New library sees the light

By Lindy Brophy

Light pours in through the entrance to UWA’s newest library, where, two years ago, a torrent of mud poured in, wrecking the library and ruining more than 11,000 books.

The new source of natural light is one of the unimagined benefits of the traumatic events of March 2010 when the hailstorm resulted in a flood of water, mud and debris smashing through the plate glass windows of the Education Fine Arts and Architecture library on the Nedlands campus.

Gina Sjepcevich, the library’s associate manager, said the redesign and refurbishment of the library had resulted in many improvements. “The first is this wonderful natural light, which was always missing from the basement library. We also have twice the number of computers for the students, and an additional group study room. All the group study rooms have multimedia equipment including electronic whiteboards and webcams. We have a new teaching space with double the capacity of the old one and a functional and attractive interior,” she said.

“It was an unexpected opportunity to update our technology and have a critical look at the development, management and use of our collections.”

The new library was opened exactly two years (all but one day) after the devastating storm, and memories of that night, the next few days and the spirit of UWA staff were still fresh among guests at the opening.

On the night after the storm, Facilities Management plumber Derek Smith spent all night manning the pump that was sucking water out of the library. Information Services staff donned rubber boots and sloshed around in the mud, salvaging as many books as they could.

Volunteer Information Services staff spent many hours scanning the barcodes of the rescued books.

“Everything had to be done quickly before mould set in,” Ms Sjepcevich said. “We had professional removalists packing books into huge cages and lifting them out with cranes. By the end of the week, they were wearing respirators – it was getting pretty smelly down here.”

The floodwater rose to 41cm and left behind soil, tree branches and 11,711 ruined books – about 15 per cent of the collection.

More than 53,000 books and journals were salvaged and moved to the Reid Library on the main campus where, fortuitously, the former home of the geology and map collections was available, that section having just moved into the new science library.

“We operated from the Reid Library for the next two years. I think it was difficult continued on page 2
for students not having their Library on the Nedlands site. Some academics said the students’ writing was affected,” Ms Sjepcevich said. “But the place has been chock-a-block since we reopened on February 23 and we have had great feedback from staff and students.”

After the storm, Information Services staff worked swiftly to do everything they could for the students. Reserve and Hold items were the first items salvaged after the flood and were made available in the Reid Library straight away. Lost Reserve and Hold items were ordered the day after the storm and began arriving less than a week later.

Although the books had been moved, an after-hours return chute was made available on the Nedlands campus and a specialist librarian spent one day a week at the Nedlands campus in the Faculties of Education and Architecture, Landscape and Visual Arts, helping students with their queries.

Two weeks after the storm, the books had been moved, dried, scanned and reshelved.

“But the forensic accounting, to arrive at the value of the lost collection for insurance purposes, took a long time,” Ms Sjepcevich said.

A graduate of the Faculty of ALVA, Honey Hiranandani, worked on the design of the new library. And art work by a PhD student from the Faculty, Craig McCormack, graces the walls.

The images are from his Honours project, 100YSS, the one hundred year starship.

The new library was officially opened by the Vice-Chancellor Professor Paul Johnson, the Minister for Education, Elizabeth Constable, and the University Librarian and Director of Information Management, Dr Mary Davies.

Vice-Chancellery into double figures

The University’s 10th full-time Vice-Chancellor, Professor Paul Johnson, was officially welcomed to UWA at a formal ceremony in Winthrop Hall.

After speeches by the Chancellor, Dr Michael Chaney, and the Guild President, Matthew Mckenzie, Professor Johnson took off his Oxford academic gown and was ‘robed’ in the official gown of the UWA Vice-Chancellor.

He said it was a great honour and a privilege to be given the opportunity to lead such a great institution.

“The people, the graduates, the ideas that have come out of UWA have had a transformative effect, not only in Western Australia, but throughout the world,” he said.

“Even as we approach our 100th year, we, like all universities, have a responsibility to be contentious, to challenge the status quo, because tomorrow could be so much better than today.”

Professor Johnson and Dr Chaney both spoke about philanthropy and its importance in the face of diminishing government funding for universities.

Matthew Mckenzie said he felt a kinship with the Vice-Chancellor as they were both new to their UWA roles, and attended their first Senate meeting together. “I was inspired by what a handle Professor Johnson already had on the workings of the University,” he said.

In the front row of Winthrop Hall watching the ceremony were Professor Johnson’s wife Susannah and his children Oriana and Orlando. Also in the audience were former Vice-Chancellors, Emeritus Professor Alan Robson and Emeritus Professor Robert Street, Vice-Chancellors of Curtin and Edith Cowan Universities, Professor Jeanette Hacket and Professor John Finlay-Jones, Government Ministers and representatives.
Music has been credited with many attributes: provoking joy, sorrow, laughter and tears; helping concentration and learning; creating moods and inspiring lofty thoughts.

Can it also help refugee children in the traumatic journey to a new home and life?

Andrea Emberly, honorary research fellow in the School of Music, is aiming to find out. She has a UWA Research Development Award to explore the impact of music on refugee children's lives in Western Australia.

Originally from Canada, Dr Emberly came to UWA to work with Winthrop Professor Jane Davidson on her ARC Discovery project, Communicative human musicality: A cross-cultural study of dance, singing and musical instrument skills in 12-15 year olds. Dr Emberly is an ethnomusicologist (studying the social and cultural aspects of music) and has spent several years in South Africa, with children in the Limpopo province.

She has been working with the archival materials of John Blacking, a renowned ethnomusicologist from the UK, who documented children's music in South Africa in the 1950s. After his death in 1990, his widow bequeathed his personal archival collection to the Callaway Centre Archive at UWA.

“When I came to WA I learned about the detention centres for asylum seekers and I became interested in what happens to the children in these centres,” Dr Emberly said.

“I am building on my research into children's music and I am looking to start work with Iranian and Afghani children who are living in Perth. Some of them might have come through the detention centre system, but not all of them.

“I want to find out whether the children miss the music from their homeland, whether hearing or playing that music would have helped them in the detention centre. I want to look at how they are using music, what they listen to, what they play.

“Does music help children to engage cross-culturally? Are they able to play or sing together with children from other cultures?”

Dr Emberly said that Professor Samina Yasmeen, the Director of UWA's Centre for Muslim States and Societies, had helped her to contact Department of Immigration officials who run the detention centres.

“They seem really happy for me come and work with the children,” she said. “But I don't know if I’ll actually get into a detention centre. Happily, I might not need to, as they have already cut down dramatically the time that children spend in these centres.

