Saline insurgency

By Lindy Brophy

The cradle of civilisation is under threat – not just from violence and conflict, but from salty water and soil.

Research Professor Ed Barrett-Lennard, from UWA’s Centre of Excellence for Ecohydrology, is one of five scientific mentors from Australia who are helping Iraq to tackle the salinity problems that are affecting three-quarters of the country’s irrigated farmland. Around 25,000 hectares of agricultural land is being abandoned each year, adding food security to war-torn Iraq’s list of problems.

The Iraq Salinity Project brings together agricultural researchers and policy makers from Australia, Iraq and international research centres under the expertise of project leader ICARDA, the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, to improve growing conditions on the Mesopotamian plain.

But how do our scientists help Iraqi farmers without putting their lives at risk? “The answer is remotely,” Professor Barrett-Lennard said. “We meet with our Iraqi partners in a neutral state. It used to be Syria, but we can’t go there anymore, so now we meet in Jordan.”

He, three CSIRO scientists and an industry consultant have been passing on their experiences through a project funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) for about two years. They have shared their knowledge in saltland agronomy, especially in the use of salt-tolerant forage crops for improved livestock production, mapping salinity using instruments on the ground and by remote sensing, management of river systems with saline flows and on-farm practices for the management and reclamation of saline soils.

And they have had some great results, after working on similar salinity problems in Australia since the 1980s.

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A creative centenary

Do you have a great idea for celebrating our University's centenary next year?

If you have an event, a work of art, a publication or any other project in mind, you can apply for one of seven small project grants from the UWA Senate Centenary Planning Committee.

Your project should celebrate 100 years of UWA Community and Culture. It will be another chapter in the long history of UWA's community connections.

Saline insurgence

“i’m very impressed with the forage growth,” Professor Barrett-Lennard said. “i’m used to pretty shabby results in WA with salt-tolerant forages, but in one of our trials in Iraq we are getting 10 to 15 tonnes of biomass per hectare, and that’s brilliant. we can’t get within a bull’s roar of those figures here. it shows how constrained we are by lack of water.”

He said the water in the Euphrates River had a salinity of about 10 per cent seawater, 200 kilometres from the coast. But local producers, with mentoring from the Australian scientists and others in the group, are becoming innovative.

One enterprising farmer developed a site for vegetable production, establishing a greenhouse for aubergines (eggplant). He dug out the saline soil, replaced it with sand and organic matter and waters his crop alternately with fresh and saline irrigation water. His yields are high and he is selling his produce at the Basra market.

The project is operating at three levels: regionally, to identify the distribution of salt-affected soils and levels of salinity in river systems; locally, to assess irrigation and drainage infrastructure; and on farms, to find out the best ways to control salt levels in soil.

In addition, salt-tolerant wheat varieties are growing well in soils that have been deep-ripped and leached to reduce saltiness of the soil. Deep drains are being trialled as a means of dropping salty groundwater. And the salt tolerance of local and introduced grains are being tested.

The group has funding until March next year.

“The Australian Ambassador visited our research sites in southern and central Iraq last month and he was very impressed,” Professor Barrett-Lennard said. “We hope this might lead to some continued funding.”

The University has always played a leading role in the cultural and intellectual life of the community. As early as 1913, in its first year, UWA staff were delivering public lectures in Perth and rural WA. The Festival of Perth, now the Perth International Arts Festival, was founded by the University to provide evening entertainment for Summer School participants. It is the longest-running arts festival in the country.

The University’s Cultural Precinct, Institute of Advanced Studies, UWA Publishing, UWA Extension, Friends and Alumni groups and Faculties all initiate or host hundreds of community events on the Crawley campus each year in the beautiful gardens, galleries and theatres, and at its other centres.

The grants will provide up to $3,000 for creative activities by individuals and groups. Successful projects will hopefully address one or more of the following criteria: they will enliven the campus; will innovatively engage the University community and visitors; will be initiated by and/or for Indigenous Australians; will promote a sense of community pride and connection to the University; will help UWA contribute to the intellectual and cultural life of the community; and will be family-friendly.

