density stock will be developed, show the most likely demand will be from lower income populations.

“The worry is that the planning for this high-density revolution has started by studiously ignoring these issues and has so far come up with a series of urban design-led outcomes which look fine on paper and in artists rendering, but simply fail to address the social realities,” Professor Randolph said.

Once we get down to implementing this higher density vision, he believes “social reality may come back to bite big time”.

In the neighbourhood

How will a sense of place develop in highly mobile flat block developments? And what provisions are being made for families? These are just two of several questions arising from the metropolitan strategies being rolled out across Australia.

Professor Randolph said the push towards high-density living raises many concerns that so far remain unaddressed. The metropolitan strategies assume implicitly that families will be involved in the higher density future. But he points out that this means far more than playgrounds and recreation areas for preschoolers.

“What happens if our new higher density renewal areas suddenly become places where teens live?” he said. “Are we asking for the same kinds of issues that have faced teenagers in high-rise housing estates in other countries? Places for teens become just as important as toddler play areas – and potentially much more socially divisive.

“Children also mean schools. We are building high-density homes in areas where educational facilities have been sold off in the last two decades by stripping governments, not least to pay off government debt.”

How far will residents build links? What kinds of neighbourliness will be a feature of this new type of development? Professor Randolph said anecdotal evidence suggests this has not happened in newer larger blocks, given that they are often occupied by young singles or couples renting before moving on. With few children, there are few opportunities for the normal social contacts to build, compared to family-centred neighbourhoods.

“Will these be positively vibrant communities or simply unfriendly dormitories for lots of highly mobile young renters on one hand and empty nesters on the other?” he said. “This could be a potentially explosive social mix.”

Governance is another critical issue. The high-density future will need a strata title framework that delivers acceptable outcomes for owners and residents. The problem of managing multiple interests within one property is not one that many residents understand. Especially in blocks



where ownership includes absentee landlords, there is considerable opportunity for conflict.

“The complexity of relationships in the larger blocks – between resident owners, landlords and tenants, as well as the strata manager, often appointed by the developer – is likely to become a significant issue governing the longer term attraction of living in such property,” he said. “Already, high-profile problems have emerged.”

There are a range of subsidiary issues: the balance between resident and absentee owners can change substantially over the lifetime of the block; resident owners are often in conflict with landlords, with the latter unwilling to spend on repairs and maintenance; and body corporates can be poorly managed with small unrepresentative meetings.

“Then there are issues surrounding sinking funds and the costs of long-term repairs, especially in lower-value blocks where owners cannot afford to pay or insufficient funds are accumulated,” Professor Randolph said. “And what happens when a block gets to the end of its useful life? Yet this is the framework that must deliver the long-term future of the high-density sector. As yet, little research has been undertaken on these issues.”

Affordable housing: the Holy Grail?

One of Sydney’s most pressing dilemmas is the cost of housing. As a city driven partly by the pressures of a global labour market, it is not surprising that housing costs in the city are higher, on average, than any other Australian city. But what happens to many residents who are not part of the global elite?

City Futures is involved in a series of research initiatives attempting to pin down the affordability problem. “Governments at all levels have ►



been trying to duck the affordability issue in Sydney,” Professor Randolph said. “There was no mention of affordable housing provision in the discussion paper that was released last year on Sydney’s new Metropolitan Strategy.

“There has been much talk [but] no real initiatives have emerged. Planning levies for an affordable housing provision have been quietly dropped in the face of concerted lobbying from the development industry. But the hope still remains in government that somehow we can produce affordable housing with little or no public expenditure. This surely must be the modern day equivalent of hunting for the Holy Grail.”

Despite the recent downturn in housing prices – a welcome break after several years of an investor-fuelled property frenzy – Sydney’s housing remains as unaffordable as it was at the height of the boom.

Research undertaken last year by Professor Randolph for the state development agency, Landcom, showed that people on moderate incomes – between about \$42,000 and \$60,000 a year – would struggle to afford any housing in Sydney without significant equity.

As part of the study, a survey of house prices in Blacktown, Campbelltown and Liverpool, three of the more affordable areas in the city, found only 11 percent of properties for sale were affordable to households at the top end of this income range, and only one percent was affordable to the bottom end. “Nearly all of these were two-bedroom properties – not much use to families,” Professor Randolph said.

