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VU RESEARCH DESIGN AND STATISTICAL SUPPORT SERVICE

Victoria University has a new research design and statistical support service to meet growing demand from staff and research students.

The service will provide one-on-one consulting and workshops for research students and their supervisors, and academic staff in all areas of the University.

It will help link students and staff to local area experts within the University and, if necessary, outside the University.

Associate Professor Neil Diamond, who worked at Victoria University from 1987-2003 and is currently Director of Statistical Consulting in the Department of Econometrics and Business Statistics at Monash University, has rejoined the University and will coordinate the service.

He said the aim is to get the best statistical support for students and staff while appropriately recognising and rewarding staff who play this important role.

Associate Professor Diamond will develop a list of staff with statistical expertise willing to consult with other staff and research student.

Existing students are entitled to 10 hours free consulting during their candidature, while staff are entitled to 5 hours free consulting per calendar year.

Students are required to get the consent of their supervisors and are encouraged to bring them to the meetings.

Prior to the first meeting, students and staff need to prepare a 1-page summary of their research and complete the application form at:


Associate Professor Diamond has a PhD in Experimental Design from the University of Melbourne, has worked for over 10 years in industry as a statistician and as an academic for over 20 years both at Victoria University and Monash University. He is an accredited statistician with the Statistical Society of Australia.

For information or bookings email Associate Professor Neil Diamond at rdss@vu.edu.au

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FILMS EXPLORE CHANGING TIMES FOR PAPUA NEW GUINEA’S WOMEN

Dr Ceridwen Spark is detailing the lives of some of Papua New Guinea’s leading women, looking at interactions between educated women and their traditional heritage.

Dr Spark, from the School of Social Sciences and Psychology, said the six films would provide a platform for scholarly analyses, but also promote gender equity in Papua New Guinea’s younger generation.

“The films are contextualising the struggles these women face as well as detailing a society in transition and what happens to traditional roles and expectations in this flux,” Dr Spark said.

Dr Spark has an AusAid grant for the project and will work in collaboration with Yumi Piksa, a film workshop aimed at capturing local stories and knowledge at the University of Goroka.

She said the project came out of a passion for communicating the inspiring stories of women who are breaking gender stereotypes.

“There are many women in Papua New Guinea bridging a difficult and little understood divide between intellectual development and traditional familial roles,” she said.

Her research is an intellectual and personal passion as she works towards not only scholarly outcomes, but a real determination to challenge the status quo for Papua New Guinean women.

2012 will be Ceridwen’s final year as a VU Postdoctoral Research Fellow, but she wants to continue contributing to the discussion and active engagement around gender equity in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific, she said.

JOINT E-HEALTH AND SOCIAL COMPUTING CENTRE OPENS IN BEIJING

A world-class social computing and e-health laboratory has opened this month in Beijing.

The lab, which will foster cross-disciplinary research into information science, health and social computing, is a collaboration between Victoria University and the Graduate University of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (GUCAS).

Over the next five years, the lab will recruit research staff and postgraduate students to participate in groundbreaking social computing and e-health projects, joint publications and research training.

The laboratory is the culmination of collaborative research between Victoria University’s Centre for Applied Informatics and the Chinese Academy of Sciences’ Research Centre for Fictitious Economy and Data Science. It also represents a five-year research partnership between Professor Yanchun Zhang (VU) and Professor Yong Shi (GUCAS).

Professor Zhang, who was recently recognized as part of China’s prestigious One Thousand Talents Program, will provide joint supervision to research staff and postgraduate students at the new lab.

FOURTEEN STUDENTS THROUGH TO 3MT GRAND FINAL

Fourteen VU students are on their way to the university’s grand final of the Three Minute Thesis competition following faculty heats earlier this month.

Competitors presented their thesis in three minutes or less on topics ranging from how to prevent falls in the elderly through to a study of the perfume industry in Saudi Arabia.

The 14 winners will now compete in front of a university-wide audience at the VU 3MT Grand Final on September 2.

Lorraine Harrison, from AEHD, is one of those competing at the grand final for a chance to win an iPad2, $2000 towards her research and flights and accommodation to compete in the Trans-Tasman Final on September 29 in Perth.

But Harrison said competing in the 3MT was about more than the prize money.

“It gave me the opportunity to think about the main themes of my thesis, (which) helped me both in writing up and explaining it to others,” Ms Harrison said. “It’s a valuable experience for any research student.”

