“You look healthy – will you marry me?”

By Lindy Brophy

The make-up, the aftershave, the expensive haircuts – all designed to make us seem attractive to the opposite sex – could be misleading, and a waste of money.

At our most basic, what we are looking for in a mate is good health, and humans’ artificial attempts to attract a mate can result in ‘dishonest signalling’ say evolutionary biologists.

Director of UWA’s Centre for Evolutionary Biology and ARC Professorial Fellow in the School of Animal Biology Leigh Simmons has spent his life studying animals and the competition between them for the best mate.

He has teamed up with psychologist and Professorial Fellow Gillian Rhodes who studies facial attractiveness. Together they are looking at the relationship between facial appearance and health to give us a better understanding of human mate choice.

PhD scholar Yong Zhi Foo is part of the investigation and is recruiting young men and women to measure their health and their facial appearance to see if they correlate.

“In the animal world, secondary sexual characteristics, such as the peacock’s tail, require testosterone to produce,” Winthrop Professor Simmons said. “Testosterone can also be an immuno-suppressant, so the animals with enough testosterone to put on a great display are the healthiest ones.

“Put simply, their attractiveness appeals to a mate who is looking for the strongest genes to pass on to her offspring.”

Earlier research in the Centre for Evolutionary Biology looked at genes involved in immunity located in the Major Histocompatibility Complex (MHC).

“Gillian’s research had already established that it was the very averageness of a face that humans found attractive: a symmetric face with nothing outside the norm,” he said.

“We asked if the people with those attractive features also had genetic diversity (and so higher immunity) in their MHC and we found that was the case. So the more attractive people should be the healthiest.”

This is where Yong comes in.

“One of the problems in dealing with humans is their use of artificial adornments,” Yong said. “We are really interested in the natural appearance of people so we are asking our volunteers to come to a testing session without make up or fake tans.

“We are looking at measures of physical health which we test with samples of their saliva and urine then compare the results with ratings of attractiveness made from photos of their faces and bodies.”

Professor Simmons referred to a colleague in Germany who is interested in body odours. “Without being aware of it, we have a preference for body odours that are different from our own.

continued on page 2
Because odours are themselves the product of genes in the MHC, by preferring partners with different odours to ourselves we create genetic diversity and greater health in our offspring," he said.

"We naturally choose perfumes that complement our MHC to make us more attractive to the best mate."

He said humans kid themselves that they know what they are doing when choosing a mate.

"The best animals at choosing the right mate include small fish known as sticklebacks. They have bright red throats and bright blue eyes and they detect water-borne odours which they use to find the strongest and most genetically compatible sexual partner.

"Insects are good at it too. I have studied crickets which have long chain fatty acids or waxes that they secrete to prevent themselves drying out. They lick each other to taste that secretion to find the most genetically compatible mate."

While licking is not a recommended method for humans, simply going with your instincts could be the best bet. And it could save you money.

Professor Simmons and Yong still need volunteers for their study, aged between 18 and 35. Please contact Yong at 21193971@student.uwa.edu.au if you are willing to participate.

With a DVC, a PVC and an SDVC, this team definitely has too many vices.

Too Many Vices is the name of the University Executive’s team in this year’s Global Corporate Challenge (GCC). It is the first time this area has fielded a team and some of its members feel that, in leading the University, they must also win the Challenge.

So the gauntlet is thrown down. Can your team beat this veritable vaunted variety of Vice-Chancellors?

The team is led by the new Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Dawn Freshwater, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) Professor Alec Cameron and Pro Vice-Chancellor (International) Iain Watt. Joining them are other members of the Vice-Chancellor, Susan Harbers, Shelby Crookes, Jessica Edelman and David Norman.

Iain Watt said he shouldn’t find it difficult to do more than 10,000 steps a day as he usually runs the 7.5 kilometres around Lake Monger every morning when he’s not overseas. Professor Freshwater too is a regular runner and has competed in several consecutive London Marathons. Professor Cameron has recently returned from leave and was wishing the GCC had started earlier and he could have included the hundreds of kilometres he had trekked in England’s Lake District.

Taking on the Global Corporate Challenge is all about motivating yourself to get to the 10,000 step a day milestone recommended for good health. Keep it up for 100 days and you’ll have built some seriously healthy habits. If you’re not a runner or walker, you can convert your cycling or swimming to steps with the help of the GCC website.

There is still time to make up a team and everybody who joins a UWA team will have half the registration fee paid by the University, reducing the cost to just $49 each, less than 50 cents per day.

To find out more, visit safety.uwa.edu.au/wellbeing or contact UWA’s Wellbeing Officer, Sarina Hilton on 6488 7931 or at wellbeing@uwa.edu.au

Leave your vices behind; step up to the GCC
Consider this scenario: A 19-year-old man, who plays football, runs, goes to the gym, eats healthily and is normal in every other way, suddenly starts to get clumsy. He starts to feel weak and thinks he must be tired … that he must be unfit. He is diagnosed with a rare incurable muscle disease that will quite possibly see him wheelchair-bound by the time he is 40.

A discovery by a UWA research scientist could hold the key to this man’s misery.

The discovery of droplets of fat accumulating in the muscle cells of mice has opened up a brand new way of investigating a rare form of muscular dystrophy (from which this young man is suffering) due to defects in a protein called dysferlin.

Miranda Grounds is the lead author in a paper just published in the American Journal of Pathology that opens new possibilities in the field of dysferlinopathies that are a form of Limb Girdle Muscular Dystrophy (LGMD).

Dysferlin is a protein linked with muscle repair. A dysferlin deficiency results in late onset muscular dystrophies in young adults and, unlike Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD) which affects very young boys, LGMD does not appear until after a boy or girl has finished growing.

An otherwise healthy teenager can suddenly start to feel weak and eventually after 20 or 30 years of progressive decline, will probably end up in a wheelchair.

Professor Grounds, a Senior Honorary Research Fellow in the School of Anatomy, Physiology and Human Biology, hypothesised that growth of muscle cells affected the onset of the two different dystrophies with muscles of boys with DMD having their muscles torn as they grew (but relatively spared in adult animal models) whereas dysferlinopathies did not manifest during the growth phase.