Artists, designers, musicians and performers are eligible to apply, as are members of the UWA community, including students, graduates, past and present staff, members of UWA Friends groups, and members of the public with a connection to the University.

Applications must be submitted by 2 October, for events to take place in 2013.

Please go to development.uwa.edu.au/donate/centenary/spg

Projects such as the Memory House, part of Dialogues with Landscape last year, are sought for the Centenary

Saline insurgence

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Soldiers guard the Australian Ambassador on his visit to the salinity project (Photo courtesy of ACIAR)
Finding new directions in food and resources

Climate change, biochar, bread quality, nutrition for alpacas and the role of farmer groups could hardly be more diverse subjects.

And they represent the huge range of research being done within the UWA Institute of Agriculture.

The Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Science’s best PhD candidates highlighted the Institute’s research last month in the annual Frontiers in Agriculture postgraduate showcase.

Institute Director Winthrop Professor Kadambot Siddique said research and teaching related to agriculture assumed an ever-increasing importance in the quest to feed a growing world population and the need to be environmentally sustainable in the face of dwindling natural resources and climate change.

“The Institute works with the agricultural and natural resource management sector to improve workforce skills, and to generate new knowledge which will assist industry stakeholders, underpin local and regional prosperity, and exercise responsible stewardship of the environment,” he said.

Eight postgraduate students presented their research at this year’s forum.

Animal Biology researcher Kirrin Lund encountered alpacas during her fourth year research project on the animals’ energy metabolism and behaviour. She moved on to a PhD with some unanswered questions from that project. Nearing the end of her research, she has acquired some of those answers – and two alpacas of her own. Kirrin was supported by the Rural Industries and Development Corporation; her supervisors are Associate Professors Dominique Blache, John Milton and Shane Maloney.

Indonesian-born Annisa developed an interest in genetics during high school but a reluctance to dissect bodies led her to plant genetics. The Plant Biology researcher presented her findings on heat tolerance in Brassica rapa, a species cultivated as a leaf vegetable, a root vegetable and an oilseed. Annisa has an AusAID scholarship and her work is part of an ARC Linkage project. She is supervised by Winthrop Professors Wallace Cowling and Neil Turner and Dr Sheng Chen.

Also in Plant Biology, Mechelle Owen, who grew up on an orchard in Carmel and a farm in York, has been researching herbicide resistance in the WA grain belt. Her work is supported by the Grain Research and Development Corporation (GRDC), through the Australian Herbicide Resistance Initiative. Her supervisors are Winthrop Professor Stephen Powles and Dr Danica Goggin.

Eduardo Dias De Oliveria from Brazil and Donkor Addai from Ghana both looked at adaptation to climate change. Eduardo’s project in Plant Biology studied wheat responses and adaptation in south-western Australia. His research is funded by UWA, CSIRO Plant Industry and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and he is supervised by Professor Siddique, Dr Jairo Patta (CSIRO) and Dr Helen Bramley.

Donkor, from Agricultural Resource Economics, studied the economics of technical innovation for adaptation by broad acre farmers in WA. Donkor’s work is funded by UWA and the Future Farm Industries CRC. His supervisors are Winthrop Professor David Pannell, Professor Ross Kingwell, Adjunct Professor Michael Ewing and Assistant Professor John Finlayson.

Beena Anil, from Earth and Environment, focused on agricultural extension, working on grower groups and their emergence, their role in farmer learning and future challenges. She has a UWA Scholarship and is supervised by Professor Matthew Tonts and Professor Siddique.

In the same school, Daniel Dempster studied biochar and the nitrogen cycle. He has recently submitted his thesis and taken a break from academic life to work on the family wheat and sheep farm east of Northam. His PhD was funded by the GRDC and he was supervised by Associate Professor Deirdre Gleeson, Professor Daniel Murphy and Winthrop Professor Lyn Abbott.