Last year Eder Kikianty took VU’s top prize with a presentation on pure mathematics. (View her winning performance at Victoria University’s YouTube channel)
To be in the audience at the Grand Final on Friday September 2 at 3:30pm, RSVP to Katie.Batterham@vu.edu.au by August 26.

The Victoria University Postgraduate Association and the Office for Postgraduate Research will host a catered celebration and social event following the competition.

**Connie Rotinsulu at the Faculty of Business and Law 3MT heat**

**Kuorwel Kuorwel at the Faculty of Health, Engineering and Science 3MT heat**

**STORMWATER HARVESTING OFFERS HOPE TO WATER-STARVED CITIES**

Melbourne could start using new lakes, wetlands and ponds to help meet its water needs thanks to new PhD research.

Indian PhD student Prasad Inamdar is researching the best way to harvest rainwater in urban environments so that it can be effectively and efficiently used to supplement a city’s non-potable water supply.

Based in Melbourne’s inner west, Mr Prasad has set out to model the geography of catchments of local parkland for a water utility, City West Water.

“I am using GIS mapping to identify how much runoff there is in the area,” Mr Inamdar said. “Once that is done I will overlay a map of parks and open spaces with high water demand in the City West Water area.”

Suitable sites where high levels of runoff can be captured will then be selected for detailed catchment design.

Mr Inamdar, who came to Australia in 2009 for his PhD at Victoria University, is working under the supervision of the university’s Professor Chris Perera and the CSIRO’s Dr Ashok Sharma.

He said the project required extensive communication between his Victoria University supervisor, CSIRO and collaborators at City West Water. But he also recognised these relationships were critical in order for his PhD to have a practical outcome.

“Because of the cost of developing these catchments, they need to be viable for at least 20-30 years, and they have to be environmentally sustainable and supported by the community,” Mr Inamdar said.

Professor Perera said the project would make a significant and practical contribution to the body of knowledge about water management and stormwater harvesting.

“Governments are spending hundreds of millions of dollars on improved water management in countries like Australia, and this type of research is essential to ensure those investments are not just money down the drain,” Professor Perera said.

**RESEARCHER BECOMES PRESIDENT**

Dr Rob Hess, a senior lecturer in the School of Sport and Exercise Science, has been elected to serve a two-year term as President of the Australian Society for Sports History (ASSH). A founding member of the Society in 1983, Rob has previously served in various roles on the ASSH Executive, and was co-convenor of the organisation’s highly successful 2005 biennial conference at the MCG. Rob was also a co-author of A National Game: The History of Australian Rules Football, co-winner of the Society’s biennial book award in 2009.

**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES GRANT SUCCESS**

Dr Wally Karnilowicz will receive a State Government grant of almost $70,000 for an urban renewal project in inner-city Melbourne. The project, with the Department of Human Services, will focus on community building and economic participation in Richmond, Prahran and Fitzroy.

Meanwhile Dr Karnilowicz has had positive reviews on his paper ‘Identity and psychological ownership in chronic illness and disease state’.

European Journal of Cancer Care editor, Stephen O’Connor, described the paper as informed and informative.

“It is devoid of self-pity, self-congratulation, or the mawkish sentimentality which sometimes afflicts secondary accounts of others’ cancer experiences. As a consequence of this, it provides an excellent example for all of us of the importance of ‘objectivised subjectivity’
when seeking to give voice to our own or others’ experiences,” Mr O’Connor said.

“Autoethnography – and certainly good autoethnography – is a comparatively rare beast amongst the many hybrid forms of research seeking to give cancer patients a voice, but on reading Karnilowicz’s fascinating paper;

I wonder why we do not encourage our patients to speak in their own words more often!”

Karnilowicz also presented two papers at last month’s European Congress of Psychology in Istanbul, Turkey – one on recovering drug addicts and one on teaching and learning practices in psychology.

MAPPING INDIGENOUS CULTURAL HERITAGE

Victoria University’s Sir Zelman Cowen Centre and technology company Iconyx are working with Aboriginal communities to map their cultural heritage sites.

The Centre’s project director, Sue Marshall, said multi-layered electronic maps were being developed in a six-month pilot with the Wadawurrung community of North-West Victoria.

The maps will include meeting places, burial sites, native vegetation and mythical sites as well as photographs, videos and oral histories.

Ms Marshall said it would develop best practice around the independent collection and management of information for significance sites of Aboriginal cultural heritage.