“I hope that the children I work with in Perth might reflect on their experiences about being in detention and coming to Australia and how music might have helped them. A lot has been written about the trauma experienced by children in detention and I want to find out how we can help to ease the transition and how children can make use of music to counter the trauma.”

Dr Emberly has enlisted the help of a Masters graduate from the School of Music, Vahidi Eisaei. She came to WA from Iran with her husband, who is an engineer. “Vahidi is helping me to find and get the children together and also helping with any language difficulties,” she said. UWA anthropologist Andrzej Gwizdalski is also assisting with the project.

“I have heard that Afghani children’s songs are fantastic. There is a great tradition of classically-trained musicians in the region, and children's songs include lullabies, learning songs and singing games.

“I will be looking at how music can contribute, with songs like these, to learning language.”

Dr Emberly hopes to win an ARC Discovery or Linkage grant to expand her research, still in its infancy, Australia-wide.
Vice-Chancellor Paul Johnson, 4 of our University.

Chancellor to meet and engage with a new community has provided a valuable opportunity as a newcomer to the position of Vice-Chancellor to be transformative by constantly challenging convention. Even when a university is part of the established structure of society – as any university approaching its centenary inevitably must be – it still has an obligation to be contentious, to challenge the status quo, to be dissatisfied with today, because of the belief and expectation that tomorrow can be so much better.

The opportunity for the taking, and we must work with all parties to try to ensure that our University gains the financial support required to underpin a world-class innovation hub here in Western Australia.

The opportunity, and the challenge, for our society here in Western Australia in 2012 is to find ways of converting immediate economic advantage into long-term prosperity and welfare for all. We have a social and, I believe, a moral responsibility, to provide transformative educational opportunities for the most capable and creative young people in the State. When this University was established in 1911 it was with the explicit objective of ensuring that no capable student would be excluded from tertiary education by reason of their personal financial capacity.

We must again aspire to that goal, and in a period of diminishing public funding we must again turn to philanthropists and business leaders to ensure that talent – the scarcest social resource of all – is not squandered for want of private dollars.

As well as providing educational opportunities for the future, UWA must also be the driver of research and innovation within the State. Our University already accounts for the great majority of competitive research activity, and the majority of scientific publications, produced within Western Australia.

We cannot, however, rest on our laurels. World-class research is costly, and world-class researchers are scarce, and often highly mobile. We face acute competition from leading North American universities that benefit from endowments valued in the tens of billions of dollars, and from leading Asian universities that are receiving massive targeted research funding from their respective governments. In China, Singapore, Hong Kong and Korea governments recognise the enormous potential long-term economic and social benefit of having world-leading research universities on the doorstep.

We certainly have the capacity in Western Australia to do the same, but as yet we lack the consensus across government, industry and society that we should emulate the successful and targeted university research investment that has driven the Californian, Singaporean and Korean economies over past decades.

This is an opportunity for the taking, and we must work with all parties to try to ensure that our University gains the financial support required to underpin a world-class innovation hub here in Western Australia.

The University has been recognised nationally as an Employer of Choice for Women for the 10th year in a row.

UWA is one of 125 organisations around Australia to be recognised by the Federal Government authority which administers the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act (EOWA). The citation was announced by EOWA Director Helen Conway.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Paul Johnson said the University had worked hard over the past two decades to position itself as a national leader in gender equity initiatives and achievements.

“UWA has been leading in gender equity reform over the past 18 years and this will continue,” Professor Johnson said.

“When you improve the workplace for women, you improve it for all staff – positively impacting productivity, staff satisfaction and retention.”

UWA’s Leadership Development For Women program, now in its 19th year, positions women in leadership roles and encourages an organisational culture that welcomes women’s involvement in leadership and decision-making at all levels of the University.

This program is supported by a generous and flexible UWA staff parental leave scheme offering up to 36 weeks’ paid leave for parents, including same-sex couples.

UWA Associate Director of Equity and Diversity Beverley Hill said UWA continued to focus on removing structural barriers that could impede the careers of female staff.

The University had conducted its second full pay equity audit, to establish the pay gap between male and female staff.

“These analyses assist the University to refine the way discretionary payments are awarded to staff, to ensure transparency, consistency and equity,” she said.

“We are also looking more closely at measuring performance, in recognition of the fact that staff with non-traditional career paths often have less opportunity to accrue merit.

We want to be able to better position our staff with part-time, delayed or dual careers so that they can maximise the opportunities available to them to be productive and engaged in the organisation.”
The donation of a kidney is the gift of life as surely as a mother giving birth to a child.

There are 9,000 people on dialysis in Australia, waiting for a kidney donor, with more patients going onto the treatment every year. But there are only between 800 and 900 kidney transplants each year. Thousands of people with kidney failure will die, often after years of living a ‘half-life’, spending hours each day attached to a machine.

The lucky ones, those who receive a kidney from a living donor, will be ‘reborn’, to live 15 years or more of a normal healthy life. (The success rate is slightly lower from donors who have died.)

But what of the selfless donors? What sort of lives do they lead after giving away a vital organ?

“We really don’t know,” said Associate Professor Neil Boudville, a renal specialist at SCGH and researcher in the School of Medicine and Pharmacology.

Professor Boudville and colleagues across the world have been asking the question for the past 10 years. “But it’s hard to get the donors back so we can find out how they’re doing,” he said. “Only about 10 per cent make the effort to get in touch when we put out a call for past donors.

“The ones who turn up may be the well and motivated ones, but we don’t know how the others are. We presume they are well; if we thought there was any significant risk to the health of the donor, we would never take their kidney for someone else. We have relied on the evidence of people who are born with just one kidney, or who have lost one from trauma or cancer, living a normal healthy life.”

But in the first years of this century, doctors started to hear of a few donors who had either died or had to go on to dialysis themselves. So in 2004 while on a fellowship in Canada, Professor Boudville began investigating donors. He and his colleagues have set up 20 collaborative centres around the world.

Recently Dr Boudville, along with partners at Monash University, the University of Alberta and the London Health Sciences Centre, secured a grant for more than $250,000 over the next five years to do what he calls a ‘prospective’ study of kidney donors.

They will measure the health of donors before they give their kidneys away, and keep in close contact with them. “Previously, we would see donors six weeks, then three months after donating a kidney, then we wouldn’t see them again. With this study, they consent to come back for some years afterwards, so we can find out how their lives progress,” he said.

Professor Boudville said most transplanted kidneys were donated by spouses or relatives and most compatibility barriers had now been overcome. “We also have some people who come in and offer a kidney to whoever needs it, without knowing the recipient. They tend to be middle-aged or older people who just feel they want to do something for somebody else.”