City Futures has also been researching the housing costs of ‘key workers’ – those members of the workforce considered essential for the functioning of the city. The results show a clear divide in housing opportunities across the city. “Younger workers who were willing to rent could afford to live in the eastern half of the city where many of the jobs are concentrated, in the ‘Global Arc’ that runs from Botany to Chatswood through the CBD.

“But as they grow older and want to buy, they have little choice but to move into the middle and outer suburbs to do so. This must be leading to an increasingly socially polarised city,” Professor Randolph said.

Funded by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, the centre is currently conducting more research to understand exactly how housing affordability affects the Australian population.

Design and crime

Housing estates with a friendly neighbourhood cop and on-site housing management have a better chance of reducing crime rates than those that rely solely on physical design improvement measures, a recent UNSW study has found.

Dr Bruce Judd and Dr Rob Samuels of the AHURI UNSW-UWS Research Centre have found that social rather than physical community renewal interventions are more effective in reducing crime in areas with high concentrations of public housing.

Spatially targeted, broad whole-of-government approaches to the issues arising on housing estates, empathetic locally based housing management and community policing are the key strategies that make a difference, the authors say. Their findings were presented last month at a seminar hosted by the City Futures Research Centre in the Faculty of the Built Environment.

Dr Judd, a housing researcher, and Dr Samuels, an expert in crime prevention and design, studied crime-reduction strategies and outcomes in nine public housing areas in three Australian states.



Locations were chosen to represent those areas with primarily physical interventions, social interventions, and those with minimum physical and social intervention.

The study found that while physical factors such as poor lighting and improper use of fencing do have a direct impact on security, areas that combine spatial and social responses have a definite advantage. “In areas of high disadvantage, community becomes critical,” Dr Judd said. “You need empathetic people on the ground actively tackling the issues.”

The two areas in which crime trends decreased over the life of the study employed a range of sophisticated social interventions, supported by preventative initiatives. The study found a particularly strong case for police who take a hands-on approach to community policing. “We had one crime-prevention officer who gave everyone in the community his mobile phone number to ring any time they had a problem,” Dr Samuels said. “That sort of things makes a big difference. We are talking about emphasising community reinforcement rather than law enforcement.”

But crime prevention in such areas requires the support of many government and private agencies, the authors say. Instead of focusing on a single issue such as drugs and alcohol, problems need to be addressed holistically. “There is always a tendency to go for a quick fix,” Dr Judd said. “Tart the area up. Put in a few fences. But we know historically that these physical responses alone never work.”

Helping to build communities where people feel safe to be outside and actively engaged in the neighbourhood boosts self-esteem, increases social cohesion and provides natural surveillance.

“In many public housing estates, people’s territories are not defined,” Dr Judd said. “There is no patch that’s yours to look after. You get these no-man’s-land spaces that end up being littered with shopping trolleys, rubbish and dead cars. This causes a downward spiral of physical deterioration, low morale and stigmatisation.”

Community gardens have been one way to reclaim ambiguous space. “Occupy space, secure it, light it well and get people actively using it,” Dr Judd said. ♦

Anti-Poverty Week: taking a stand

By Louisa Wright

The poor, the Bible reminds us, are always with us. Julian Disney has spent decades trying to get them a better deal. Part of his long-term strategy is Anti-Poverty Week, born on the UNSW campus in 2002 and now a national program.

Essentially a grassroots program, Anti-Poverty Week is designed to give mainstream Australians the opportunity to express their concerns about examples of severe hardship in all its forms. "It's also about engagement," said Professor Disney, who is the national chair of Anti-Poverty Week and also the part-time director of the Faculty of Law's Social Justice Project. "People can set up a stall at the shops, or talk to their council alderman, or express their concern about poverty in any way they feel comfortable."

Professor Disney's driving belief in establishing Anti-Poverty Week is that mainstream Australia is neither as greedy nor self-serving as politicians and the media seem to believe. He points to consistent survey results indicating that people would prefer improved Medicare services in place of tax cuts, and believes that every sausage sizzle fundraiser for a local welfare program sends a message to Canberra: that there is more concern in the community about poverty than perhaps the politicians understand.