“When we raised mice lacking dysferlin for about 12 months, we discovered big droplets of lipid (fat) within the muscle cells and adipocytes (cells that store fat) accumulating around the muscle fibres,” Professor Grounds said. “The same observations were made for human muscles. This is most unusual and presents a wealth of possibilities about what is going wrong in this obscure muscle disease.”

Professor Grounds said the field of lipids and their regulation within muscle and adipose (fat) tissue was highly complex and the focus of much research into obesity, insulin resistance and metabolic disorders such as diabetes. “Yet the young people who contract LGMD typically don’t have metabolic disease.

“I think it is a really important feature of this muscle disease that has not previously been recognised,” she said. “I hope it will revolutionise the field.

“This focus on lipids provides new directions for investigating the mechanisms that result in the progressive decline in function of dysferlin-deficient muscles, with the possibility of novel diagnostic and therapeutic targets, and requires intensive investigation.”

Droplets of fat at the start of a long road to a cure for rare disease

Electron microscopy confirms many lipid droplets (pale and darker grey oblong shapes) within the muscle fibres of a dysferlin-deficient mouse

Light microscopy shows many lipid droplets (red dots) within the myofibres of a patient with dysferlinopathy

Miranda Grounds (right) and her former PhD scholar, Jessica Terrill, worked together on the dysferlin research
We are in the zone

The University has recently been in the international spotlight – for all the right reasons.

I was pleased to attend several high profile events on campus that have helped further reinforce our role as a global university that’s working hard to make a difference to the people, communities and businesses in our region.

At the start of the month the University proudly hosted the latest In The Zone conference which was attended by hundreds of business, political, academic and community leaders from across our region. Speakers and delegates came from the far reaches of the zone – India, China, Japan, Korea, Singapore and Indonesia.

It was particularly exciting that the Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, decided to gather 87 of her overseas Diplomats and Ambassadors in Perth to take part in the opening session of the conference.

Perth is truly at the heart of Australia’s pivot to the Indian Ocean, and the gateway to the Indo-Pacific region. In the Zone seeks to crystallise for a national audience the importance of changing our perspective, mindset and attitudes about where this country’s future lies.

In The Zone is just one of many ways in which the University is undertaking a thought leadership role in the region.

The night before the University was pleased to host the Australia America Association’s (AAA) Gala Dinner. It was the first time the event, which brings together captains of industry and political leaders from across the country, was held in Perth.

The University has strong ties with the AAA through our partnership in establishing the new Perth USAsia Centre located here on campus.

It was a successful celebration of the important relationship between Western Australia and the United States. The dinner also showcased some of the many talented students of this University who have received scholarships from the AAA to study and undertake work experience in the United States.

Hearing them speak in front of 450 leaders of this country about their hopes, goals, and dreams filled me with enormous pride about the work we do here at UWA. Their energy and enthusiasm about the future once again highlighted that we are making a positive difference for the future.

Paul Johnson
Vice-Chancellor

Mystery solved

It seems that medical student John Gwynn Harrold wins the prize for the 1930s graffiti on the bottom of the Reflection Pond.

University Archivist Maria Carvalho suggested the young John Harrold when she read about the name found carved in the concrete of the pond.

Now his son David Harrold says he is almost certain it would have been his father.

“He started studying Medicine at UWA,” David wrote.

“The story that I was told (only after my parents declined to lend me some money to buy a sports car while I was studying) was that my father did quite well at university until he purchased a red sports car, after which he apparently became ‘distracted’ from his studies!”

“When he failed some units in his final year, my grandfather banished my father to Ireland where he completed his medical studies at Trinity College Dublin.

“After the war, he returned to WA where he practised medicine in the Victoria Park and Bentley areas from the late 1940s until he died in 1974.”

David said he thought his father’s rebellious streak ended with the red sports car, but now believes it probably included his autograph in the Reflection Pond.

4 | UWAnews | Number 3 | May 2014 The University of Western Australia
Exercise gets to the heart of the matter

Exercise is good for us, right?

It makes us feel good, helps us to lose weight and look good, but until now, there was little evidence that exercise was actually good for cardiovascular health.

Does all that exertion and effort result in a healthier heart and blood vessels, helping to avoid heart attack and stroke and contributing to a longer life?

Dr Angela Spence in the School of Sport Science Exercise and Health found some answers in her PhD research over the past few years and has recently been awarded the 2013 Exercise and Sports Science Australia (ESSA) Medal for her thesis, Comparative impacts of endurance and resistance exercise on the cardiovascular system in humans.

ESSA is Australia’s peak professional organisation for practitioners and academics in exercise and sports science. The medal is awarded to the most outstanding PhD thesis in any discipline of the field across all universities in Australia.

“We were interested in cardiac adaptation to exercise: how do the heart and blood vessels respond or change. Are we making people healthier with exercise?” Dr Spence said.

The short answer to the question is yes, exercise is good for our hearts and blood vessels. Most of us assumed that, but most evidence to support it had been based on testing of athletes, rather than the man in the street.

Dr Spence recruited 23 of these men, young healthy but inactive males between the ages of 18 and 35, and put them through six months of intensive training.

“We had found that some information about the impact of exercise on the cardiovascular system was missing,” she said. “But nobody had bothered to spend six months training ordinary people to really test the impact. It had always been easier to use athletes.”

During 2010, Dr Spence trained these sedentary men for six months, turning ‘couch potatoes’ into distance runners and weight lifters.

“By the end of the program, the men we trained in endurance were able to run the City to Surf, and the men who did the resistance training were able to lift Olympic-level weights,” she said.

“But we found the evidence we were really looking for with MRI scans and a special form of echo-cardiography. I had to go to England to analyse this data as we don’t have the equipment anywhere in Australia.”

She found the men trained in endurance had enlarged hearts, similar to what is seen in athletes. “The resistance-trained men returned interesting data. The walls of their hearts had thickened but their hearts were not enlarged. This is still a positive adaptation for the cardiovascular system,” she said.

Dr Spence’s PhD was supervised by Winthrop Professor Danny Green, whose group has a proven track record in exercise and cardiovascular health research over more than a decade.

Dr Spence is now running Preventia, a study designed to prevent dementia with exercise.