These people, along with family member donors, have up to 12 month’s counselling before they can donate a kidney. “There is a very vigorous program to ensure that it is medically appropriate for people to donate, but also to ensure that they are psychologically able to handle what could be a bad outcome. There is always a chance that the patient might die and the donor has to be able to cope with that and not blame him or herself.”

Professor Boudville and his colleagues have found some evidence of slightly raised blood pressure among donors. They hope to gather a lot more information with the new project, with 50 donors in Australia and 300 worldwide.
As astronomers at UWA’s International Centre for Radio Astronomy Research wait anxiously for the imminent decision on the siting of the SKA, two of the centre’s young graduate students are celebrating their individual success.

Jacinta Delhaize and Morag Scrimgeour have been chosen by senior astronomers and physicists as two of the shining stars of the discipline. Both young women are close to completing their PhDs, both supervised by Professor Lister Staveley-Smith, deputy director of ICRAR. Professor Peter Quinn, the director, is co-supervising Morag, along with a third supervisor, Dr Tamara Davis, from the University of Queensland.

Jacinta has been nominated by the Australian Academy of Science to attend the Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting in July. It is a meeting of Nobel Laureates held every year in Germany, and this year focuses on Physics. About 30 Nobel Laureates will speak in the mornings, then the young researchers will take part in smaller discussion groups in the afternoons. "It’s overwhelming to think I’ll be part of it," Jacinta said. “The contacts I will make and the exchange with the other students will be so valuable."

Morag was nominated by Professor Schmidt for a scholarship from bankmecu (Australia’s first customer-owned bank). Professor Schmidt will deliver the annual CSIRO Malcolm McIntosh lecture in Canberra later this week. The scholarship is awarded each year to a student who is considered by the speaker to be outstanding in his or her field of research.

“I know Brian quite well, as he is a collaborator of my UQ supervisor,” said Morag, who came to UWA from Scotland to do her PhD. Her research is related to Professor Schmidt’s discoveries about expansion of the universe. “The accelerated expansion is caused by what is called dark energy,” Morag explained. “It is one of the challenges of physics to understand dark energy.

“We are using a new probe to measure dark energy: the motions of galaxies due to gravity, separated from their motion due to the cosmic expansion. If we can measure that, we can use it to test gravity.”

Morag will give a brief presentation on her PhD project at the lecture in Canberra.

Sarah Murray is a lawyer who is not keen on fighting.

Her research and teaching in UWA’s Law School focuses on ‘less-adversarial justice’ and her commitment to this particular legal practice has won Associate Professor Murray a prestigious prize from Monash University.

She was awarded Monash University’s Vice-Chancellor’s commendation for doctoral thesis excellence when she graduated with her PhD recently.

Professor Murray won the 2011 Mollie Holman Doctoral Medal for her PhD thesis Less-Adversarial Practice and The Constitutional Role of the Judiciary in Australia.

The Mollie Holman Doctoral Medal, awarded since 1998, goes to the doctoral candidate in each faculty of Monash University judged to have presented the best thesis of the year. The medal is named in honour of Professor Mollie Holman, who has made a long and distinguished contribution to Monash University and has been a vigorous champion of postgraduate education.

Professor Murray also works in the areas of public law, institutional change and constitutional law.
A fair way for all to get to university

The students at the heart of the University’s newest equity program are still at school.

There are 45 students from metropolitan and regional WA powering their way through Year 12, fuelled by UWA’s new Fairway program.

It is a support program for the final year of secondary school to provide disadvantaged students with an opportunity to build upon their abilities, improve their academic skills and develop their true potential.

If they successfully complete the Fairway journey and achieve an ATAR (tertiary entrance score) of 70 or above, the destination will be entry to any of the University’s undergraduate three-year degree courses.

“The primary criterion for entry to the program is financial hardship,” said Dr Adam Nicol, Fairway project officer.

“But students are also assessed against criteria such as an unsupportive study environment, excessive family responsibilities, a disrupted migrant or refugee passage to Australia, severely disrupted schooling due to relocation and other difficulties.

“Students who were accepted started the program with a three-day residential camp at St George’s College in January,” Dr Nicol said.

“The students had a great time. I think they really appreciated meeting and making friends with other students who, like them, face considerable obstacles in reaching University.

“They built up peer networks on the camp, learned a lot about the University, were assigned current UWA students as mentors, and completed their first learning module in a continuing study skills program.”

The students continue that program throughout this year, with online learning exercises to increase their skills in critical thinking, research and note-taking, to help them with their school work, as well as building skills for tertiary education.

They must also complete a ‘Fairway Report’, a research assignment on a sustainability issue in their region. “This is due in August, but the students can start submitting their drafts from this month, so they can get help with them,” Dr Nicol said. There is also an online forum so the students can chat with each other, ask each other’s advice and stay in touch until they meet up again during the July holidays.

UWA has paid for a subscription to Your Tutor for every student in the program. This is an online service that provides tutors in different subjects, to assist students with their Year 12 studies.

“We are investigating ways that we can provide further support for the students, many of whom face a unique set of challenges,” said Dr Umneea Khan, project officer for UWA Aspire, who is working with Dr Nicol.

Students from all schools in WA are eligible but UWA has targeted schools in the very successful Aspire project. “Current Fairway students come from schools as far away as Broome and Albany,” Dr Nicol said.

UWA funds for the Fairway program were supplemented by donations from alumni. For the first time last December, the annual mail-out to graduates, asking them to support their alma mater, specified where the donations would be used – to help disadvantaged students to get to University.

“The annual fund mail-out raised $35,319 – the most that has ever been raised in that campaign,” said Dr Judy Skene, Associate Director, Student Services (Student Support Services).

“It means we are able to offer more than we thought we could to these students. At the end of the camp, we gave them all a $200 voucher for Office Works because we knew that some of them were having to work after school just to buy stationery. It’s been great hearing back from them how they are using it and how much they appreciate it.

“One set of twins (there are three sets in the program) put their vouchers together and bought a study desk and a small printer,” she said.

Dr Nicol said they hoped to increase the Fairway program to include 100 students next year.
The word ‘cyclone’ generally stirs feelings of fear and anxiety. It goes with ‘death’ and ‘destruction’.

But UWA academics have found a positive side to tropical cyclones: They are essential to keeping ecosystems alive, and the decline in cyclones off the north-west over the past decade was partly responsible for the Big Dry in south-eastern Australia.

