PROSPER OR PERISH

EXPLORING THE LIMITS TO GROWTH

A revealing research essay by Victoria University Associate Professor Michele Grossman has been selected as this year’s Griffith REVIEW nomination in the print media category for the Australian Human Rights Commission Medals and Awards.

Michele’s essay, ‘We are all learners now’, was noted by Griffith Review editors as having grown out of her research on the challenges that humanitarian refugees face in settling in a new culture, “as well as on her personal experiences of volunteer work with the SAIL (Sudanese Australian Integrated Learning) Program in Melbourne’s Western region”.

“Australia is home to approximately 30,000 Sudanese refugees,” the editors continue. “The essay invites an intimate understanding of the unique mix of loss, misapprehension and discovery the immigrant or refugee faces in making a home in a new culture.

“We believe that this understanding will enrich the vibrancy of public discussion around how we treat refugees – politically, legally and as neighbours enriching and contributing to our communities.

“As Australia’s population is bound to grow with a diverse mix of immigrants and refugees seeking asylum from political or environmental instability, it is vital to shape a humanitarian and viable strategy for managing the asylum and resettlement processes. Treating refugees with empathy and insight would significantly enhance how Australia is perceived in the region and globally.”

Michele’s essay appears in Griffith REVIEW, Edition 29: Prosper or Perish?, August 2010, pp. 137-147. The essay was also long-listed for the Australian Book Review Calibre Prize for Outstanding Essay in March 2010. It was also the basis for Michele’s appearance as part of a panel on population and immigration sponsored by Griffith REVIEW at the UNESCO Wheeler Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas in August. She shared the panel with Peter Mares (ABC), Rachel Buchanan (La Trobe University) and Julianne Schulz (Editor, GR).

WORK WITH US, YOUTH TELL VICTORIA POLICE

Far from being disengaged gangs prone to crime, young people in Melbourne’s west have told Victoria University researchers they want to work with the police to ensure their neighbourhoods are safer.

In a study released last month, Don’t Go There: Young People’s Perspectives on Community Safety and Policing, VU researchers Michele Grossman and Jenny Sharples say there are strong indications that a collaborative approach by police working alongside young people will reduce violence and crime.

“We surveyed 500 people in the Brimbank area aged 15-19 and conducted focus groups with a further 50, and it’s...
fair to say these young people are very willing to develop relationships with the police based on openness and mutual understanding,” Michele says.

“One of the common assumptions these young people reject is that youth congregate in ethnically based ‘gangs’ with criminal intent. Young people overwhelmingly tell us they socialise in large groups for safety and for cultural and social reasons.

“Most of the groups are culturally diverse, and are not based on a single ethnic group. Although there are exceptions, they are generally homogenous and law-abiding.”

Some of the key findings of the study, jointly funded by Victoria Police and the University, are:

* 50 per cent of survey respondents said they felt extremely safe or safe in their neighbourhood
* 81 per cent of those surveyed said they had never been a victim of violence in a public place
* More than half of those surveyed (58 per cent) reported they felt safer when they see police on the streets
* Suggestions for improving safety included police and community members working collaboratively, greater reporting of crime by young people, and more environmental security measures such as cameras and guards, especially at local transport hubs
* Both Sudanese and Pacific Islander young people expressed a lack of trust and confidence in police when their safety is threatened
* Many of those surveyed reported they knew other young people who regularly carried weapons including various kinds of poles, bats, knives and guns

The report authors have developed a consultative model, ‘Listen and Learn’ for police-youth community partnerships that can be rolled out across the state. This strategy draws on the success of similar programs in Canada, the US and the UK.

“We believe there is a great opportunity for police and other community stakeholders to establish mutually supportive relationships with young people based on the evidence in this report,” Jenny Sharples says.

The Institute of Logistics and Supply Chain Management (ILSCM) and partner Integrated Management Information Systems (IMIS) were able to leverage a unique level of cooperation between companies to carry out the Port of Melbourne study, which is critical to future infrastructure planning by government and businesses.

Information collected during the project enabled the accurate mapping of the domestic and international container freight task. Using the container number as the key to track all freight movements, the relevant organisations provided the following information for all containers: container number, origin post code for export/destination post code for import, container size, timing (total travel time and dwell time along the chain), truck type and the transportation route.

