IN THIS ISSUE

Full Circle: Warren Payne returns to where it all began and sees a bright future for VU research

Human Research Ethics: Expressions of Interest

Internet business advice a trip too far for tourism operators

Trial of Indian cactus has ears pricked

VU researches sustainable household behaviour in the west

SparkL Report: Innovation in schools: Readiness and capacity to enhance learning and teaching

Grant success

First study of Buddhist education reveals happier, calmer students

Grant opportunity

FULL CIRCLE: WARREN PAYNE RETURNS TO WHERE IT ALL BEGAN AND SEES A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR VU RESEARCH

When Professor Warren Payne first joined Victoria University as a physical education student, the sports building was a modest house on Nicholson Street with four staff and a secretary.

More than 36 years later Professor Payne is presiding over a research program that will soon incorporate a $68.5 million world-class sports building into its system.

"Clearly VU has changed enormously," the new Research Pro Vice-Chancellor says. "These days, if you want to be a university you have to be active in research, and active at a world class level. I think we’re moving towards that rapidly and my job is to keep the foot on the pedal."

Professor Payne – who lectured exercise physiology at VU for four years during the 1980s – started his new role on July 12. He has been busy travelling around to all the campuses meeting research staff and learning how the university works.

"The welcome I have received has been overwhelming," he says. "I see my role here as being one of helping the university grow its research profile.

"I am very much looking forward to the opportunity of trying to advocate for VU in the community and in government. I’m here to help remove some of those common barriers for researchers and make it easier for them to produce great work."

Professor Payne joined VU from the University of Ballarat, where he worked as Deputy Head of the School of Human Movement and Sports Sciences.

He has published over 150 refereed publications, conference proceedings and major industry reports.

He is Deputy Chair of the WestVic Academy of Sport, Vice-President (Science) Sports Medicine Australia Fellows and is a member of advisory panels for Victorian Health Promotion Foundation and Sport and Recreation Victoria.

The 53-year-old was a founding executive member of the Australian Association for Exercise and Sports Science and has established a range of commercial and academic links in countries such as China, Sri Lanka, USA and UK.

While he acknowledges his strong sports background, Professor Payne says he is committed to all forms of research and is impressed by VU’s variety of outputs.
"I've got a really broad background in research. I believe research has to be pervasive throughout the whole of VU, certainly at Higher Education. But we also need to integrate the TAFE division into that thinking. We need to see ourselves as a research active and, in the future, a research intensive university.

“We want to be world class in terms of research credibility but we also have to serve our region and the question is how do we balance the two? They're not competing demands; in fact they should be synergistic.

“We've got to be realistic; we can’t be all things to all people. But we want to establish ourselves with the academy as being a university that undertakes world class research and at the same time produces research that results in tangible benefits to our community.”

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS: EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

Expressions of Interest from members of staff are sought for the position of Chair, Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development Human Research Ethics Subcommittee (AEHD HREC) commencing 1st September 2010.

The role will provide an opportunity for staff to develop and exercise vital skills in an academic setting and provide the University with an essential service in the review of human research ethics applications.

Interested staff may download the Duty Statement from the VUHREC website at: http://research.vu.edu.au/hrec.php

INTERNET BUSINESS ADVICE A TRIP TOO FAR FOR TOURISM OPERATORS

New research by Victoria University has found that small and medium-sized tourism operators are frequently uncertain about the quality, accuracy and currency of business management information they obtain from the internet.

The report by VU Professors John Breen and Brian King found that while operators favour the internet as the primary source of business information, they are sometimes overwhelmed by the quantity of material available.

Professor King said the second most frequently used resource for business information is from tourism and industry bodies.

“We have recommended strengthening the connections between these two information sources so that tourism bodies and industry groups are positioned as 'honest brokers','” Professor King said.

“This would help filter and summarise relevant information and provide knowledge which will be meaningful for members.”


TRIAL OF INDIAN CACTUS HAS EARS PRICKED

A Victoria University trial of an Indian cactus has stirred widespread public interest after it received national media coverage last month.

The research trial was motivated by the experiences of five-year-old Mia Griggs, who was diagnosed with a rare genetic disorder that causes a feeling of constant hunger.

Mia’s insatiable appetite and slow metabolism was due to Prader-Willi Syndrome; a condition caused by the deletion of chromosome 15, which affects between 1: 11,000 –1: 18,000 babies born worldwide.

Difficult food-seeking behaviour has often led parents to lock kitchen cupboards and ensure constant supervision, but mother Joanne found an instant remedy for Mia in the form of an Indian cactus that she read about in an American health publication.

Since taking one tablet of the cactus powder each day, Mia has kept her weight and appetite under control for three years.

“It's been a godsend,” Joanne said. “Along with a regimen of habitual behaviour and good nutrition, supervision continues but Mia has been known to say she’s not hungry.

“The concentration on food can be difficult because most people with PWS have low muscle tone which means the body cannot metabolise a large number of calories. This propensity can lead to obesity, diabetes and heart disease if regimens are not created.”

Mia's success led Joanne to contact researchers to study the effects of the cactus. VU Nutritional Therapy Senior Lecturer Dr Michael Mathai is now conducting a three-month trial in Melbourne's western suburbs to test the effectiveness of the cactus in overweight people.

Half of the trial’s 40 participants have been receiving the recommended dose of the cactus extract each day, with the other half receiving placebo capsules, in conjunction with advice on healthy diet and lifestyle. The trial is expected to be completed in late October.