Dr Gavan McGrath, a postdoctoral fellow in the Soil Science group at the School of Earth and Environment, was the lead author on a paper to this effect, which last month was singled out as a research highlight by the prestigious journal Nature.

He and his UWA co-authors, Professor Christoph Hinze (Dr McGrath’s former PhD supervisor), Professor Erik Veneklaas (Plant Biology) and Assistant Professor Rohan Sadler (Agricultural and Resource Economics), found that instead of the long-lasting drought being localised to south-east Australia, the drought in fact spanned the continent. Their research demonstrated that the drought was associated with a decline in cyclone frequency and the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD), an index of sea surface temperatures.

In the negative phase of the IOD, the atmospheric circulation brings moisture from warmer waters off the north-west across the continent in a south-easterly direction. In the positive phase, south-east Australia experiences lower rainfall.

A year ago, the apparent end of the drought in the south-east coincided with a strong La Niña and a strong negative IOD phase.

“We hypothesised that a drought in the south-east may be associated with continent-wide drought, oriented north-west to south-east,” Dr McGrath said.

He and his colleagues (including Professor Hans Lambers) were working on a big ARC linkage grant with the mining company Newcrest Mining Ltd and the Minerals and Energy Research Institute of WA to work out the best way for mining companies to restore landscapes after mining.

“It was a joint effort between Earth and Environment and Plant Biology,” Dr McGrath said. “Mining companies often need to prevent water entering acid-generating rock and they do this by engineering a soil cover to support vegetation which evaporates that water before it gets to the rock. The collaboration between our disciplines, combining research into water flow in soil with plant physiology, is already changing the way rehabilitation and soil cover design is being implemented by the mining industry.

“When we started work out near Newcrest’s Telfer operation, there had been almost no rain for two years. Then Cyclone Laurence went through in 2009 and we saw a dramatic effect on vegetation so we decided to look more closely at the effects of tropical cyclones and measure them. Tropical cyclones also pose a major challenge to soil cover design
because of the sheer volume of rainfall they deliver. To look at how natural ecosystems respond to cyclone occurrence we compared data from satellites measuring changes in gravity of the earth’s surface, which indicates changes in water stored in soil, with measured changes in vegetation over time.

“Some research from the University of New South Wales on the decade-long drought in the south-east showed a strong relationship between sea surface temperatures in the north-west and drought in the south-east,” he said. “And we found a further very strong relationship with tropical cyclones.”

The group’s findings suggest that distinct climatic factors, such as cyclone trends over decades, and changes in ocean circulation, can combine to create a continental-scale drought.

“We may be able to predict continent-wide drought if we can work out when these climate drivers coincide,” Dr McGrath said.

“Furthermore, predicting the occurrence of tropical cyclones may be essential to understanding the impact of climate change on these ecosystems.

“Our findings are of benefit to the mining companies because they can help them to plan their mine closures, so they’re maximising the potential for successful rehabilitation rather than investing at a time when there is no rainfall.”

Professor Hinz said the project was a good example of taking fundamental research and turning it into applicable results for the mining industry.

He cited the quote that has variously been attributed to Kurt Lewin, James Clerk Maxwell and even Einstein: ‘There is nothing more practical than a good theory.’

The original paper was published in Geophysical Research Letters. Read it at dx.doi.org/10.1029/2011GL050263

Cyclone Yasi devastated banana plantations in Queensland last year

Cyclones wreak havoc but are essential for our ecosystem
Former Western Australian Premier Dr Geoff Gallop is one of four community leaders who were recognised during the autumn graduation season.

Dr Gallop was awarded an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters on 20 March. He was WA Premier from 2001 to 2006. He took up the position of Professor and Director of the Graduate School of Government at Sydney University, and in 2008 became a member of the Board of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission.

Emeritus Professor Dennis Haskell was awarded an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters at the first ceremony on 13 March. A leading poet, literary critic and editor, Professor Haskell has had a wide influence on Australian literary life and is currently Chair of the Australia Council Literature Board. He taught in UWA’s School of English and Cultural Studies for more than 25 years, before retiring at the end of last year.

An Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters went to biochemist, academic, entrepreneur and educator Dr Annie Duncan to recognise her work in vocational education and training, health, women’s issues, science communication and scientific research. Dr Duncan became CEO of Scitech in 1995 and was made Director of the National Science and Technology Museum in Canberra in 1999.

Mark Barnaba, Chairman of Macquarie Bank WA, was awarded an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Commerce. Mr Barnaba was Chairman of the West Coast Eagles until 2010. Within the University, he serves as an Adjunct Professor in Investment Banking and Finance, is Chairman of the UWA Business School Board and a member of UWA’s In the Zone editorial committee.

A record number of 3,471 graduands will have received their degrees over the 10 ceremonies, spread over the three week season.

A total of 78 PhDs and 11 professional doctorates will have been bestowed. The graduation season ends this week.

This century’s trend continued with the Bachelor of Commerce once again being the single degree awarded to the most graduands – 487 this season.

But 646 graduands received science degrees in different disciplines including psychology, exercise science, microbiology, neuroscience, analytical chemistry, marine biology, restoration ecology and urban and regional planning.

Emeritus Professor David Lindsay loathes bad language.

It’s not the occasional swear word that upsets the agricultural scientist but the misuse of words and the use of dull and boring words in uncreative and repetitive writing.

And it seems that the judges of the best academic writing in the English-speaking world agree with him. Professor Lindsay’s book, Scientific Writing = Thinking in Words has recently been named one of the American Libraries Association’s outstanding academic titles for 2011.

The ALA is a not-for-profit organisation that promotes libraries and library education internationally. It is the oldest and biggest library association in the world, with more than 62,000 members. Every year it reviews about 7,000 academic titles in its magazine, Choice.

And in January each year, it publishes its list of the top 10 per cent, which this year included Professor Lindsay’s latest publication, which also made it into the top 50 science titles.

Since retiring as head of the animal science group at UWA in 1999, Professor Lindsay has been running workshops on scientific writing. After publishing his book in both English and French last year, he has returned to the lecture theatre, teaching scientific writing to first years in the new Bachelor of Science course.

“Writing is the same the world over, regardless of the language,” he told guests at the launch of Scientific Writing = Thinking in Words, last year. “The most important part is getting the logic of things right.”

Just as he retired, 12 years ago, Professor Lindsay wrote a column for The Last Word in UWAnews, in which he made clear his distaste of flowery, meaningless and overused words and language. “Is the sea of words diluting our real purpose and drowning our real achievements?” he wrote.

His communication skills are still much in demand by scientists, and will probably remain so after his book made it into the ALA’s top 50 science titles.