The project, in the School of Sport Science Exercise and Health, will run over a couple of years, training and testing up to 150 people between the ages of 51 and 72 who have a family history of dementia or are already suffering some mild memory loss.

“That is, once again, I’m comparing different forms of exercise: hydrotherapy and aqua-aerobics compared with walking on land,” she said. “We anticipate that exercise will be beneficial but can exercising in water be more beneficial?”

Dr Spence may already have some insight to exercising in water, having completed her first solo Rottnest Channel Swim this year in six hours and five minutes.

But this is more than a story about excellent research.

It is about a remarkable young woman, one of the University’s highest achieving recent graduates. She has just been selected by the Australian Academy of Science as one of 20 Australian representatives to attend the Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting in Germany in June. During her PhD research, she published 12 papers in high impact journals, three of which were chosen for editorials. Her PhD won her a special commendation from UWA and she won a prize at a national sports science conference for the best research project in Australia.

Incredibly, during all this, she had to deal with a great personal tragedy when her mother was lost in a light plane crash in a remote area of South Africa. Dr Spence flew home to Johannesburg just as her mother’s body was found, and did not return to UWA and her research for nine months.

Professor Green says she is a special young woman and he is privileged to work with her.
China supports 20 per cent of the world’s population but has only eight per cent of the globe’s arable land.

So food security is a major issue for our big neighbour.

As UWA’s Program Leader of Land and Water Management in the UWA Institute of Agriculture (IOA) and ARC Future Fellow Professor Daniel Murphy (School of Earth and Environment) puts it: “WA’s major export destination is China and our agricultural sector has a big role in global food security.”

He leads a UWA team involved in a major collaboration with the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS) in which both partners, China and Australia, will benefit with more knowledge about how agricultural systems react to climate change and how to improve soil management to produce high crop yields while ensuring sustainable soil condition.

CAAS scientists have an extensive network of long-term field trials across China that have been monitored for the past 30 years including an archive of soil samples. “It’s a unique database, better than anything we have to study in Australia and probably more extensive than anywhere else in the world,” Professor Murphy said.

“Bringing together these field trials with the technological expertise within the IOA in carbon modelling, molecular ecology and application of Nano-scale secondary ion mass spectrometry (NanoSIMS, Centre for Microscopy, Characterisation and Analysis) to soil-plant-microbial interactions will allow us to ask fundamental questions about soil carbon and nutrient cycles with respect to the design of production systems that are resilient to climate change, have high fertiliser use efficiencies and that minimise greenhouse gas emissions.”

“The ongoing project will help both countries to address sustainable food production,” said the Deputy Director General of the CAAS, Professor Minggang Xu, who along with his colleagues recently attended a workshop at UWA run by the Soil Biology and Molecular Ecology Group from the School of Earth and Environment.

He said he was keen to increase his Institute’s contribution to soil research with more bilateral exchange of students and research staff.

China has doubled its yield of wheat and maize in recent years, with the widespread use of chemical (inorganic) fertilisers.

Dean of Science, Winthrop Professor Tony O’Donnell, said the increased yields were unsustainable.

“China is now the biggest user of inorganic fertilisers in the world, but carbon levels in their soils haven’t increased, so they are just a short-term solution,” he said.

Soil carbon is an indication of the health of soil. Using organic fertilisers encourages a carbon-nitrogen balance. Without it, the arable land in China is likely to decline.

“We want to help to put a stop to that potential future decline,” Professor Murphy said.

He has had a long association with the CAAS and holds a Chinese High-End Foreign Experts Visiting Professorship with the Academy.

Recent findings from this collaboration have been published in the international journal Global Biogeochemical Cycles. He says that “this study asked the question – What will happen to future soil organic carbon stocks in Chinese upland agricultural soils under future climate scenarios and anticipated change to net plant primary production?”. After checking the accuracy of carbon and climate models using historical data from the long-term trials, the team from China, UWA and Japan concluded that under no fertiliser input these soils would be a net source of CO2 in most parts of northern China. However, even when inorganic fertilizers were applied, the additional carbon input from increased plant growth could not meet the microbial depletion of soil organic carbon in the northwest of China. Manure application or retaining stubble in the field could improve the carbon sequestration.
Citizens blitz the State’s soils

Hundreds of children, retirees, scouts and families have become ‘citizen scientists’ and, in a world-first, are digging up soil samples all over the State.

They are part of the MicroBlitz project developed by Winthrop Professor Andy Whiteley and his team to map WA’s bacterial ecosystems to support research into soil rehabilitation.

Our soils are under increasing pressure from climate change, agriculture and population growth. Ordinary people throughout the State are now helping scientists to manage these pressures.

In his laboratory fridge in the School of Earth and Environment, Professor Whiteley has about 2,000 soil samples, more than 1,000 of them taken by citizen scientists over the past few months.

Professor Whiteley led a world first project to map the UK’s bacterial ecosystem. “But we didn’t use citizen scientists,” he said. “We did it with 60 paid assistants, at a cost of around four million pounds.”

On sabbatical at UWA in 2011, he shared an office with Deborah Bowie, who was co-ordinating a lot of work with schools. “We came up with the idea of using citizen scientists for the project in WA, thinking it would mainly be school children who would help us,” said Ms Bowie, who is Project Manager for MicroBlitz.

“But it’s turned out to be the Grey Nomads and families with young children who are travelling around the State, who are our greatest helpers. We recently had a stand at the Caravan and Camping Show at the Claremont Showgrounds and we had about 600 people come by and want to register to become one of our volunteer team,” she said.

“We have had phenomenal interest,” said Professor Whiteley, who has a Premier’s Fellowship. “The idea of the citizen scientist has become quite common in

continued on page 8
The vertical space between the tops of the highest trees and below the lowest reaches of their roots to the aquifer is a zone that is critical for our survival.

UWA has joined the Critical Zone Exploration Network (CZEN), a global community of scientists using a network of field sites to investigate this zone that sustains human (and other terrestrial) life.

CZEN was established in the US about a decade ago but the new Critical Zone Observatory (CZO) at UWA’s Farm at Pingelly is the first such observatory in Australia and in the Southern Hemisphere.