VU DOCKS IN SYDNEY AFTER UNPRECEDENTED SUCCESS OF PORT OF MELBOURNE RESEARCH STUDY

The unprecedented accuracy and success of a recent study on Port of Melbourne container freight movement has led to Victoria University winning the tender to conduct a similar study for the Sydney Ports Corporation.

The project included importers, exporters, transport operators, empty container parks, freight forwarders, Australian Customs and Border Protection Services, Australian Quarantine Inspection Service, stevedores and rail operators. The cooperation and collaboration that was achieved by ILSCM is impressive because the Port of Melbourne Corporation has no regulatory influence or authority to collect data from the different sectors that impact the landside logistics chain.
This project is significant because the outcomes of the research will support future private and public sector infrastructure planning founded on precise data. The unprecedented accuracy of this study was based on key companies agreeing to provide commercial in-confidence electronic data for every container moved during the sample period at each point of the logistics chain.

**SUCCESSFUL GRANT FROM THE VICTORIAN WOMEN’S BENEVOLENT TRUST**

VU postdoctoral fellow Ceridwen Spark has been awarded a grant from the Victorian Women’s Benevolent Trust for the research project ‘Sewing Seeds: Exploring African Women’s Involvement in Sewing Enterprises’.

This innovative community project involves interviewing Somali, Sudanese and Ethiopian women participating in newly established sewing enterprises in order to assess their experience, and will contribute to the positive development of their partnership with the organisation, Green Collect.

Ceridwen, a postdoctoral fellow within the Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development, believes this study will benefit newly arrived African refugee women, who are among the most socially, economically and culturally marginalised groups in the Australian community.

“I am very grateful to the Victorian Women’s Benevolent Trust for their support of this study,” she said.

**VU 3 MINUTE THESIS COMPETITION GRAND FINAL**

The inaugural VU 3 Minute Thesis Grand Final was held at Footscray Park last month in front of a crowd of more than 200 people.

The successful event followed weeks of preparation across the Higher Education Faculties by 30 participants who had put themselves forward for the heats in July. On Friday 27 August staff, students, family and friends of the competitors gathered to watch the 13 finalists compete against each other for the major university prizes.

The final winners were: Roziya Abu, Robert Kaczan, and Elizabeth Rouse (Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development); Susan Bird, Victoria Gonzalez, Siti Nuryanah, Connie Rotinsulu, Gail Smyth and Neale Wardley (Faculty of Business and Law); and Shabbir Ahmed, Sarah Buelow, Iwan Jumana and Eder Kikianty (Faculty of Health, Engineering and Science).

All competitors presented their theses within the allotted 3 minutes in a highly professional and engaging manner. They impressed both judges and audience with the high quality of thesis topics and the rich diversity in their approaches to research. The expert panel of judges – Professor Warren Payne, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Research Training) (Chair 3MT Judging panel), Associate Professor Colleen Vale (Chair, Postgraduate Research Committee), and Ms Christine White (General Manager, Media and Communications) - had a tough job in deciding the winners.

The 3MT audience also enthusiastically got behind the presenters and were impressed with the quality of the presentations. At the conclusion of the event, as the judges deliberated, each audience member voted for their favourite 3MT presentation.

The winner of the audience choice award was Eder Kikianty from the School of Engineering and Science, Faculty of Health, Engineering and Science. Her prize was a $64 iPad!

Eder joined winners from other universities across the nation at the Australian and New Zealand three-minute thesis finals, which were held at the University of Queensland on 21 September.

Despite her difficult topic, Eder got very close to making it through to the final. Our spies say she did VU proud against some very tough opposition. Well done Eder!

The winners of the main prizes were:

- **1st Prize** - Eder Kikianty, Faculty of Health, Engineering and Science
  - $2000 towards research related expenses
- **2nd Prize** - Connie Rotinsulu, Faculty of Business and Law
  - $1000 towards research related expenses
- **3rd Prize** - Robert Kaczan, Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development
  - $500 towards research related expenses

All competitors received a certificate and an iPad. The audience choice winner also received a 64G iPad!
IAN POTTER FOUNDATION SUCCESS

Associate Professor Mikel Duke’s application to the Ian Potter Foundation for funding to bring Professor Jerry Lin (Arizona State University, USA), Professor Toshino Tsuru (Hiroshima University, Japan) and Professor Wanqin Jin (Nanjing University of Technology, China) as keynote speakers to the 3rd International Symposium on Inorganic Membranes in Melbourne on 26 November has been successful.