In awarding its Outstanding Academic Titles, the ALA looks at overall excellence in presentation and scholarship; importance relative to other literature in the field; originality or uniqueness of treatment; value to undergraduate students; and importance in building undergraduate library collections.
The Geophysics group at UWA recently blasted away the opposition at an international conference in Brisbane.

Two of the five major awards for best papers went to UWA, which was the only university to win any prizes.

Jeff Shragge, Assistant Professor in the Centre for Petroleum Geoscience and CO₂ Sequestration, won the Best Petroleum Geophysics Paper and Masters student Wendy Young was awarded Best Student Geophysics Paper at the Australian Society of Exploration Geophysicists’ conference.

Professor Shragge works in the Centre with Winthrop Professor David Lumley on time-lapse imaging, one of the hottest fields of research in the petroleum industry.

Professor Lumley was a co-author on both papers.

His winning paper was on transformations applied to data in complex situations before imaging. “When you are working in a complex area like the North West Shelf, you need to work out mathematically how to improve a seismic image before you capture it,” he said.

His work is potentially applicable to petroleum exploration in the north west.

The conference was Wendy Young’s first time presenting at an international meeting and the Centre is delighted with her success.

“My research focuses on repeatedly measuring the Earth’s gravitational field over time to detect dynamic changes in the Earth’s subsurface caused by gas production or CO₂ sequestration,” Wendy explained. “This is important to optimise the amount of gas recovered or to monitor the storage of CO₂ in subsurface reservoirs,” she said.

She works as a geophysicist at Chevron while completing her Masters part-time, under the supervision of Professor Lumley.

The conference was attended by about 1,000 delegates.

### How Perth was ‘two hours from disaster’

Perth people don’t know how close they came to a major flood calamity just over a year ago.

Winthrop Professor Chari Pattiaratchi said the city was lucky to escape disaster.

“Perth came very close – within two hours – of being flooded by Cyclone Bianca,” Professor Pattiaratchi said at a forum on marine disasters.

“The whole of the foreshore and the (Esplanade) train station would have all been flooded.”

Professor Pattiaratchi, from UWA’s Oceans Institute and School of Environmental Systems Engineering, was speaking at a public lecture, Responding to Marine Disasters.

He explained that if Bianca had crossed the coast near Perth in January last year, as it had been expected to do, it was set to create a record flood level of up to 2.3 metres – about 30cm higher than Perth’s highest recorded flood level of 1.98 metres.

“But the cyclone dissipated two to three hours before it hit land,” he said.

Professor Pattiaratchi, who chairs the numerical modelling working group of the Indian Ocean tsunami warning system, also told his audience of the advances made in tsunami warning systems in recent years.

Responding to Marine Disasters was part of the Oceans Solutions Dialogue series. The Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 claimed thousands of lives and last year the world watched in horror as another major tsunami wrought destruction in Japan. Even a relatively minor incident such as the breakup of the MV Tycoon at Christmas Island earlier this year had disastrous results for the local community.

The Dialogue is looking at the role of science in responding to marine disasters such as shipping catastrophes, oil spills, tsunami and cyclones, to help guide society through these calamities to the solutions.

The lecture featured two other speakers: Dr Larry Madin, of Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in the US, spoke on the lessons learnt from the shocking Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

And renowned sea-level rise expert Professor Robert Nicholls, from the University of Southampton, UK, spoke on the role of science in managing the risks of coastal flooding.

It was organised by UWA Oceans Institute and the Institute of Advanced Studies, with the support of Shell Australia and the WA Department of Fisheries.
Undergraduate research is the latest trend in tertiary education and UWA is blazing a trail, not only on campus, but across the world.

Professor Sally Sandover, academic director of the University’s Educational Strategies Office, and Assistant Professor Lee Partridge from the Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, are lining up nine undergraduate students to take part in a global research project with three other universities in the Matariki network.

Queens in Canada, Durham in the UK and Otago in New Zealand are joining with UWA to provide a unique and exciting opportunity for second or third year undergraduate students to connect with their counterparts overseas, to learn research skills, to complete a research project on teaching and learning and to embed the experience in the latest technology.

The four universities’ access grid along with computer technology, will be used for the students to meet, talk and exchange ideas in real time.

The project comes out of ULTRIS, UWA’s Undergraduate Learning and Teaching Research Internship Scheme, set up in 2009 and run by Professor Sandover and Professor Partridge.

“Jane Long (Pro Vice-Chancellor Education) spoke about ULTRIS at a Matariki meeting and the other universities were very interested,” Professor Sandover said.

“Most undergraduate research worldwide is discipline-specific. This project, like ULTRIS and the new BPhil undergraduate research training program, will focus on teaching and learning topics. This first year the theme is internationalisation, which is of strategic importance to all four universities,” she said.

One student from each faculty and the School of Indigenous Studies will be chosen for an internship during second semester, starting with research skills workshops during the July break.

“It’s actually very difficult to get all four sites online together, because of time differences, so mostly UWA students will work with Durham students, and Queens students with Otago students. But we have scheduled regular sessions when all four sites can get together.”

These are likely to be scheduled for 6pm Perth time, which is 6am in Kingston, Ontario (Queens), 11am in Durham and 11pm in Otago.

The research conducted by the students is not for credit but they will be provided with a scholarship so they can complete the internship as an alternative to outside employment.

The program will help the students to develop transferable research skills and provide an insight into and basic preparation for postgraduate research and how this is conducted in different institutions. It is hoped their results will be used to inform policy and practice in the participating universities.

“It is clear from our experience with ULTRIS that the students will certainly benefit, but the program is also of real value to the University,” Professor Sandover said. “We found the students involved in teaching and learning research with ULTRIS became really engaged with university life and the academic community. Almost all of them have gone on to work more on teaching and learning or research issues.”

ULTRIS students displayed improved communication skills, both verbal and written, enhanced confidence and a stronger sense of belonging to their institution.

“New challenges face this international project. Will the outcomes be as good for the larger, globally-dispersed cohort? We hope so.”

An information session for students will be held on 17 April. Please go to teachingandlearning.uwa.edu.au/teaching/management-framework/eso/undergraduate-research/murn/uwa-murn

(The Matariki Network is a group of seven universities, of similar size, all research-intensive and interested in the student experience.)
Last month’s Bike Breakfast was positive proof that more staff and students are cycling to the University.

Organisers said more than 350 people attended the breakfast at the University Club and they had run out of food when some turned up after 9am.