She said the technology would empower traditional landowners to produce and maintain their own maps and assign permissions for various layers of information.

“They could produce a cultural tourism map for the general tourism industry and another showing sites of secret women’s business,” Ms Marshall said.

The Wadawurrung have provided access to their lands and heritage sites for the Centre to conduct research, while Iconyx will supply the technology and train six community members in its use.

“A major objective is that the community will gain knowledge and technology skills from this,” she said.

It will also ensure knowledge traditionally passed down by elders will continue to be transmitted to younger generations.

“Continuity has been disturbed significantly by colonisation and its continuing impact on community life,” Ms Marshall said. “In consequence, information crucial to the identity of many Aboriginal groups is being lost.”

Ms Marshall said contemporary sites of significance would also be mapped to reflect the community’s status as a living culture.

The study runs until January 2012 and was generously funded by the trustees of the William Buckland Foundation, who awarded a grant of $150,000 for this project.

NURSING AND MIDWIFERY RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

The past couple of months have seen exciting research-related activities in the School of Nursing and Midwifery.

In early August the School held its own research seminar, where the VU community were invited to come and listen to research findings.

Professor Terence Mc Cann spoke about family carers of young people with first-episode psychosis, and issues of responding to stigma, while Associate Professor Mary Carolan presented research on how maternal age and method of birth effected outcomes for babies.

Dr Deb Kerr spoke about enhancing nursing handovers in emergency departments and Associate Professor Kris Martin-McDonald looked at addressing the inner dialogue of a health service.

Meanwhile Associate Professor Liza Heslop has launched a special edition of the Electronic Journal of Health Informatics with five refereed articles on the theme e-health strategies, to which five VU staff contributed. The Health Informatics Society of Australia chief executive has now asked Professor Heslop to take up an editorial role for this journal.

Earlier this month Dr Maureen Farrell, whose medical surgical textbook has been shortlisted for the Australian Educational Publishing Awards, gave a paper at the prestigious Health Informatics of Australia Conference. Her written paper was accepted for publication in the conference proceedings.

MEDICAL RESEARCH ON ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS TO COMMON DISORDERS

Research by associate professor Dr Hong Xu and colleagues in the School of Biomedical and Health Sciences is raising VU’s profile in Chinese medicine.

Dr Xu and Dr Mary Millikan recently supervised research by PhD student, Arcane Kolasani, into the mineral content in Chinese medicinal herbs used to improve kidney function.
Dr Xu said the study, published in the Food Chemistry journal in August, would lead to better herbal selection for kidney function treatments.

“These analyses give valuable information with respect to safety and nutrition and results provide scientific evidence for these Chinese herbs commonly used in clinical practice,” Dr Xu said.

Meanwhile, Dr Xu and masters student Daniel Lee have published a paper on needle-free electro-acupuncture as a way to control pain after a hysterectomy.

The study showed needle-free electro-acupuncture to be beneficial when used alongside other treatments.

“This needle-free approach has benefits for patients who have difficulties with traditional acupuncture needling and at the same time are interested in a non-pharmacological approach to treating pain,” Dr Xu said.

The joint study with international colleagues was published in the eCAM journal in July.

This follows a study on the effectiveness of Chinese kiwi fruit extract on female reproductive hormones by Dr Xu and PhD student Lulu Fu.

Dr Xu said the month-long clinical trial on Australian peri-menopausal women showed Chinese therapeutic food could regulate hormonal fluctuations, which are known to affect the mental and physical health of middle-aged, peri-menopausal women.

The article has been viewed more than 500 times since it was published in Integrative Medicine Insights in April, according to publishers.

COLLABORATIVE MUSEUM PROJECT

A program focused on learning and teaching in community sites has been awarded Australian Learning and Teaching Council funding.

Long term educator in the School of Education and director of Gallery Sunshine Everywhere, Professor Maureen Ryan, will lead the project aimed at engaging humanities and education students in experiential learning.

Professor Ryan said as part of their work in the project students learn about collecting, collating and curating material to share with the broader community.

“For example, this year students have been involved in interview based projects which have culminated in digital stories launched at the Immigration Museum and in a text and photographic based exhibition at the Granary Cafe in Sunshine,” Professor Ryan said.

She said the project came out of previous work Dr Effy George, from the School of Pathways and Transition, and Karen Charman, formerly of VU and now at Deakin University, in recent years with TAFE and Higher Education students, the Immigration Museum and Flagstaff Hill Maritime Museum in Warrnambool.

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