Shuo Wang, a Chinese national who grew up in Germany and the US, began his tertiary education in computer science. As an undergraduate in Minnesota, he used visualisation techniques to understand seismology and convection problems. He came to WA to apply his knowledge to breads which led to fascinating discoveries about bread microstructures. At UWA, in Earth and Environment, his PhD project investigates how changing the processing of dough can lead to improved bread quality. Shuo’s research is supported by UWA, CSIRO, the Department of Food and Agriculture WA (DAFWA) and the GRDC. His supervisors are Winthrop Professor Klaus Regenauer-Lieb, Dr Sumana Bell (Centre for Grain Food Innovation) and Dr Ali Karrech (CSIRO).
With NAIDOC Week to be celebrated throughout Australia from the first Sunday in July, it is fitting to reflect on our University’s commitment to Indigenous Australians and to building a dynamic partnership between the University, the Aboriginal community and the broader society.

Many of you will be aware of NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee) celebrations during this important week in the national calendar, recognised in some form since 1957. At its core is a celebration of Indigenous culture and heritage, but it also puts the focus on the achievements of many Indigenous Australians.

At UWA, we are serious about encouraging Indigenous students to reach their full potential. Since the establishment of our School of Indigenous Studies in 1988, more than 200 Indigenous students have graduated with degrees in Arts, Commerce, Science, Social Work, Psychology, Engineering, Medicine, Dentistry, Health Sciences, Education and Architecture. And we have one of the best success rates nationally for encouraging Indigenous students to undertake and complete Medicine, Dentistry and Health Science.

In part that outstanding success in health-related fields is due to the comprehensive recruitment and retention program run by our Centre for Aboriginal Medical and Dental Health (CAMDH) and the School. The program enables students to imagine medicine or a health career as a viable option, has entry pathways that respond to individual students’ realities and offers support for students once they commence their studies and beyond.

The importance of Indigenous Knowledge is recognised through its inclusion as one of our University’s six research strengths, most notably through the Centre for Rock-Art Research and Management. The Centre promotes collaborative projects with Indigenous organisations, helping us all to learn more about the antiquity and meaning of rock-art.

In our new course offerings too, there are a number of new courses that reflect the value we place on Indigenous Knowledge, particularly in the areas of health and wellbeing, history and heritage.

Recently two Indigenous students from our University were chosen to represent young Aboriginal Australians at the inaugural National Indigenous Youth Parliament in Canberra.

We celebrate the art and culture of Indigenous Australians in the Berndt collection of Aboriginal art and cultural materials (housed in the Dr Harold Schenberg Art Centre) and exhibitions such as the recent exhibition of men’s and women’s art from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands (in the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery) and the current Jimmy Pike Artlines exhibition, which I encourage all of you to see.

I urge you all, during NAIDOC week, to remember that our University is situated on Noongar land, to recognise the achievements of our Indigenous students and staff, and to acknowledge the unique culture and heritage of Aboriginal Australia.

Paul Johnson
Vice-Chancellor

Len flies the flag for Australia

Len Zuks, carpenter and welder in UWA’s building workshop, was busy on campus, sporting his grey overalls as one of the University’s Mr Fixits.

At the same time, Len Zuks the internationally renowned artist had two paintings on display in Lebanon: the first as part of a United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) celebration of World Day for Cultural Diversity; the other as part of a London Olympics exhibition in Beirut.

The International Flag Art Exhibition opened in Beirut in May and will continue in major Lebanese cities until August. Artists from 40 countries around the world were invited to submit original paintings that were transformed into flags to fly on the Beirut waterfront and avenues of other cities.

All the artists were members of the Olympic Fine Arts Association. Len, the only Australian invited to exhibit, became a member of that group when he exhibited his sculptures during the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008.

The second exhibition, a London Olympics solidarity event, brought the Olympic spirit to Beirut this month, with a display of variations on the Union Jack at the British Embassy.