Ruth Balding, UWA’s transport co-ordinator in the office of Sustainable Development (Facilities Management) said there was a growing demand for showers for commuter cyclists.

“Facilities Management is working on this and we hope to provide showers and secure bike storage at four locations on the Crawley and Nedlands campuses by next year,” she said.

“We have noticed that the students this year are very aware of security and we have had a lot of requests for locked bike cages, not just bike racks, so we are looking at providing those along with showers for cyclists.”

**RESEARCH GRANTS**

- **Grants Awarded Between 3/03/2012 and 17/03/2012**

**FOUND ANIMALS FOUNDATION**

Dr Megan Lloyd, Dr Lee Smith, Dr Alec Redwood, Winthrop Professor Geoffrey Shellam, Biomedical, Biomolecular and Chemical Sciences (School of); “Contraception using recombinant mouse cytomegalovirus as a vaccine vector: Proof of concept study in rats.”— $187,880 (2012)

**MEDICAL AND HEALTH RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE FUND**

Dr Stuart Hodgetts, Anatomy and Human Biology (School of)— $16,529 (2012)

Winthrop Professor Karl Miller, Mechanical and Chemical Engineering (School of)— $13,667 (2012)

Winthrop Professor Alan Harvey, Anatomy and Human Biology (School of)— $13,099 (2012)

Professor Wallace Langdon, Pathology and Laboratory Medicine (School of)— $34,584 (2012)

Associate Professor Livia Hool, Biomedical, Biomolecular and Chemical Sciences (School of)— $14,604 (2012)

Winthrop Professor Peter Le Souef, Paediatrics and Child Health (School of)— $30,467 (2012)

Associate Professor Peter Richmond, Paediatrics and Child Health (School of)— $28,366 (2012)

Professor Susan Prescott, Paediatrics and Child Health (School of)— $34,091 (2012)

Professor David Smith, Dr Peter Pivonka, Computer Science and Software Engineering (School of)— $24,678 (2012)

Professor Cashel Holman, Population Health (School of)— $39,779 (2012)

Winthrop Professor David Lloyd, Sport Science, Exercise and Health (School of)— $12,973 (2012)

Professor Ian Lawrence, Medicine and Pharmacology (School of)— $11,629 (2012)

Winthrop Professor Sarah Dunlop, Animal Biology (School of)— $16,051 (2012)

Winthrop Professor Sandra Thompson, Primary, Aboriginal and
Rural Health Care (School of)— $48,397 (2012)
Winthrop Professor Timothy Davis, Medicine and Pharmacology (School of)— $60,549 (2012)
Winthrop Professor Brendan Waddell, Anatomy and Human Biology (School of)— $24,623 (2012)
Winthrop Professor David Sampson, Biological, Biomolecular and Chemical Sciences (School of)— $31,437 (2012)
Winthrop Professor Lawrence Abraham, Biomedical, Biomolecular and Chemical Sciences (School of)— $18,360 (2012)
Winthrop Professor Sergio Starkstein, Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences (School of)— $20,207 (2012)
Winthrop Professor Bruce Robinson, Medicine and Pharmacology (School of)— $94,453 (2012)
Professor David Atkinson, Primary, Aboriginal and Rural Health Care (School of)— $13,438 (2012)
Professor Oren Yoffe, Biomedical, Biomolecular and Chemical Sciences (School of)— $11,417 (2012)
Winthrop Professor Geoffrey Shellam, Biomedical, Biomolecular and Chemical Sciences (School of)— $28,010 (2012)

Professor David Preen, Population Health (School of)— $19,726 (2012)
Winthrop Professor Jonathan Emery, Primary, Aboriginal and Rural Health Care (School of)— $26,289 (2012)
Professor David Bruce, Medicine and Pharmacology (School of)— $54,716 (2012)
Assistant Professor Peter Franklin, Population Health (School of)— $12,032 (2012)
Professor Anna Nowak, Medicine and Pharmacology (School of)— $21,607 (2012)
Clinical Professor Arthur Musk, Population Health (School of)— $49,098 (2012)
Professor Peter Henry, Medicine and Pharmacology (School of)— $11,715 (2012)
Winthrop Professor Ming Zheng, Surgery (School of)— $17,097 (2012)
Associate Professor Christopher Beer, Medicine and Pharmacology (School of)— $14,508 (2012)
Professor Peter Barrett, Winthrop Professor Gerald Watts, Medicine and Pharmacology (School of)— $38,418 (2012)
Dr Dick Chan, Medicine and Pharmacology (School of)— $13,453 (2012)
Winthrop Professor Osvaldo Almeida, Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences (School of)— $57,922 (2012)
Professor Paul Atwood, Biomedical, Biomolecular and Chemical Sciences (School of)— $13,438 (2012)

Winthrop Professor Gary Hulse, Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences (School of)— $12,517 (2012)
Emeritus Professor Charles Oxnard, Forensic Science (Centre for), Anatomy and Human Biology (School of)— $13,800 (2012)
Professor Gillian Rhodes, Psychology (School of)— $19,861 (2012)
Professor Anne Barden, Medicine and Pharmacology (School of)— $12,065 (2012)
Emeritus Professor Lawrence Beilin, Medicine and Pharmacology (School of)— $16,524 (2012)
Professor Trevor Mori, Medicine and Pharmacology (School of)— $40,214 (2012)
Professor Richard Prince, Medicine and Pharmacology (School of)— $32,242 (2012)
Professor Jonathan Hodgson, Medicine and Pharmacology (School of)— $20,475 (2012)
Winthrop Professor David Badcock, Psychology (School of)— $13,450 (2012)
Professor Kevin Croft, Medicine and Pharmacology (School of)— $25,315 (2012)
Professor Patricia Price, Pathology and Laboratory Medicine (School of)— $11,162 (2012)
Winthrop Professor Michael Stacey, Surgery (School of)— $25,089 (2012)
Winthrop Professor Jiakun Xu, Pathology and Laboratory Medicine (School of)— $31,932 (2012)
Winthrop Professor Matthew Knulman, Population Health (School of)— $54,716 (2012)
Winthrop Professor Geoffrey Stewart, Biomedical, Biomolecular and Chemical Sciences (School of)— $17,222 (2012)
Dr Martin Ebert, Physics (School of)— $17,485 (2012)
Professor Thomas Riley, Biomedical, Biomolecular and Chemical Sciences (School of)— $15,735 (2012)
Associate Professor Manfred Behnke, Biomedical, Biomolecular and Chemical Sciences (School of)— $11,417 (2012)
Winthrop Professor Assen Jafari, Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences (School of)— $37,463 (2012)
Assistant Professor Daniela Ugliati, Biomedical, Biomolecular and Chemical Sciences (School of)— $13,681 (2012)
Professor Deborah Trinder, Medicine and Pharmacology (School of)— $22,756 (2012)
Professor Miranda Grounds, Anatomy and Human Biology (School of)— $37,573 (2012)
Winthrop Professor Martyn French, Pathology and Laboratory Medicine (School of)— $22,784 (2012)
Associate Professor Tom Briffa, Population Health (School of)— $16,385 (2012)
Professor Associate Charlene Kahler, Biomedical, Biomolecular and Chemical Sciences (School of)— $13,193 (2012)
Professor Charles Bond, Biomedical, Biomolecular and Chemical Sciences (School of)— $11,509 (2012)