Soil science special

Europe and the UK over the past few years, but it was a new concept here. And people have really taken to it.

“In the past, citizen scientists have been asked to observe and record their observations of things like butterflies, birds and whales. To my knowledge, MicroBlitz is the first project in the world to get people actually taking samples.”

The data from these samples will feed into research into agricultural systems and mine site rehabilitation projects.

The child-friendly sample kits are small and easy to carry, with everything needed fitting into a big lunch-size zip lock bag. Volunteers are asked to take a photograph, record the location, dig a small hole and collect about 200g of soil and post it back in the postage-paid bag.

“Postage, at $13, is the most expensive part of the project, but still so much cheaper than employing assistants,” Ms Bowie said. “And it’s just great that so many people want to take part. It’s a wonderful way to disseminate information about science and get people interested in current research.”

The MicroBlitz team is working on an app they hope to release later this year, which they hope will encourage more young people to take part in the project. Also later this year, the citizen scientists will be able to get feedback about their samples from a website and compare the microbial information from their samples with other soil samples from around the state.

“We’ve had a good take-up in the metropolitan area and in the south-west,” Ms Bowie said. “We’re now focusing on the north-west because we want to cover the whole state. Some travellers are willing to take a transect for us: stopping every 100 kilometres to take samples across a section of the state.”

In March this year MicroBlitz was officially launched at the UWA Albany Centre, supported by the Dean, Winthrop Professor Tony O’Donnell, the (then) Chief Scientist, Professor Lyn Beazley, and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) Winthrop Professor Peter Davies. Since then, the project has attracted a lot of media coverage, generating even more sampler registrations.

MicroBlitz will help to investigate the genetic biodiversity, distribution and functionality of microbial communities, in order to establish a knowledge base, create a benchmark for future monitoring and to help understand the ecological links between the microbial communities and improving the sustainability of soils.

To register and receive a free sampling kit, go to microblitz.com.au

A tiny layer is the most critical for life to thrive

The vertical space between the tops of the highest trees and below the lowest reaches of their roots to the aquifer is a zone that is critical for our survival.

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CZEN was established in the US about a decade ago but the new Critical Zone Observatory (CZO) at UWA’s Farm at Pingelly is the first such observatory in Australia and in the Southern Hemisphere.
To launch this observatory, Assistant Professor Matthias Leopold and Associate Professor Deirdre Gleeson from the School of Earth and Environment ran a three-day international workshop on the Crawley campus and at the University’s experimental farm.

The CZO provides an umbrella for a wide range of scientific projects and it is particularly important for WA that the observatory is on agricultural land. A/Professor Leopold said the CZO would help integrate the findings of a range of projects strategically important to WA including the restoration of degraded land, integrated grazing systems, carbon sequestration, water storage and the use of novel polymers for enhancing water and nutrient use.

“Data from this Avon River Catchment CZO and others in the network around the world will increase our understanding of the basis of food and water security leading to better and more sustainable management practices for farmers and other land users,” he said.

“Work at the CZO will also provide insights into the resilience potential of our critical zone following the impact of bushfires, agriculture, clearing and the spread of urban development,” said A/Professor Gleeson. “We have to establish continuous measurements, and our data will be linked to and shared with other observatories. We are working towards a global CZEN in which everybody uses the same protocols and methods so we can successfully compare data.”

The CZEN incorporates a multidisciplinary group of scientists working at the interface between areas such as geoscience, hydrology, agriculture, plant science, microbiology, ecology, soil science, and engineering.

Dr Tim White, the National Coordinator for the US CZ Research Program said the network’s primary goal was to investigate CZ processes such as weathering and soil formation. “Through this network researchers can access and integrate data in a way that allows isolation of environmental variables and comparison of environmental effects across gradients of time, human disturbance, biological activity and topography,” said Dr White, from US Penn State University.

“Weathering is a most important phenomenon in the southern hemisphere,” A/Professor Leopold explained. “Its history is very different from that in the northern hemisphere, which underwent huge changes during the ice age. In the southern hemisphere and especially in Australia, we didn’t experience the challenge and movements of the ice age to such an extent. In Australia, the materials in our CZ are deeply weathered, leached and recycled, with no fresh material added, in some cases, for millions of years.”

The workshop brought together Critical Zone experts from the UK, the US, Germany, New Zealand and South Africa and interested scientists, farmers, land managers and NGOs from all over Australia.

Professor Steve Banwart, who heads up the EU SoilTrEC CZ Program, said that southern hemisphere CZ science brought a unique aspect to the international program, particularly in the area of social sciences, weathering history and ecology. “It also addresses questions central to the global network,” he said.

UWA is working with other organisations in Australia and across the southern hemisphere to extend the CZEN to include the re-vegetation of mine sites and other disturbed sites; to understand the processes within the Critical Zone of weathering, transport of nutrients and pollutants; and adaptation of agricultural practices on ancient soils to climate change and climate variability.

Funding for the workshop came from the World Universities Network (WUN), UWA, the Faculty of Science, the School of Earth and Environment and the Perth-USAAsia Centre.
Opportunities and access for students with disabilities will be in the spotlight later this year as the Australian Tertiary Education Network on Disability (ATEND) holds its biannual conference in Perth.

Pauline Pannell, Nikola Horley and the staff at UniAccess (Student Services) are helping to organise the conference, Navigating New Frontiers, for December. UWA has a commitment and a legal obligation to provide a flexible and responsive teaching and learning environment for students with a disability.

Students with disabilities can choose to register with UniAccess, where disability officers work hard to ensure they can participate as fully as possible in university life and studies.

“We respond to the needs of the students,” Ms Pannell said. “Unless you have universal design of all units, there have to be individual changes and adjustments made. Making individual adjustments is time consuming and much less effective than creating a course that can be accessed equitably by everyone.”

Much of the language of the disability sector is not used in Indigenous communities.

Damian Griffis, founder and CEO of First Peoples Disability Network, and a guest speaker at the conference, said it was a positive thing, in the sense that people weren’t labelled.