While Professor Disney is thinking about the small local events, his strategy is far larger. He hopes to capitalise on the trend of political innovation to emerge from the non-city areas and has worked extensively to encourage rural and regional involvement and awareness in Anti-Poverty Week. "Major movements in Australia are not generated in Sydney and Canberra but often from outside the so-called influential centres," he said.

Professor Disney acknowledges that building a groundswell of public opinion in favour of moves to combat poverty – in particular moves to strengthen public health, public education and public housing sectors – is a long-term project.

"We need to take a long-term approach and it won't be just a one-week campaign," he said. "We need to develop the anti-poverty movement over ten or fifteen or



twenty years, much as the women's movement and the environmental movement have done. It requires good strategies and networks as well as good policies."

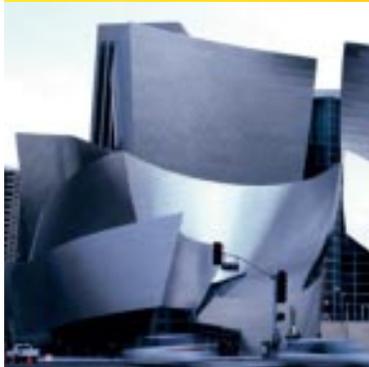
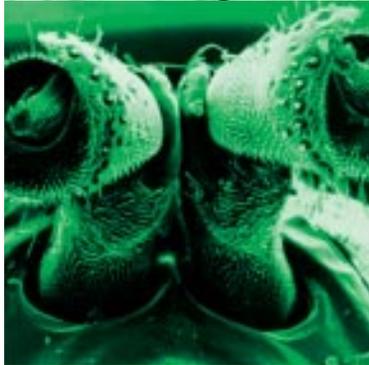
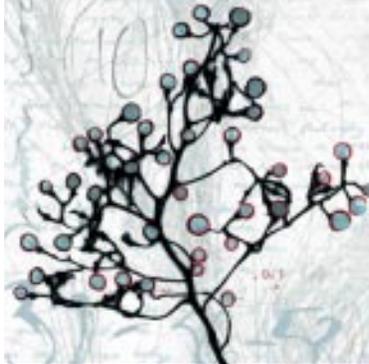
Professor Disney is particularly keen to see people involved in Anti-Poverty Week who are not traditionally thought of as working in the welfare sector: teachers, police officers and healthcare workers, many of whom deal with the outcomes of poverty every day in their work. "They are often deeply concerned about it," he said.

Professor Disney is also involved with poverty issues through his work as chair of the National Summit on Housing Affordability. His particular focus is on the impacts of the taxation system, which he sees as a key engine room of economic and social policy.

"There are two major tax problems which distort housing prices and flow through the housing sector to the bottom," he said.

"They are the exemption of luxury homes from capital gains tax and the current negative gearing provisions. I am in favour of some tax concession to encourage home ownership and low-cost housing, but the current system is driving up prices to unaffordable levels." ♦

Anti-Poverty Week runs from 16 to 22 October and will include more than 100 activities around Australia. Highlights include forums in Sydney, one titled *Does it matter if we push the poor out of Sydney?* and the other *Achieving the Impossible? Halving world poverty by 2015*. In its third year on the Kensington campus, Anti-Poverty Week activities will include seminars at the Social Policy Research Centre on the topics of disability, poverty and hardship in Australia; a seminar on Indigenous poverty; and a discussion about volunteering abroad. For information and activities, see www.antipovertyweek.org.au or call 1300 797 290.



The rise and rise of COFA Online

By Alex Clark

Professor Ian Howard, Dean of the College of Fine Arts, set up an academic unit in 2002 called COFA Online. It began with one course and 18 students. Today the initiative boasts 23 courses and more than 850 online students.

“The key to success has been ensuring a quality teaching experience through groundwork,” said COFA Online head Rick Bennet, who examined online programs around the world and found the most successful were those that focused on preparation and that dispelled the fears of online learning – and the myth it would replace face-to-face learning.

“Despite all the initial hype, we realised e-learning internationally was in a terrible state,” Bennet said. “This was largely because of misplaced drivers behind it: software companies and cost saving.”