Winthrop Professor Colin Raston, Biomedical, Biomolecular and Chemical Sciences (School of)— $15,979 (2012)
Dr Peter Noble, Women’s and Infants’ Health (School of)— $14,321 (2012)

MURDOCH UNIVERSITY EX GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY EX NATIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION RESEARCH
Professor Peter Davies, Associate Professor Barbara Cook, Assistant Professor Peter Speldewinde, Assistant Professor Paul Close, Natural Resource Management (Centre of Excellence): ‘Adapting to Climate Change – A Risk Assessment and Decision Framework for Managing an Aquatic Dependent Ecosystems with Declining Water Levels’— $53,536 (2012)

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH PROGRAM NERP
Professor Jessica Meinewegg
Winthrop Professor David Pannell, Professor Gary Kendrick, Agricultural and Resource Economics (School of), Animal Biology (School of), Plant Biology (School of), Marine Futures (Centre for), UWA Oceans Institute: ‘Marine Biodiversity Hub’— $851,180 (2012-14)

US DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE EX CSIRO SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE FLAGSHIP CLUSTER
Associate Professor Philip Vercoe, Animal Biology (School of): ‘Policy (Measuring and managing methane emissions from livestock from lab to landscape)’— $270,000 (2012-14)

UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES EX NHMRC PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS
Professor Vera Morgan, Assistant Professor Maxine Croft, Professor Marie-Paul Austin, Professor Elizabeth Sullivan, Dr Nicole Hight, Catherine Mihalopoulos, Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences (School of): ‘The Australian Perinatal Mental Health Reforms – Using Population Data to Evaluate their Impact on Service Utilisation and Related Cost Effectiveness’— $234,801 (2012-14)

UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA EX DEEWR EDUCATION INVESTMENT FUND EIF
Winthrop Professor Charitha Pattiaratchi, Environmental Systems Engineering (School of): ‘IMOS – West Australian Integrated Marine Observing System (Gliders)’— $1,344,000 (2012-13)

WA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Associate Professor Rhonda Clifford, Medicine and Pharmacology (School of): ‘Identification of At Risk Asthma Patients in Primary Care’— $101,000 (2012-13)

WA HEALTH PROMOTION FOUNDATION HEALTHWAY
Winthrop Professor Sandra Thompson, Dr Fiona Nichols, Dr Sarah Prout, Associate Professor Dawn Bessarab, Assistant Professor Janice Hall, Charmaine Green, Primary, Aboriginal and Rural Health Care (School of), Curtin University of Technology: ‘More Than Talk – An

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The University of Western Australia
Aboriginal Non Aboriginal Partnership for Action—$728,751 (2012-16)

**WATER CORPORATION WA**
Rajendra Kurup, Dr Neil Coles, Environmental Systems Engineering (School of), Ecosystems and Water (APRA Centre for): Application of Moringa Oleifera Seed Extract as a Coagulation Agent for Water Industry Applications—$14,000 (2012)

**NEW STAFF**
18 February to 21 March 2012
Samantha Andrews, Administrative Assistant, International Centre
Eleni Avard, Graduate Research Assistant, Psychology
Lewis Bennett, Assistant (General), Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
Michael Burley, Research Assistant, Pathology and Laboratory Medicine
Dr Susan Caddy, Assistant Professor, Population Health
Jane Chadburn, Graduate Research Assistant, Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences
Riti Chetti, Lecturer, Population Health
Geoffrey Coates, Numeracy Skills Adviser, Student Services
Lisa Cryer, Administrative Assistant, UWA Business School
Peter Elford, Research Development Advisor, Research Services
Radhika Ellies, Lecturer, Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences
Lynelle Ellis, Nursing Officer, Student Services
Travis Endersby, Assistant, Reception, Vice-Centre of Excellence for Plant Sciences
Angela Lindley, Director, Information Services
Dawn McLoughlin, Manager, Vice-Chancellery
Sue Lyn Lim, Assistant, Oral Health Centre of WA
Svetlana Lane, Dental Clinic Assistant, Oral Health Centre of WA
Khiu Hung Lee, Administrative Assistant, Oral Health Centre of WA
Sue Lyn Lim, Communications Manager, Vice-Chancellery
Angela Lindsey, Administrative Assistant, Medicine and Pharmacology
Simon Lockwood, Accountant, Facilities Management — Administration
Lyn Leeng Loh, Research Assistant, Pathology and Laboratory Medicine
Michael Sâm, Finance Officer, Financial Services
Lee Mitten, Laboratory Coordinator, Physics
Jingxin Mo, Research Officer, Medicine and Pharmacology
Bernadette Muir, Senior Research Nurse, Medicine and Pharmacology
Rupa Nair, Faculty Administrative Assistant, Life and Physical Sciences
Kym Nicholas, Administrative Assistant, UWA Business School
Goossens Patras, Project Officer, Student Services
Michelle Pederson, Dental Clinic Assistant, Oral Health Centre of WA
Research Assistant Professor Cassandra Philippou, Research Assistant Professor, Social and Cultural Studies
Habidah Shah, Job Controller, Facilities Management — Administration
Assistant Professor Amy Sharma, Research Associate, Physics
Dr Dino Spagnoli, Assistant Professor, School of Chemistry and Biochemistry
Dr Nicholas Taylor, Research Assistant Professor, Social and Cultural Studies
Kim Thompson, Lecturer, Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences
Assistant Professor Tijana Vujosevic, Assistant Professor, Architecture, Landscape and Visual Arts
Iain Walker, Service Desk Manager, Information Services
Imelda Western, Dental Clinic Assistant, Oral Health Centre of WA
Vicki-Louise White, Administrative Officer, Vice-Chancellery
Janine Wickett, Lecturer, Population Health

**CLASSIFIEDS**

**TO LET**
**SHELLEY:** House to rent $600 – would suit sabbatical visitor with family. July – Dec 2012. Fully furnished, 3-4 bedrooms, pool, air-conditioned, close to shops, primary school, Rossmoyne HS district. House is in a quiet, friendly cul-de-sac and is a short walk to river, playgrounds, picnic areas, bike path and public transport. Contact Julie 6488 1786 or julie.plummer@uwa.edu.au

**QUINDALUP:** A charming, recently renovated, fully self-contained redbrick cottage only 400m from beautiful Geographe Bay and 2km from Dunsborough township. Located at the end of a private road, this cottage offers privacy and security, a lovely natural vista out over the Water Inlet Reserve, and is a great cottage for all seasons. Please go to quindalup.net.au for further information.