In an interview first published online by The Guardian last year, he said: “disability tends to be talked about from an impairment perspective, such as ‘my cousin has trouble getting around’ or ‘my brother is a bit slower than everybody else,’” he said. “Neither of these descriptions is offensive. They are entirely appropriate ways to describe disability in terms of what others in the community may need to look for, to support that person.”

The First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN) has been Mr Griffis’s life’s work.

He said that Aboriginal people with disabilities were among the most disadvantaged Australians, often facing multiple barriers to meaningful participation within their own communities as well as the wider community. The proportion of the Aboriginal population aged 15 years and over, reporting a disability or long-term health condition is at least 40 percent.

The issues affecting Aboriginal people with disabilities and their families include access to education, employment, access to health services, accessible transport and early intervention.

“I hope there will be a time in the future when the human rights of all Aboriginal people with disabilities can be realised,” he said. “Change will take significant time because this area has been overlooked for so long. But I am optimistic, given the recent major reform with the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. But the key now will be getting Aboriginal people with disabilities to understand this new system and how to use it to their advantage.”
It may come as a surprise to know that there are at least 30 students with autism studying at UWA. Disability Officer Pauline Pannell looks at how they are being supported.

UWA is committed to strategies promoting equity for students with autism, the most common developmental disorder in Australia. The many UWA students with autism are exceptional both for their intellectual talents and their autistic characteristics. While a diagnosis on the Autism Spectrum occurs more often in families of physicists, engineers, and mathematicians, there are students with autism succeeding in every Faculty, and at both undergraduate and post graduate levels at UWA.

Typically, students with autism possess cognitive strengths in specific areas as well as significant difficulties with sensory function, socialisation, communication and behaviour. These students benefit from supports and adjustments, which help open the door to a positive student experience. The stories of Jarrad and Alisha below (not actual students) illustrate some of the experiences reported by our students with autism.

Jarrad, who had a diagnosis of Asperger’s Syndrome, had made a relatively smooth transition from school to university.

In his first semester, he was gaining excellent marks on the many on-line assessments in his course. For the first time in his life, Jarrad found other students with whom he could share a passionate interest in mathematics.

However, when Jarrad realised that he had an overnight field trip for a broadening unit, he became very anxious. His strong daily routines at home and the opportunity for time alone each day were an important part of managing his studies and wellbeing. Jarrad’s anxiety led to insomnia and some overdue assignments.

When Jarrad was able to speak to UniAccess about what had been worrying him, it was arranged for him to attend the first day of the field trip, returning home that night with some alternative assessment for the missed second day. Jarrad got back on track and caught up.

Alisha was really enjoying the well-organised content and clear on-line learning for her law unit. She was well aware that she could not understand non-verbal cues and so she missed a lot of the meaning of group discussions.

Unfortunately, Alisha felt like the walls were closing in on her on the day when the tutorial venue was changed unexpectedly. She arrived late and the room was crowded, she could not function and had to leave straight away.

After some discussion with her Disability Officer and the tutor, Alisha’s tutor was happy to always reserve a seat for Alisha and to call her if the venue was changing.

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A pilot project in the Business School is trialling universal access to a flipped learning approach.

The big first year unit, Marketing Management, has been redesigned to address the needs of students with learning challenges associated with active in-class learning and attendance.

A flipped learning approach delivers knowledge disseminated to students in a lecture online, and uses face-to-face lecture time as a workshop, to consolidate and extend understanding and skill through a range of learner-oriented activities.

Assistant Professor Shannon Johnston said these activities promoted deeper learning, and thus attendance was critical. In this unit, during the workshop, students participate in group activities, with around 400 students.

A problem arises for students who have learning challenges who find it difficult or impossible to attend or participate in social and interactive settings.

A/Professor Johnston, from the Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, has collaborated with Assistant Professor Wade Jarvis, from the Business School, to overcome the limitations of this sort of class for remote students and those with disabilities.

Alternative means to ensure students identified through UniAccess have equal opportunity to participate were explored, and the preferred alternative was the online workshop. The second option was to use lecture capture of the workshop sessions coupled with asynchronous participation via discussion forum contributions.

This semester, 30 students have volunteered to be in a pilot online workshop group. It uses synchronous text contributions via the LMS chat tool and a shared google document.

“I was concerned whether people could think and type quickly enough to take part in real time,” A/Professor Johnston said. “But it does potentially meet the needs of students struggling to physically attend class, those who are challenged by face to face interactions in social, active, group learning contexts and also simply those that want to be more efficient with their time and who are very good at learning via an online environment.”

Anecdotal evidence from A/Professor Jarvis notes that the online version is successful: “In a 45 minute setting, up to 10 pages of content is co-produced, and the standard is on par or better than the work done in the face-to-face setting,” he said.

“The whole approach addresses different student needs,” said A/Professor Johnston. “Students with autism may be challenged by the social setting but will better engage via text online; students with dyslexia would benefit from actively engaging in learning through group talk rather than writing or listening; hearing-impaired students can read text and participate in writing; and students with cognitive processing challenges can participate, and then revisit workshop experiences and content through the captured session and workshop class notes. The approach also potentially benefits students with a non-English speaking background who could review class experiences and content through these same multiple resources.”

A/Professor Johnston and A/Professor Jarvis created this new form of teaching and learning with the support of a 2013 UWA Teaching and Learning Fellowship.

Conference on disability in tertiary education

Flip the learning process to include everybody

Inclusive learning requires good technology. Photo: Matt Galligan
How many academics wish their work was recognised outside of their disciplines?

The man who can make that wish come true is Alex Attwood from UniSearch, Australia’s biggest provider of expert opinion services.

Based on the Crawley campus, his position is the first formal arrangement outside the University of New South Wales, where UniSearch began in 1959.

If you are willing to help answer queries about your field of research and provide opinion, in short, to become a consultant, you will earn money for the University, for your School or Centre and for yourself.

UniSearch is a commercial company with competitive neutrality. It was Australia’s first university-based consulting company.

focused on commercialisation then added an expert opinion service. UniSearch has been involved in impressive projects, from engineering solutions for the Sydney Opera House to international public health initiatives such as tracing the epidemiology of HIV in the region.

The company’s group executive John Arneil, said that when UniSearch began to get inquiries from outside the expertise of UNSW, it started to co-opt academics from other universities.