Students don't come to class three hours a week, they come for ten minutes three times a day, seven days a week. They come to class at 4am because it's such a flexible way of studying

By formalising a fellowship program to assist online course development and delivery, Bennet set out to change perceptions of online study. Following the success of the fellowship program (see box below), COFA Online has consolidated with a program that supports staff who are beginning online teaching.

“To maintain the quality of teaching online we are running workshops in the session following the fellowship program – it's like a fellowship alumni program,” said Simon McIntyre, associate lecturer and COFA's Online course co-ordinator. “It allows for sharing ideas on teaching that can be implemented immediately.”

The huge growth in courses offered at COFA has spread across the five schools of the college and lured large numbers of students from the main campus to enrol. This session has seen the introduction of ten additional online courses.

Designing courses: the fellowship program

COFA's Online Course Author Fellowship Program has been the key to COFA Online's success by creating a supportive network for academics as they learn to deliver quality online art and design courses.

The COFA Online Course Author Fellowship has been developed to expand the pool of available staff to author and teach online courses through funding to both UNSW staff and external industry professionals.

The program was developed in collaboration with the University's Learning and Teaching Unit. Launched in session two of 2004, it runs over six months for one session each year.

Collaboration and Visual Communication in Graphic Design; Scientific Visualisation of Medicine; Visual Identity in the Built Environment, and Contemporary Aesthetics in Digital Architecture are just a few examples of the cross-disciplinary courses that appeal to both local and international students.

“The universal appeal of the internet opens up all kinds of possibilities for education, enabling students from around the world to come together in a way that would never have been possible a few years ago,” McIntyre said.

Online COFA courses consist of online lectures, resources and other reference materials. Students engage in individual and group activities and tutors facilitate group discussions. Students receive individual and group feedback from peers and tutors throughout the course.

Bennet and McIntyre believe it's this group interaction and feedback that makes online learning so effective.

“Students don't come to class three hours a week, they come for ten minutes three times a day, seven days a week,” Bennet said. “They come to class at 4am because it's such a flexible way of studying but it also means they take the time to really consider their input.”

“Many students say that they want to experience working with students from other faculties with different ideas and approaches. This interest in collaborating with others, coupled with the fact that many students feel more confident to speak their mind online than face to face, can really create a strong online learning community. Students make comments like ‘I don't usually say anything in class but online I feel I am able to contribute more’,” McIntyre said. “You get very direct feedback.” ♦

Fellows meet once a month face to face to work on different stages of course development and delivery, and how to conceptualise this for online. Between these meetings fellows meet online, submit course material as it is developed and review one another's progress.

“This is actually the same environment in which they will teach their course so by the time they have completed the program they know the online environment back to front,” Bennet said. COFA Online is now inviting UNSW staff across all faculties to apply for the Online Course Author Fellowship Program. The scholarship is awarded to course proposals that gain approval from the COFA Online Advisory Group. For more information go to www.cofa.unsw.edu.au/online.

The Woman Who Mistook Her Husband For Art

By Alex Clark

A husband and wife team who are both honours graduates from UNSW's College of Fine Arts have won the 2005 Helen Lempriere Travelling Art Scholarship, the second consecutive year that the prestigious prize has been awarded to COFA artists.

Collaborative artists Richard and Stephanie nova Milne, who collaborate under the title of Ms & Mr, won the award, valued at \$40,000, for their work *The Woman Who Mistook Her Husband For Art*. The award-winning work is a mixed-media installation projected onto a levitating organ.

The award's highly commended artists included Vanilla Netto and Matthew Tumbers, both from COFA.

The criteria for selection were artistic merit and the potential of the chosen course of study to benefit the artist's creative and professional development. Ms & Mr intend to use their scholarship funds to undertake a year-long research residency at Amsterdam's Rijksakademie, an institution that particularly encourages collaborative cross-media practices.

The selection committee, comprising Tony Bond from the Art Gallery of NSW and the artists Euan Macleod and Rosemary Laing, said that the winning entry was a "refreshing and original work of sound, sculpture, performance and video".

Other entries by COFA students and graduates included Zehra Ahmed, Simon Cooper, Alex Davies, Jacqui Drinkall, Hayden Fowler, Damien March and Wade Marynowsky.



The Helen Lempriere Travelling Art Scholarship is presented by the NSW Government with the generous support of the Helen Lempriere Bequest.