**PARIS:** Interested in staying in a lovely apartment on an island in the Seine? Choose between seven apartments in inner city Paris for holiday or longer term accommodation – Île de la Cite, Île St Louis, Montmartre, Le Marais, Nation, Unesco-Pasteur. Contact Carlotta for arrangements: carlotta@beenparis.com

**WANTED**

**WORK:** Reliable and trustworthy graduate available for work. Experienced gardener (labour only) interested in raking, weeding, trimming; painting of patio, miscellaneous maintenance work and house cleaning. Also available for professional work like financial accounting tutoring at University level, contract accounting work, company secretary, board of directors work, including audit committee. Contact Susan: sing1963@gmail.com or 0416 171 217.

**HOUSE WANTED:** NZ family of 4 are coming to UWA for a sabbatical 13 August 2012 – 13 January 2013. We are wanting a house to rent or sit furnished (or unfurnished) for this time period. House would need to be child-friendly and have 2 or more bedrooms. Please contact Paul Kenyon P.Kenyon@massey.ac.nz

**NOTICE**

**FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY**

*A Tale of Two Theatres:*

The impacts of the intense rivalry between two ‘Royal’ theatres of London on the 1774 oratorio season

By Margaret Seares

**Tuesday 10 April 2012**

Refreshments 7.30pm, Presentation at 8.00pm

UWA – Field Library ground floor meeting room (Enter via glass sliding staff door – ground floor – facing car park)

The London Lenten oratorio season of 1774 saw mounting competition between the Theatre Royal Drury Lane and the Theatre Royal Haymarket. It resulted in the introduction of a ‘never before performed oratorio by Mr Handel’, on the one hand, and the abandonment of planned performances and the enlistment of old favourites such as Messiah and Judas Maccabaeus on the other. This paper looks at how the season and, in one case, the music itself was impacted upon by this rivalry.

Emeritus Professor Margaret Seares is a former Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor at The University of Western Australia, having retired from that position at the end of 2008. She holds a PhD from UWA in Music, with her specialty being keyboard music of the 18th century.

Free parking is available via Entrance 1, Car Park No. 3, the glass door is unmanned, please enter via spiral staircase to first floor, then go down the stairs to the ground floor meeting room.

Members: Free.
Non Members: $5 donation.
The getting of wisdom

An edited version of the Occasional Address at the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences graduation ceremony.

Ladies and gentlemen, here you see me and my colleagues up on stage, dressed in these foppish gowns and absurd hats, going through the elaborate rituals of graduation.

You may be wondering what the graduands are thinking; the graduands are thinking, “I had to sit through 600 lectures to earn this degree, and now they’re making me sit through one more before I get the piece of paper!”

At least, graduands, this last lecture will be the shortest.

I was deeply involved in creating the University’s Albany Centre and lit upon the idea of establishing our presence by marching in our gowns in academic procession through the town one Saturday morning. It did bring the shopping to a halt, but, grand as we looked, a young boy asked, “Mum, is this a Harry Potter convention?” Well, we looked the part.

The Harry Potterish gowns we wear derive from the cowls of Medieval monks, who came together to discuss serious ideas and thereby created the first universities. These clothes symbolise something of increasing importance in a media-frenzied era of instant gratifications, in which the only time that exists is the present; in which politicians have to sum up political philosophies in 30 second ‘sound bites’; complex business enterprises are known by their logos, slogans and endlessly repeated advertisements; and heroes are often pop singers who couldn’t sing to save themselves.

Clothes are indeed a massive preoccupation for many people, and thousands of young women particularly aspire to become models rather than university students. Feminism is, I believe, the most important social movement in my lifetime but sometimes I wonder if it ever happened. Models, through a process of verbal inflation, have become “supermodels”; in truth they’re not much more than clotheslines on legs, and they have one of the most boring jobs in the world.

In many respects we live in a society of superficialities, of glossy, empty magazines, of simple messages, of dealing with no more than the obvious, of obsession with the body – a world in which thoughts of “wisdom” never appear. Poetry was once a popular art but few people these days read it, except at those serious moments – at births, weddings, funerals and in In Memoriam notices. What has turned most people away from poetry is what has turned them towards supermodels and an obsession with beautiful bodies: a loss of belief in the idea of the soul.

The idea of the ‘soul’ is a difficult one, as is the idea of ‘wisdom’. Both are nigh on impossible to define, but we all have a sense of what the terms mean. The great philosopher René Descartes thought the pineal gland was ‘the seat of the soul’, and a Dr Duncan McDougall in the early twentieth century claimed to measure weight loss in people as they died, evidence of the soul departing the body. His standing these days is not very high!

Both their arguments were evidence of a scientific culture. Science has given us an enormous amount of knowledge, in a fairly short period of human history, and its value is obvious. However, in our time it seems to many people the only form of knowledge, and it has encouraged a stress on materiality, on the physical. There is no scientific evidence for the existence of the soul, but does that matter? Subjective experience remains mysterious and this is where degrees in the arts come into their own. I am an admirer of the Franco-Bulgarian scholar, Tzvetan Todorov, an advocate of Critical Humanism. Todorov writes:

… a considerable space must be left, next to science, for other forms of comprehension and expression, which allow access to the truth by ways that cannot be made perfectly transparent. Symbol is no less necessary than sign, myth no less than discourse, art no less than science. Humanism … accepts that knowledge sometimes follows paths that elude rational analysis.

Science gives rise to knowledge. Knowledge is essential to wisdom but knowledge is not itself wisdom.

Arts students are involved daily, whether they know it or not, in the search for wisdom. This is the reason Arts has a special place in the university; degrees in the arts, humanities and social sciences are largely non-utilitarian. When your friends from other faculties ask about your degree: “What can you do with that?” or “Do you want fries with that?”?, ask them about their degrees: “How much wisdom did you get with that?”