The Olympic artists were asked to create their version of the British national flag. After a day at the Embassy, the flags were transferred to the façade of the historic Phoenicia Hotel, where they will remain for the duration of the Games.

Len Zuks with his painting, Through the Trees
Research leaders from seven international universities – the Matariki Network – have mapped a path for the future.

They plan to harness their collective expertise to tackle global issues such as peace, cyber-security, energy and resources. Last month Professor Robyn Owens, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research, met at Durham University with her counterparts from the Matariki Network of Universities (MNU) to discuss how this could be achieved.

The seven universities in the network are high-quality research-intensive universities, which pride themselves on the quality of their undergraduate programs and the student experience. The initial focus of the network has been on the undergraduate experience.

Their representatives’ exploration of possibilities for collaborative research focused on seven primary research themes. Overall responsibility for each theme will be taken by one of the universities in the network.

Otago University (New Zealand) will lead research into the brain and mind (integrative neuroscience); Tübingen (Germany) will focus on quantum science; Uppsala (Sweden) will concentrate on peace and conflict; Durham (UK) will steer research into disaster resilience; Dartmouth (UK) will guide studies on cyber-security; energy, resources and environment research will be led by Queen’s (Canada); while UWA’s special areas are Medieval and Early Modern thought and affect, and digital support for the Social Sciences and Humanities.

Each of these seven themes is multidisciplinary and intended to be inclusive, although not every University in the network will necessarily be involved in all seven.

The network members will aim to host a workshop on their themes in the next two years and will report on the collective capability within their themes across the network.

The structure of the workshops will be guided by the principles that the network should add value, that the topics considered should be innovative, and include opportunities for early career researchers. Long-term plans should be explored, including provision of external funding.

Potential sponsors of international networks and exchanges, fellowships and funders of collaborative research have already been identified.

The group is discussing the possibility of shared access to research infrastructure, with the initial focus on field stations.

Professor Owens said the MNU members’ collaborations would have a strong global impact. “And our existing research at UWA is enhanced by these collaborations too,” she said.

UWA academics who are currently collaborating with MNU members on any of the listed themes are strongly encouraged apply for a UWA Research Collaboration Award (research.uwa.edu.au/staff/ro/wn/c-gualine) which provides a grant of up to $20,000 to help facilitate ongoing collaborations, leading to enhanced institutional ties, and opportunities for publications, grants, and training opportunities.

If you are working in one of the listed priority areas and would like to explore the possibility of establishing a collaboration with a researcher/s from an MNU university, please contact Associate Professor Judith Berman (judith.berman@uwa.edu.au or 6488 8033).

(Matariki is the Maori name for the group of stars called the Pleiades, also known as the Seven Sisters.)
New equipment at UWA will help our scientists to tackle some of society’s big challenges in health, food production and the environment.

A high-resolution mass spectrometer, used to provide accurate metabolomic analysis of molecules in complex samples, has been donated to the UWA Centre for Metabolomics, which is jointly hosted by the ARC Centre of Excellence in Plant Energy Biology and School of Chemistry and Biochemistry.

Agilent Technologies, a US-based company, has donated this instrument, valued at nearly half a million dollars, as well as $44,000 in funding, as part of a five-year collaboration, through its Global Academic Program.

Researchers are excited at the big increase in capability in areas of research including drug discovery and metabolism, innovative pathway mapping in diseases such as cancer and atherosclerosis, environmental pollution characterisation, food analysis and disease biomarker discovery. The new spectrometer can accurately measure molecules in biochemical pathways, such as those involved in cancer and diabetes.

Metabolomics is the analysis of metabolites (the products of a metabolic reaction) in biological samples and this type of analysis is provided for researchers by the UWA Centre for Metabolomics. The centre supports biological research from many disciplines including plant, animal and medical sciences.

Winthrop Professor Steven Smith, Director of the Centre for Metabolomics, has welcomed the arrival of this critical new infrastructure to UWA. “It will provide cutting-edge metabolomics technology for use by many researchers in diverse areas throughout UWA and the State,” he said.