In 2004, a Masters of Fine Arts student in COFA's Department of Photomedia, video artist Kate Murphy, and COFA Adjunct Professor Richard Goodwin won the Helen Lempriere National Sculpture Award for his *Prosthetic Apartment B*, an installation that examined the relationship between architecture and the body in the minimum form. ♦

Left top: Matthew Tumbers, *Pablo Velasquez Shoeboarding*, video still

Left bottom: Ms & Mr, *The Woman Who Mistook Her Husband for Art*, video still

Above top: Vanilla Netto, works from... *Cushion – Do Not Crash Insulation*, digital prints on aluminium

Above bottom: Ms & Mr, *The Woman Who Mistook Her Husband for Art*, video still

Images courtesy of Artspace and the artist/s

**By David Gonski, AO
Chancellor**

Council met on 29 August 2005. Following the meeting, Council members met informally with the Deans. From September I will be inviting other members of the University to post-Council drinks in the Chancellery foyer. This will replace Council lunches and I hope will allow more members of the University to meet with Council.

**Appointment of new Chief
Financial Officer**

Council approved the appointment of a new CFO, Garry McLennan. Mr McLennan comes to UNSW after 20 years with HSBC and with a wealth of commercial expertise. He commenced on 30 August 2005.

UNSW Asia

Council approved the establishment of three Vice-President positions for UNSW Asia, to be advertised shortly; the establishment of an International Advisory Council and the funding package for the Singapore campus.

**Report on review of
NewSouth Global**

Council received the report and recommendations of the review of UNSW's controlled entity, NewSouth Global. The report, by an external consultant, found NSG to be one of the best-performing controlled entities in Australia, a benchmark for the sector.

UNSW branding

Council received a briefing on the new UNSW branding from the Director of Marketing and Development, Clare Taylor.

The new images will be introduced in 2006 and have been discussed and endorsed widely in the University.

Endorsement of UNSW By-law

Council endorsed amendments to the UNSW By-law so that the University can meet requirements of the National Governance Protocols. Once approved by the Governor, the By-law amendments will allow for overlapping terms of office for graduate members, systematic procedures for the nomination of prospective members for appointment to Council, and the addition of a 22nd (appointed) member.

**Learning and teaching
rankings**

Council received a briefing on UNSW's performance in the learning and teaching rankings from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Quality Improvement), Professor Adrian Lee. Council discussed ways in which UNSW could improve its performance, noting that the methodology used to collect the data had been criticised widely.

**Policy on competitive
neutrality and pricing**

Council approved this policy, the implementation of which will involve the development of an online calculator and other tools, to assist staff in costing activities.

**Sydney Harbour Institute of
Marine Science**

Council noted the development of a proposal for a marine science research

facility at Chowder Bay, in partnership with Macquarie University, the University of Technology, Sydney, and the University of Sydney. The proposal will concentrate and benefit marine research capacity in the Sydney Basin area.

**Report on General
Education Program**

Council received a report from the Academic Board on the effects of the changes to the General Education Program made in 2002 and noted that GE continued to be an integral part of study at UNSW, with a wide variety of courses available.

Additional matters

Council noted the Research and Research Training Management Report 2005, approved the timetables for election of Deputy Chancellor and the 2006 Council Elections (www.elections.unsw.edu.au) and set quorums and formalised procedures for approval of matters by circulation for Council Committees.

Council minutes

Council minutes and other information can be accessed by all members of the University via the Secretariat Services website (www.secretariat.unsw.edu.au).

For further information on matters relating to Council or its Committees, please contact Victoria Eyles, v.eyles@unsw.edu.au, 9385 3068 or Helen Parks, h.parks@unsw.edu.au, 9385 3072.

The Chancellor is the chair of Council.

Meeting of 6 September 2005

The Academic Board was presented with the consultation draft and proposed changes to the Paid Outside Work Policy, as part of an extensive consultation process. Staff had submitted written comments and a number of points had been identified at the Heads of Schools retreat. Members of the Board raised additional issues for consideration including the flexibility of the Policy; time allowance and weekend work; provision for substantial teaching arrangements with other institutions with prior agreement; the approval process at Faculty or School level; the inclusion of marking of public examinations such as the HSC under remunerated academic activity and the development of a statement of contract of remuneration.