Dr Mathai said the cactus had been used traditionally in India during times of famine but little was known about it in the western world. It is being sold in a small number of countries but few trials on its effectiveness on weight loss have been carried out.

“This is a very exciting trial because of its potential as an appetite suppressant,” Dr Mathai said. “The question is does the cactus work well for Mia because it stops her focusing on food, or is it going to work for all overweight people to reduce their appetite? With the growing problem of obesity in Australia, the time is right to find out.”

VU RESEARCHES SUSTAINABLE HOUSEHOLD BEHAVIOUR IN THE WEST

Victoria University is undertaking research to explore the motivations and capacity of residents in Melbourne’s western suburbs to make sustainable behaviour changes. This research, assisted by Maribyrnong City Council, will be used to inform the development of sustainability projects and programs that can better engage and serve the needs of householders in this community.
The project examines a range of factors that influence residents take-up in sustainable practices, as well as understanding capacity and willingness to undertake pro-environmental behaviour and maintain this behaviour change.

If you would like to participate in the survey or have any questions or comments about the survey, please contact Dr. Wayne Binney from Victoria University on Wayne.Binney@vu.edu.au

SPARKL REPORT: INNOVATION IN SCHOOLS: READINESS AND CAPACITY TO ENHANCE LEARNING AND TEACHING

The Victoria University Access and Success team recently submitted the report: ‘SparkL Report: Innovation in schools: Readiness and capacity to enhance learning and teaching’ to the funding body Ed Partnerships International.

VU, as part of the research consortium (Ed Partnerships International; ACER, RMIT University and VU), has undertaken the research and evaluation components of SparkL.

Ed Partnerships International has been supporting 12 primary and secondary schools in the Northern, Western, Hume and Southern Regions of Department of Education and Early Childhood Education (DEECD) via SparkL.

The aim of SparkL is to identify effective ways to develop young people’s creative capacity and consequently increase their educational achievement and engagement in each school. During 2008-2009, creative practitioners (e.g., film maker, landscape gardener, mosaic artist, and entrepreneur) have been embedded in these schools, to work with teachers and students.

A strategic aim of the program is also to have an impact at the system level by integrating the SparkL model into public education more widely. SparkL, with its research consortium partners, is collecting and analysing data from the schools, which will then be used to inform state and national policy. The VU research team focussed on identifying the interplay of the following features that identify school readiness and capacity for innovative projects such as SparkL:

- School Leadership
- School organisation and structures (culture)
- School community engagement

The VU Access and Success Research Team is Dr Bill Eckersley, Dr Merryn Davies, Mr. Bert Van Halen and Ms Barbara Reilly.

GRANT SUCCESS

Drs Anne Harris and Mary-Rose McLaren are the proud Project Leaders of a successful Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF) grant entitled: ‘CULTURE SHACK: Arts Processes as Foundation (Arts) Studies for CALD Young People from Refugee Backgrounds (Pumphouse Theatre)’.

This year-long project will bring together faculty and students from the School of Education and community artists and arts organisations. It will develop a ‘Foundation Studies (Arts)’ pathway to the Creativity and the Arts courses in VE and HE through community arts workshops. Dr Harris has also recently had an arts-education article accepted for publication in the A-ranked journal Visual Anthropology (forthcoming, January 2011) entitled “Slowly By Slowly: Ethnocinema, Media and the Young Women of the Sudanese Diaspora”.

FIRST STUDY OF BUDDHIST EDUCATION REVEALS HAPPIER, CALMER STUDENTS

Buddhist education can make students happier and assist with behavioural problems such as bullying, a Victoria University study has found.

The first study of the effects on students of Buddhist education, which was introduced to select Melbourne primary schools in 2005, has just been completed by VU PhD graduate Dr Sue Smith.

It reveals that students from Years 3 to 6 consistently rated themselves happier after their weekly meditation session, improved their strategies to cope with bullying in a calm, detached way and become more resilient. Children who’d been tremendously unhappy started feeling more calm and children with very poor self esteem were becoming more confident.

Dr Smith said the positive results showed meditations adapted from the Buddhist tradition had an “important place” in education and could be incorporated more widely into the curriculum without being religious.

A self-reporting technique called a ‘Happiness Scale’ was used by students to gauge their reaction to meditation. Children drew a happy, neutral or unhappy face before and after each meditation session.

“Consistently the children were marking themselves in the positive category after meditation,” she said. “Even if they marked the same face twice they would say that although they didn’t feel better, they were definitely calmer. They’d mention that their mind felt brighter, they were less worried, and had less bad stuff to think about.”

Dr Smith said teachers at each of the 12 schools in the study noted positive changes in their students.

“The teachers said the students developed new strategies to cope with bullying in a calm, detached way that helped them regulate their responses and become more resilient. Children who’d been tremendously unhappy started feeling more calm and children with very poor self esteem were becoming more confident.”

“One surprise is that many of the students started practising meditation in their own time, for example before playing sport or before classroom tests.”

Dr Smith’s study also looked at how Buddhist education could fit alongside the Victorian and national education policies.

GRANT OPPORTUNITY

THE WILLIAM BUCKLAND FOUNDATION

The William Buckland Foundation provides innovation funding to Victorian charitable organisations. The Foundation seeks to enhance and improve the social fabric of Victoria by investing in new ideas that benefit the marginalised and disadvantaged.

Closing date: 1 October 2010

THANK YOU to all who contributed to the content of the Research Matters bulletin. 😊