Dr Bo Zhu’s application to the Ian Potter Foundation for funding to work as a visiting scientist with Professor Dongyuan Zhao, Department of Chemistry, Fudan University, Shanghai, China from 15-29 October has also been successful.

SPECTACULAR LIGHT AND LASER SHOW BEAMED ACROSS VICTORIA

Victoria University journeyed across the State last month to treat students and families to spectacular and educational light and laser presentations.

The two special shows, A Celebration of Light advancements with LASERS and Optics in Life Sciences and The Voyage of Light, were toured as part of National Science Week and the Royal Melbourne Show respectively.

The term laser stands for Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation. Since its discovery 50 years ago by American Theodore Maiman, the laser has become an indispensable tool in our daily lives.

Equipped with her “James Bond” Optics suitcase, VU Biomedical Science Research Fellow Dr Nicoleta Dragomir travelled to western regional schools and the Melbourne Showgrounds to present exquisite experiments involving light.

Her school show highlighted the science of lasers from phasers to X-ray lasers, as well as examples from today’s extraordinary uses of lasers in life sciences.

“Lasers are used when we communicate using our mobile phones, watching a video or needing medical help,” Dr Dragomir said.

“Lasers are simply cool. One hundred years ago these possibilities were unheard of. The future is awaiting more scientists to discover and invent new ways to use light and its properties. It is very important to improve the quality of life through technology.”

Dr Dragomir said she was thrilled to be able to show students the physical brilliance of lasers, as well as educate families at the Show about the physical brilliance of light.

“These were entertaining and engaging shows that will no doubt encourage more young people to follow science as a career. Despite the cold temperatures on our school tour, we received an incredibly warm welcome when we arrived in VU’s Mobile Gateway Vehicle.

“A huge thank you to all team members who were involved in this project, the concerted effort was well worthwhile.”

KENYA’S DOMINATION OF LONG-DISTANCE RUNNING DUE TO STRATEGIC USE OF RESOURCES, NOT CULTURE

The recent success of Kenyan long-distance running is due to strategic use of resources rather than the “mythical” and widely accepted reasons of culture and genetics, a Victoria University study has found.

With the Commonwealth Games in India about to start, (October 3-14) VU PhD graduate Peter Ochieng said it was time to dispel the myths that genetic inheritance, a higher pain threshold, and high altitude training were the main reasons for the African nation’s world domination of endurance running events.

In his study, A Resource-Based View of Elite Kenyan Running Successes, Mr Ochieng says that the 1990 liberalisation of the Kenyan government has been the greatest factor in the country’s marathon successes.

“People have been very good at making generalised claims about Kenya’s running successes that have not been based on scientific evidence,” Mr Ochieng said.

“Saying Kenyans are good at marathon running because it is part of their culture is like saying Australians are good at swimming because it is part of their culture. It is a very simplistic explanation of success.

“After the Kenyan government removed restrictive barriers in 1990, foreign sporting agents were allowed to enter the country and train local athletes, major international companies built elite training camps, and the athletes were allowed to move around the country and travel overseas freely.

“This thrust of human resources (coaches and agents) as well as physical resources, such as specialised training camps, were found to be the potent fuel for success.”

Although Kenya produced some marathon successes prior to 1990, the number of its world class runners increased from 95 prior to the liberalisation policy to 1154 now. When all the marathon running successes are combined, top 10 Kenyan finishes grew from 17 before 1990 to 412 now – a 2424 per cent increase. The number of marathon training camps in the country also rose from 26 to more than 70.

“The Kenyan government has taken a back seat and allowed the private sector to fund the sport and support the athletes. Previously you could be talented but you were only allowed to run for the national team at events like the Olympic and Commonwealth Games. Now there are many more commercial opportunities,” Mr Ochieng said.

“Part of my theory is that if you’ve got the resources like good coaches and training facilities, and use them well strategically, there is much more chance of success than
relying on cultural, genetic or geographical factors.”

Mr Ochieng, who has worked, lived and consulted in Kenya and the USA, said there were lessons in Kenya’s system of elite sports funding for Australia.

“In Western countries most elite sports are funded by governments but that money can quickly dry up if the world economy takes a dive. The worry is that the Australian government’s ability to fund these sports is at the mercy of the world economy. A greater mix of private and public sector funding would be a preferred model.”

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