The Board also discussed the introduction of Disability Standards for Education 2005, and the AVCC Guidelines on Information Access for Students with Print Disabilities. Members noted that UNSW already provided a wide range of

services but acknowledged that there were now additional requirements on staff in relation to inclusive teaching practices and access to academic material. A working party would be established to provide input to the development of an implementation plan, and to identify ways and means of producing academic material to address the needs of students with print disabilities.

The President presented the summary of events for the AUQA visit and encouraged members to be open in their discussions with the AUQA panel. He also gave a demonstration on the Quality System Map and commended the QSM website as a useful University tool.

The Board recommended that Council approve the changes to the Temporary Protection Visa Scholarships Program; the change of the name of the School of Rural Health to Rural Clinical School; the renamed program Bachelor of Commerce in Services Marketing – Tourism and Hospitality; the introduction of the Master of Commerce (Extension), and the Bachelor of Engineering

in Materials Science and Engineering Bachelor of Commerce; and the models, programs and rules for the postgraduate programs for offer at UNSW Asia.

We approved the change in student electorates for the Faculty Board, Faculty of Medicine; the revised Master of Finance and Bachelor of Commerce in Marketing, Tourism and Hospitality Management; the proposed four-year option for a Humanities major in the Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Science Bachelor of Media and Bachelor of Science Bachelor of International Studies, and course substitutions in the Bachelor of International Studies, for offer at UNSW Asia; and the Services Marketing and Management major in the Bachelor of Commerce.

If there are issues you would like me or Academic Board or its Committees to consider, or if you would like to attend a meeting, please let me know via a.dooley@unsw.edu.au or 9385 2393.

**Tony Dooley
President, Academic Board**

Digging up the dirt: the archaeologist

By Alex Clark



Digging with a trowel at sunrise is not the common pursuit of an academic but for Dr Shawn Ross it's the ideal method of unearthing antiquity.

An historian and archaeologist specialising in early Greek history, Dr Ross brings a fresh set of tools to the University's School of History in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Having recently received a Fulbright Teaching/Research Award, he is also eager to recruit undergraduate and postgraduate students from all UNSW faculties for his 2006 dig in Bulgaria.

"A modern archaeological project is an interdisciplinary affair which spans the humanities, social sciences, anthropology, history, art history, language and strong scientific elements," Dr Ross said. "It's important to examine the whole environment to understand people of antiquity."

Dr Ross is particularly keen to work with soil scientists and geologists, areas of expertise in the University's Faculty of Science and of particular relevance to prehistoric sites in Bulgaria.

"Excavating a Roman site, you've got walls, even buildings, that look familiar," he said. "For a prehistoric site it's lot more subtle. They often had dirt floors and were built with wood so you're largely looking for changes in soil colour, such as a black layer that might indicate a time when everything was burnt."

Despite formal training in history rather than archaeology, Dr Ross developed an immediate love for the blend of manual labour on site and the precise nature of the work. As a doctoral student in history, he decided to examine his primary sources first-hand and by the late 1990s found himself working in south-western Greece, excavating at a major Bronze Age site, the Palace of Nestor at Pylos.

After a number of seasons of excavating in Greece and the Ukraine, in 2004 he joined a team of researchers working in Bulgaria associated with the American University in Bulgaria and the Blagoevgrad Museum.

Several years earlier, the team had made a groundbreaking discovery in the Struma River Valley near Blagoevgrad: a previously unknown network of monumental stone-built structures dating to about 1200 BC. Nine such sites are now known; ongoing excavations involving Dr Ross are attempting to determine the function of these structures and learn as much as possible about the society that built them. The Fulbright Award will enable Dr Ross to return to the region for six months and oversee three new projects: a preliminary archaeological surface survey, a new excavation and the establishment of a field school for undergraduate and postgraduate students.

"Surface surveys are best after the snow has melted or after a fresh plough has allowed

artefacts to come to the surface, especially pottery," Dr Ross said. "Pot shards are the bread and butter of archaeology – while ceramics break, they last forever and we can date them to within 50 years or so."

The new excavation site where Dr Ross will begin work, Golyama Mogila, has been an anomaly to locals for years. The enormous mound, some 45 metres wide and more than 15 metres high on the valley floor, has yet to be explored and will give Dr Ross the opportunity to use modern technologies that have altered archaeological projects.

