

The School of Biological Sciences Newsletter

March /April 2004

Welcome to the March/April/early May edition of the School Newsletter. The first quarter of the year has been an exciting and rewarding one for us. The School can be justly proud of the stature of the candidates who were interviewed for the new Chair, and I can now tell you that the Chair Appointments Committee met this week and has approved the recommendation of the Selection Committee. We can now start negotiations, but it will be some time till there is a formal announcement. The appointment of the new Professor (and next Head of School) is an ideal opportunity for the School as a whole to look forward and focus on where we want to go. In this we should be looking at our strengths and accomplishments; while it is necessary also to consider weaknesses when planning for the future, we are often too concerned with discussion of our shortcomings and the difficulty of change. Let's concentrate on the "opportunity" side of this key period in the School's history!

While we are fortunate in being able to look forward to new vigor with the incoming Chair, we will also be saying a sad farewell to two valued members of staff with the departure of Sue Franklin and Simon Hudson. I am sure that the whole School will join with me in wishing Sue and Simon all the best in their future endeavours, and in thanking them for their dedication to teaching and learning in all aspects of our curriculum.

I am delighted to be able to announce that we are finally almost ready to submit a Development Application to Gosford Council for the long awaited redevelopment of Warrah. It should go in about the end of May. If all goes smoothly after that, the project could be complete by the middle of 2005. Dr Kate (Fairley) Grenot, a graduate of the School, has very generously offered to help us raise funds for the buildings, and with her help and the support of other users across the University, we will attempt to fund the entire project - i.e. the new sleeping accommodation AND the redevelopment of the main building. If we cannot do so, we will revert to the original plan of increasing the accommodation so that we can take groups of up to 50 to Warrah, and deferring the work on the main building to a later stage. Our progress and success to date would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of our architect, Lindsay Johnston and the new project manager from FMO, Bruce Litchfield.

Roz Hinde

Administration Notices

Please do not forget to check the School's Administration pages on the website for all the latest committee and School Board meeting minutes. The pages can be found at the following link <http://www.bio.usyd.edu.au/SOBS/ADMIN/sobs.html>

Ian Hume visits the Frozen North Ian Hume will be at the University of Alaska,

Fairbanks in April/May as the 20th Irving-Scholander Lecturer in Environmental Physiology. He will deliver a public lecture on "Conserving Australian marsupials from knowledge of their energy and water requirements", a seminar to the Graduate School on "Responses of the gastrointestinal tract to the cold", and will consult with staff and graduate students, visit research stations near Fairbanks and on the North Slope, and generally have a good time.

Long Term ecological study site preserved as major Conservation site

Ethabuka has recently been purchased by the Australian Bush Heritage, and I believe ABH based their decision primarily on Chris' tireless work in the Simpson since 1989. No mean feat, Ethabuka is now going to become a major conservation reserve.

Chin Liang Beh

On the move: how do scout honey bees guide a swarm of ignorant bees?

Madeleine Beekman has been awarded an Australian Academy of Sciences award to investigate how scout honey bees guide ignorant bees. The summary of the project is; "The organized movement of a swarm of honey bees towards its new home is a perplexing phenomenon because only a small number of scout bees know the direction in which the swarm has to move. How do the scouts transfer directional information to the uninformed bees? This project aims at obtaining fundamental data on the movements of honeybee swarms. These data will form the basis of individual-based models that describe swarm movement and aim at understanding how a small group of scouts can guide a swarm of ignorant bees."

Madeleine will use the award to spend time at Cornell University (Ithaca, NY) to collaborate with Prof. Tom Seeley (and escape the winter in Sydney).

Notes from the College Director of Teaching and Learning

I have recently been appointed as the College of Sciences and Technology Director of Teaching and Learning and thus seconded from the School of Biological Sciences for 12 months. My functions are to look at T&L issues from a strategic point of view and help develop the College T&L plans for the next two years (2004-5), next five years and ten years. This is in line with the PVCs current moves to develop ongoing Strategic Plans for all aspects of College activities.

At the same time as my secondment started the University began putting into place a mechanism to move the project funded WebCT work of the University into core business. This has resulted in a management process that will see a Director of ICT in T&L for every college and Associate Deans ICT in T&L appointed from the faculties to help the Director work on the strategies to implement the best ICT in T&L across the College. Yes, you've guessed it, I am also that Director, and I view the ICT work as part of my

broader teaching brief for the College. The Associate Deans have yet to be appointed by the PVC College.

The University move to make ICT in T&L core business includes the appointment of a project manager and three developers to work for the College for two thirds of each year. The remaining four months each year will be used to bring "live" the units of study for semester 1 and semester 2. The appointment of these people will enable the College to prioritise its ICT needs and to set milestones for development. More of this later.

I am currently involved in working with all the faculties to identify where they perceive they are going with respect to T&L developments and will share some of this with you at a later date. Strategic developments that we are looking at include: · Benchmarking projects · Development of image banks and learning object repositories (with the Library) · E-publishing (with the Library) · Scholarship in teaching · Development of integrated teaching programs

Mary Peat April 2004

First Year Biology on the Orange campus of the University of Sydney. In 2003 First Year Biology started teaching Concepts in Biology and Human Biology on the Orange campus to approximately 40 students. These students are mainly Pharmacy students but some Science, Liberal Studies and Arts students also take Biology. For this to happen a new teaching laboratory/preparation area/computer lab was designed and built ([see enclosed photos](#)) in late 2002/early 2003 - as usual with these sorts of things the lab came "on stream" about 1 week into semester 1!!!. A huge amount of work was done on this by Claudio Muhrad. Two new staff members have been employed, [Carol Sheldrake](#) as the Biology lecturer and Jenny Cox as the Technical Officer. Carol delivers all the lectures and practicals for both semester 1 and semester 2 biology units. Jenny position is shared by Biology and Chemistry in order to set up for classes in first year units of study from each School.

In 2004 we also commenced teaching 20 students in the Nursing Degree Programs but this time in "block" mode ie in short, week long bursts of activity. This required some restructuring of the Concepts in Biology and Human Biology units of study to fit the new time frame. Currently the Nursing students are taught by Jill Fisher and Chin Liang Beh at the Orange campus.

Hopefully the student numbers at the Orange campus will continue to increase. This year we are starting to run High School Liaison activities out there as well eg we have just run the Gifted and Talented Biology day in the Easter break. *Sue Franklin*

Submissions for May/June Newsletter

Please send submissions to Mark Ahern electronically at the following email address, mahern@bio.usyd.edu.au

If you include images please keep the file sizes to a minimum.