“Now we have academics from nearly every university in Australia, as well as people from outside the tertiary sector, in areas such as construction or agricultural issues. These include retired or former academics,” he said.

These arrangements with other universities are informal, but Mr Attwood’s position here is the first formal institutional arrangement.

UniSearch has thousands of academic experts who consult on up to 800 projects each year. Mr Attwood is keen to hear from UWA academics who want to expand their consultancies.

“If you are outside the University, it is almost impossible to find somebody with the expertise that you want, unless that person is well-known publicly,” he said. “UniSearch will facilitate that access to UWA expertise.”

An accountant by profession (and a UWA graduate), he is already discovering UWA’s expertise and who is willing to be involved. “I want to promote UWA staff as the first option when somebody requires advice or opinion. UniSearch will sort all the legal matters and negotiate the contracts.

“It’s important that we comply with the University’s consultancy policy so I’m also trying to demystify that,” he said.

He is talking to academics across the university, including in the Centre for Forensic Science. “I can’t think of any other place in Australia that has the forensic experts that we have here,” Mr Attwood said. “We also have sought-after expertise in law, health sciences and physical sciences. There are few organisations outside of the university sphere that have the recurrent investment in both technology and the human expertise which make universities a unique resource for both industry and the wider community to tap into. The technologies we have in the School of Physics, for example, are world class.

“I’m getting around the University as quickly as I can but I need academics to contact me if they are willing to take part. Once they are registered, I can add their names and expertise to the national UniSearch database.”

Mr Rob Forage, CEO for UniSearch’s parent company UNSW Global P/L, said: “This joint initiative between UWA and UniSearch will enable UWA to increase its outreach and relevance to industry and commerce. In this win/win scenario, UniSearch provides a business service platform and governance framework geared to academic consulting.”

For more information about UniSearch and how to develop a consultancy, please contact Mr Attwood in Research Development and Innovation on 6488 4713 or at alexander.attwood@uwa.edu.au or a.attwood@unswglobal.unsw.edu.au or go to unisearch.com.au/uwa
The powerful 9.4 T Bruker BioSpec MRI is WA’s first high-field MRI scanner dedicated to research. CMCA’s head of bioimaging, Associate Professor Matt Linden said the new capabilities offered by the BioSpec would greatly boost science in this State.

“Magnetic Resonance Imaging, or MRI, allows scientists to non-invasively see inside specimens, which can be anything from living tissues through to hydrogen fuels cells,” he said. “Using very strong magnetic fields and radio waves, MRI scientists get very detailed images of their structure and function.”

The NIF BioSpec will be widely used in medical research imaging, including the targeting of drugs to growing cancers or measuring muscle function. This MRI will also be used in other fields of scientific research: to measure the evolution of brain development; understand how Western Australian sharks sense their prey; and to assist in the engineering and design of desalination membranes to provide drinking water at remote mine sites.

“The scanner will be critical for researchers, facilitating discovery of information that is not discernable on routine diagnostic instruments,” A/Professor Linden said.

“As well as improving the quality of standard images (obtained from protons in tissues), researchers will be able to study other nuclei including carbon, fluorine, sodium, and phosphorus. The Bruker BioSpec can also provide non-invasive identification and characterisation of chemical species through magnetic resonance spectroscopy (MRS), often providing critical insight into underlying biochemical processes in health and disease.”

The reputation of CMCA and UWA, coupled with this new infrastructure, has attracted Associate Professor Kirk Feindel from Canada to lead the establishment and growth of WA’s MRI research program.

Through CMCA’s role as the WA node of the Australian National Imaging Facility this instrument is available for use by local, national and international research scientists. Please contact A/Professor Feindel on 9346 3628 (tie line from Crawley 52 3628) or at kirk.feindel@uwa.edu.au for more information.
“The USA, the UK and Canada are the most popular destinations for our students,” said Carole Rakotonirina, Study Abroad and Student Exchange co-ordinator in the International Centre. “But they go everywhere. And the common thing we hear from our students when they return is that they have had ‘the best time of their lives.’ Students love the opportunity of immersing themselves in different cultures and travelling to countries near their study destinations.”

She said students who studied overseas quickly developed important ‘soft skills’ such as interpersonal and cross-cultural communication. “They become more confident, adaptable and well-rounded. And these are attributes that make a difference when they graduate and are looking for a job.”

UWA now has more than 140 exchange agreements with overseas universities. New partners this year include: the University of South Dakota, Presbyterian College, Otterbein University and University of Montana in the US; Okayama and Kwansei Gakuin universities in Japan; in China, Peking University, HSBC Business School, Harbin Institute of Technology, China University of Science and Technology and Nanjing Agricultural University (Study Abroad); Aalto University (School of Business), Finland; Technical University of Denmark; and University of Bath, UK.

Ms Rakotonirina said it cost between $10,000 and $12,000 to study abroad for a semester, but scholarships were available for all students.

Brad Turnbaugh from Montana State University is making the most of his last two months of a 12-month exchange. He is studying sport science and hopes to work with elite athletes in the US after he completes his degree back in Montana.

While Brad loves the relaxed university culture here, he finds Perth overwhelmingly huge. “Montana is very rural and we have nothing anywhere near as big as Perth there,” he said. He was glad he hadn’t chosen to study in Melbourne or Sydney.

The University’s Study Abroad and Student Exchange programs are flourishing. Even Brady the golden retriever wants to be part of it.

Brady is the well-trained pet of Sara Duffy from Study Abroad and Student Exchange, which held its annual fair last month on Prescott Court.

The number of incoming students over the past 12 months has more than doubled, partly due to the well-funded Brazilian Science without Borders program. More than 540 students from Brazil and all over the world came to UWA to study in 2013, and 446 UWA students were outward-bound.

“Every student and her dog wants to study abroad”

“The USA, the UK and Canada are the most popular destinations for our students,” said Carole Rakotonirina, Study Abroad and Student Exchange co-ordinator in the International Centre.

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Tales from Boomtown is one of those books that anybody with an interest in politics will love.

One of the latest publications from UWA Publishing, it is political journalist and broadcaster Peter Kennedy’s potted history of WA Premiers from David Brand to Colin Barnett.