"While an archaeologist's main tool is still a hand trowel, technology has assisted our methods of record keeping," he said. "Using Total Stations and GPS systems we can record the exact position of everything we find. This is crucial since archaeology is an intrinsically destructive process, where you destroy the evidence as you dig."

The last part of the project will see the official launch of a field school at the American University of Bulgaria, opening up opportunities for Australian and overseas students.

"Often students can be disappointed when they come to a modern dig, usually because they've watched Indiana Jones too many times," Dr Ross said. "It can be backbreaking, very meticulous but for the most part incredibly rewarding." ♦

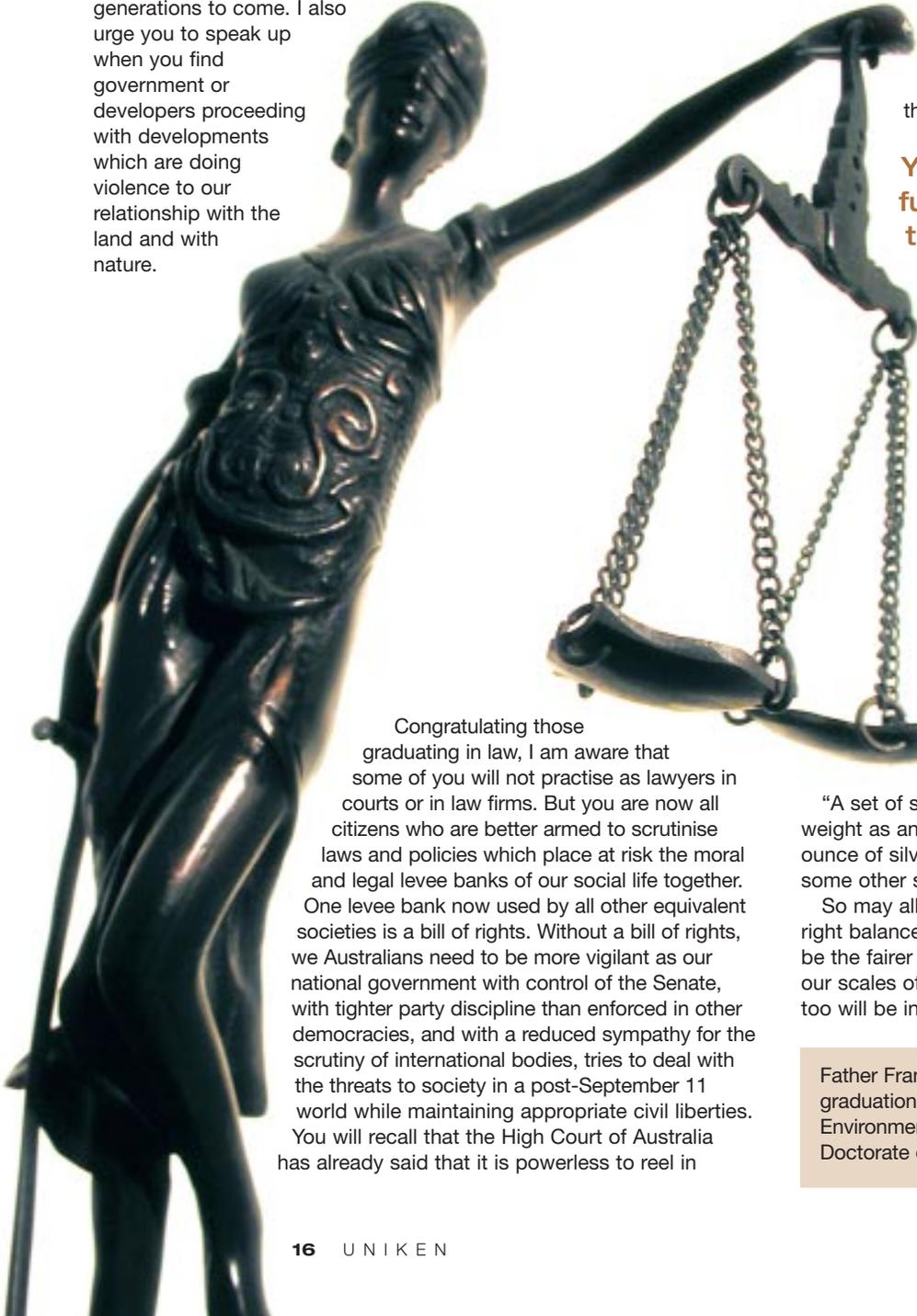
“An ounce of silver has the same weight as an ounce of sand”

A graduation address by Frank Brennan

Last December, I was in New Orleans, that most enchanting of southern US cities. Staying at Loyola University, I enjoyed the charming southern hospitality not only in the piano bars and at the university but also on the tramcars and in the streets, which had been invaded by football fans from all over the United States for one of the big college football finals.

Since then, the levee banks of New Orleans have been swept away by Hurricane Katrina. We have all been reminded how fragile our hold on nature is; and just as fragile is our hold on morality, law and order.

Our usual consolation as we go about our daily lives is that it could never happen to us. I daresay many residents of New Orleans thought the same thing. Congratulating those of you graduating with Masters of Environmental Management, I urge you to do all you can to maintain the levee banks of our cities and continent so that we might live securely in our land for generations to come. I also urge you to speak up when you find government or developers proceeding with developments which are doing violence to our relationship with the land and with nature.



Congratulating those graduating in law, I am aware that some of you will not practise as lawyers in courts or in law firms. But you are now all citizens who are better armed to scrutinise laws and policies which place at risk the moral and legal levee banks of our social life together. One levee bank now used by all other equivalent societies is a bill of rights. Without a bill of rights, we Australians need to be more vigilant as our national government with control of the Senate, with tighter party discipline than enforced in other democracies, and with a reduced sympathy for the scrutiny of international bodies, tries to deal with the threats to society in a post-September 11 world while maintaining appropriate civil liberties. You will recall that the High Court of Australia has already said that it is powerless to reel in

government even if it wants to keep stateless asylum seekers in detention for life without court order or supervision.

Prior to my year's study leave in the United States, I was much taken up with Australia's policy on asylum seekers. After my first visit to the Woomera Detention Centre in 2002, I went to Canberra to meet with Minister Ruddock. One of my government contacts warned me that they were sick of the moral outrage from the churches and other advocacy groups. I was urged to keep cool. I kept cool until Easter that year. I then wrote to the minister:

“My three hours in the detention centre on the evening of Good Friday convinced me that it was time to put the message to you very plainly despite its public unpopularity and despite your government's immunity to moral outrage: ‘Minister, this is no place for kids.’ When

children end up in the sterile zone against the razor wire with tear gas and batons around them in Australia, it is time for all parties including the Commonwealth Government to stop blaming others and to effect policy changes so that it can never happen again.”

If you are to maintain a passion for law with justice, there is no substitute for being able to eyeball the victims

You are well positioned to live fulfilling professional lives dedicated to law and justice. We need your vigilance and eye for the victim and for the decision maker

as well as the government decision makers. Never presume that the public are less moral than you...

In the end, the government did apologise to the mother of the seven-year-old boy whose bruises I had seen after he had been hit with a baton and tear gas. And finally government has decided that a detention centre is no place for kids.

You law graduates have been privileged to attend one of the great law schools of the nation. You are well positioned to live fulfilling professional lives dedicated to law and justice. We need your vigilance and eye for the victim and for the decision maker.

Like courts, we often have to balance competing interests. The scales of justices are a powerful image in the law. Our Chief Justice has warned that this sort of balance is no easy matter. Reflecting on the law and values, Murray Gleeson has said:

“A set of scales can tell you that an ounce of silver has the same weight as an ounce of sand. The scales cannot tell you whether an ounce of silver is more valuable than an ounce of sand; you need some other standard of measurement for that purpose.”

So may all you graduates in law and environmental studies find the right balance in your personal and professional lives, and may Australia be the fairer and more secure as a result of your labours. Without you, our scales of justice will be tilted, laden with sand; and our levee banks too will be in jeopardy. ♦

Father Frank Brennan SJ AO was the guest speaker last month at a graduation ceremony for the Faculty of Law and the Institute of Environmental Studies, during which he received an Honorary Doctorate of Laws.