Peter joined the ranks of political writers at The West Australian at the end of the Brand era in the early 1970s and made an outstanding contribution to political commentary for nearly 40 years.

His book is an easy read that brings back memories of the demolition of the Perth Barracks, the entrepreneurship of Sir Charles Court, the disasters of WA Inc and the unexpected events that catapulted two leaders from opposite sides of the political spectrum into the leader’s seat.

Sir David Brand was a country boy who left school after year seven. Brian Burke was the youngest Premier, leading his party to victory at the age of 35. He was also the first Premier of WA to have a university degree.

The stakes were then raised by Australia’s first female Premier, Carmen Lawrence (now on staff in the School of Psychology) and Geoff Gallop, who both came to office with PhDs.

Geoff Gallop and Richard Court share a birthday, and still correspond, despite leading opposing political parties.

Brian Burke and Alan Carpenter both started their careers as journalists. Alan Carpenter was overseas when Geoff Gallop unexpectedly announced his resignation and told the people of Western Australia about his battle with depression. He returned from London, contested the leadership and was soon in the top job.

Another unexpected turn of events saw Colin Barnett become Premier, soon after he had announced his retirement and Diedre Willmott was endorsed for his seat of Cottesloe.

Back in 2008, Troy Buswell’s indiscretions were already attracting unwanted publicity, and Kennedy writes that the party’s leadership was in turmoil and Colin Barnett was being quietly urged to stay on.

He returned to the leadership of the WA Liberal Party and, within a month, had won the election and become Premier. Kennedy describes it as one of the great rags to riches stories in WA politics.

But he says Sir Charles Court and Brian Burke were the stand-out premiers.

“Court had vision and drive in spades,” he writes. “He saw what WA’s rich resources could deliver for its citizens (and) he hounded the federal government … to lift the iron ore export embargo in 1960.”

He says that Burke’s “finely-tuned political brain was never in question” and that his “star shone so brightly that key players in the Hawke government were seeing him as the next federal Labor leader, ahead of Paul Keating.”

But Burke took big risks, as did his “four-on-the-floor” business associates. He was badly wounded when they crashed, along with the stock market in 1987.

These business associates, the players in the sorry saga of WA Inc, included Alan Bond, Warren Anderson, Laurie Connell, Dallas Dempster, Lang Hancock and Yosse Goldberg.

Kennedy asks: “Was he too young to take on the premiership? Probably. Did he and some of his coterie believe they were bulletproof? Definitely.”

Read the fascinating details of WA’s real life political dramas in Tales from Boomtown, available from the Co-Op Bookshop and UWAP online for $29.99.

UWA staff get a 10 per cent discount when they use the promo code UWASTAFF at the checkout when buying online at uwap.uwa.edu.au
Get social and have fun with your colleagues

Football, cooking, wine, jazz, bushwalking – something for everybody!

That’s the aim of the newly invigorated UWA Staff Social Club.

The Club began nearly four years ago but lately has not been offering many activities.

“That is about to change,” said the new president Rob Blandford, from the Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics.

He and a new committee are breathing new life into the Club, with a launch event at the Byrneleigh Tavern on Hampden Road, Nedlands, on Friday 30 May.

All paid up Social Club members will receive two drink vouchers and canapés in a private function room. Non-members can also attend or can sign up to the club for a discounted ticket price.

“We would like all current members to reconnect with the club and encourage all staff to come along, so we can swell our membership and offer even better discounts and events,” Rob said.

While discounted tickets for movies, Adventure World and the Rottnest Express have always been available through the Club, there will now be more events for staff to meet each other, network and make new friends.

And the new club website offers the ease and convenience of purchasing tickets online so you can download your tickets immediately if you feel like a spontaneous trip to the movies or Rotto at almost half price. This feature alone makes joining the club worthwhile.

“On the drawing board are jazz nights, a wine tour, cooking lessons, an open mic night, some bush walking, a car rally and forming our own football team,” Rob said. “Discussions with members suggested that people liked a mix of on- and off-campus events, alternating monthly.”

Membership of the UWA Staff Social Club is just $3 per fortnight and can be deducted from your salary.

The sundowner at the Byrneleigh will kick off at 5pm.

Current members can attend the event free and new members can pay $10 to join in the fun.

Contact the team at staffsocialclub@uwa.edu.au or go to: staff.uwa.edu.au/social/staff for further information.

Above: Herb Faust beat the Iron Chef
Right: Emmanuel Mollois’ latest book is published by UWA

MasterChefs on campus

Two of Perth’s best known chefs will demonstrate how to eat well to live longer, at UWA’s 2014 Biggest Morning Tea.

The fundraiser, for the Cancer Council, will host Herb Faust and Emmanuel Mollois at a morning tea and cooking demonstration at the University Club on Thursday 22 May starting at 10am.

Cindi Dunjey from the Centre for Exploration Targeting is running her fifth Biggest Morning Tea at UWA and she hope the chefs will attract the biggest crowd yet.

“If we eat well, we’re on the way to good health and keeping cancer at bay,” Cindi said. “Herb and Emmanuel have some recipes they will share with us so we can all eat well and live longer.”

Herb Faust shot to fame when he became the only contestant ever to beat the infamous Iron Chef, on the TV series of that name. This was during his stint as chef for the boarding school at Scotch College, making meals most teenage boys only dream about.

Just 200 metres down the road from the school is Choux, a patisserie where Emmanuel created his famous macarons for many years before going back into partnership with fellow French chef Alain Fabregues at Bistro des Artistes in Subiaco. He has recently put his legendary pastries into a book, Patissier, published by UWA Publishing.

“I’m so excited to have Herb and Emmanuel coming along this year,” Cindi said. “Once again Gary Ellis at the University Club is sponsoring the morning tea, as he does with wonderful generosity every year. It’s a fantastic morning of food and entertainment for just $10 – all of which goes to cancer research.”

There will be a range of prizes as well as a splendid morning tea. For more information please see the website: uwa.edu.au/biggestmorningtea or contact Cindi at cindi.dunjey@uwa.edu.au or on 6488 2640.
From early childhood literacy to high school science, UWA’s teaching graduates are sharing their expertise in classrooms across the country. Wherever you want to make a difference, the Master of Teaching course at UWA will help you get there. This two-year program is available in both Perth and Albany, in full-time and part-time mode.

For more information call 6488 2388 or visit education.uwa.edu.au.

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**SWANBOURNE:** House on Devon Road. $600 per week. Unfurnished 3 bedroom, 1 bathroom. House with off street parking and low maintenance garden available. Close to public transport and shops. Contact Christine on 0401 675 400 or christine@uwa.edu.au

**HOLIDAY HOUSE INJIDUP BEACH:** Zamia House is an elevated, north facing contemporary home with 180 degree views across Wyadup valley and an ocean view towards Canal Rocks. Injidup Beach is 2km away. The house, set on five acres of bush, is central to Margaret River wineries, restaurants and attractions. The home has 3 bedrooms and 2 bathrooms (one an ensuite), a large covered deck and open plan living. The house sleeps 8. Discount prices for inquiries through UWA News, starting from $200 per night. Contact Jani on 0418 949 318 or zamiahouse@gmail.com

**FRANCE – DORDOGNE:** Holiday accommodation. Self-contained apartment in one of the most beautiful Medieval Villages of the Périgord Noir, Belves. Train and all amenities. For more details see website www.belves.info or contact Susana Melo de Howard on 0246 5042 or 0415 099 667. Email: susana@belves.info

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Sony 32” Flat screen display unit with side speakers attached (Sony FWD-32x2f), Mint Condition.

Contact Jani on 0418 949 318 or zamiahouse@gmail.com

**NOTICES**

**Friends of the UWA Library Talk**

Tuesday, 13 May

Venue: Reid Library Ground Floor Meeting Room

7pm (refreshments) followed by the talk at 7:30pm

**Perth: Creating a 21st Century City of Culture**

Guest Speaker: Winthrop Professor Ted Snell (Director of UWA Cultural Precinct, UWA)

Friends of the Library members: Free

Non members: $5 donation

For further information contact: 6488 2354 or email susan.oconnor@uwa.edu.au

**REDUNDANT EQUIPMENT**

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<td>Good</td>
<td>Centre for Learning Technology</td>
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**Oral health for baby boomers.**

From cracked teeth and old fillings to more serious concerns, oral health issues experienced by people in their middle years require special care to conserve a youthful, natural smile. Dr Chai Lim and his team have a special interest in dentistry for baby boomers.

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**Altitude childcare and kindergarten**

The new childcare facilities at SCGH have vacancies, which is great news for UWA staff, as both day-care and early learning centres on campus are full, with waiting lists.

Altitude is located on top of the multi-storey car park with beautiful outdoor play areas. It includes a kindy program for four-year-olds.

For more information please call Nicole Walker on 9346 3812 or at altitudechildcare@health.wa.gov.au

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Richard J Hobbs
Australian Laureate Fellow
School of Plant Biology

In July, I will have been in Western Australia for 30 years. Although now well and truly settled here, an Australian citizen and Dockers supporter, I also retain my Scottish heritage, accent and love of rugby.

In September this year, there will be a referendum in Scotland asking the question “Should Scotland be an independent country?” This referendum represents an interesting moment in history and is the culmination of a period of increasing devolution of government to Scotland over the past couple of decades.

Of course, there is much debate and argument about whether removing Scotland from the rest of the United Kingdom (hence making it the “Untied Kingdom”, as an English colleague of mine quipped) is either sensible or practical. And as Scottish author Alexander McCall Smith commented in a recent lecture here at UWA, the referendum also brings to the surface deep-seated values and perspectives of what it means to be Scottish.

However, what’s interesting is the different tenor of the “yes” and “no” campaigns. Late last year the Scottish Government published Scotland’s Future, which First Minister Alex Salmond described as the “most comprehensive blueprint for an independent country ever published”, and argued his government “do[es] not seek independence as an end in itself, but rather as a means to changing Scotland for the better”. The “yes” campaign promotes a future-focused vision and strategy for Scotland that provides a voice for people’s hopes and aspirations. The “no” campaign, on the other hand, is mostly negative (somewhat predictable for a “no” campaign, admittedly) and taps into fears and doubts about the prospect of rocking the status quo.

Whatever the outcome of the referendum, it has been remarkably refreshing to see a nation’s politics rise above the mundane and to hear discussion on what the country could be and do. It’s been exciting to hear stimulating debate and well-crafted speeches focusing on everything from the minute details to the big picture. What does a “better” Scotland actually look like? And is it achievable?

Comparisons are always odious, but let’s do it anyway. Rather than feeding off people’s hopes and aspirations, Australian politics currently taps into baser instincts, fear and prejudice. Rather than focusing on what Australia could be as a nation, we are pummelled with parliamentary slanging matches about bogus “issues”, with a sole aim of scoring points against the other side. We have slogans instead of sentences, vitriol instead of vision. Cardboard cut-out election slogans (“Stop the boats”, “Axe the tax”) are turned into equally one-dimensional policies that often leave morals, principles and even common sense in the cupboard.

Both sides of mainstream politics seem locked in an arm-wrestle to the bottom of the barrel. To be fair, meeting with individual members, be they state or federal, generally reveals them to be intelligent, hard-working people – but why the brain-wipe when they go through the doors of Parliament? Why the wait for politicians to retire and become “elder statesmen” before they start talking sense (or even sentences) again?

Former Finance Minister, Lindsay Tanner, argued in his 2011 book Sideshow: Dumbing down democracy that this situation has arisen, at least in part, because of the trivialisation of issues in the fast-paced and relentless media cycle and the political response to this. Certainly, it’s hard to find a balanced picture on anything in the mainstream media these days. But isn’t that just part of the story? Who elects the politicians, and who buys the newspapers and watches TV? Have the electorate’s expectations dropped so low that all this is taken as the norm now?

Changing this isn’t easy, but there are signs of growing numbers of people who are disaffected with the situation and a proliferation of alternative venues for critical reporting and debate. Universities have always been, and need to remain, in the business of training young minds to think critically about important issues, to see past the slogans and ask for more from the media and politicians. And Australia may be able to whop Scotland at rugby, but we could do well to watch and take note as the Scots debate nationhood.