Professor George Yeoh, a liver cancer researcher at the School of Chemistry and Biochemistry and a group leader of the Cancer Medicine Program at WAIMR, is looking forward to using the new LC-QTOF mass spectrometer.

He has been studying liver cancer for the past 40 years and is internationally recognised for his work on liver progenitor cells and their relation to hepatocellular carcinoma.

“Pathway mapping in cancer cells will allow accurate assessment of the metabolic pathways that are involved in cancer development and mechanisms by which cancer cells grow and maintain themselves,” he said. “This technology affords a means of identifying pathway targets that can be used against cancer cells, as well as for monitoring outcomes of strategies to control cancer cells. We expect that many pathways that have been implicated in tumour development will be more accurately and comprehensively assessed for the first time.”

Rod Minett, general manager, Life Sciences, South Asia Pacific and Korea, at Agilent, said the company had formed a strong partnership with the national Metabolomics Australia network and with researchers at UWA.

“We see real benefit in supporting the UWA Centre for Metabolomics to provide the best quality metabolomics analysis and to assist researchers in solving many of society’s biggest challenges,” he said. “The donation of the LC-QTOF to UWA will give this centre advanced capability and allow the development of new applications to measure small molecules in many areas including biomedical science, environmental science, plant and oceans research. Agilent will provide additional assistance to the centre to support researchers through its experienced applications specialists located in Australia and overseas.”

UWA and Agilent will soon sign a Memorandum of Understanding, committing to a five-year collaboration. For information about the Centre for Metabolomics contact Research Assistant Professor Michael Clarke at michael.clarke@uwa.edu.au
A secure home is a top priority for most elderly people.

But security of tenure for seniors’ housing is a problem in WA that is growing as the population ages. Researchers from the Law School have launched an investigation into the issue, with the hope of their findings leading to policy development and law reform in several areas.

Associate Professors Eileen Webb and Aviva Freilich will first ascertain whether WA’s ageing population is being disadvantaged by laws governing housing and accommodation. Both academics work in the Law School’s Consumer Research Unit.

The pair and their research partner Council of the Ageing WA have $225,000 from Lotterywest for the work. They will talk to seniors, carers, agencies and other stakeholders to identify housing and other accommodation-related issues.

“We want to ask them about their experiences of current housing legislation and investigate any shortcomings or difficulties they may be facing,” Professor Webb said.

“Older people are more likely to suffer stress and anxiety about housing and accommodation because they place a high value on their home environment. They are less likely to be in full-time employment and more likely to spend more time at home and in their neighbourhood than at any other period in their lives.”

The researchers will examine accommodation designated for seniors, such as residential aged care facilities and retirement villages, strata title developments, public housing tenancies, boarding and lodging houses, and residential parks.

They will also consider the law as it impacts on seniors in rural and regional areas; seniors with disabilities; indigenous, culturally and linguistically diverse seniors; and those with low incomes and low assets.

“To date there has not been any one study which seeks to collate such a significant amount of information about seniors’ housing and accommodation law in WA and its specific – and at times unique – areas of concern,” Professor Webb said.

She cited granny flats as one area of concern. “They can be a very useful form of housing for seniors, but if it doesn’t work out for some reason, the elderly person can be left with nothing. Often, an older person will sell his or her home to fund the building of the granny flat, which comes under the original land title. “If either the family or the senior is unhappy with the arrangement, the granny flat can’t be sold separately.”

Professor Freilich said a separate title for granny flats could be one of many great outcomes from this research. Park homes, popular with older people in the lower economic bracket, can also be a problem, as many of them have periodic tenancies, which means no security of tenure.

“Land values in pleasant convenient areas are forcing these parks further away from infrastructure such as public transport and hospitals, both necessary for most seniors,” Professor Webb said.

“We would like to look at getting governments or local councils to take responsibility for purchasing or providing large areas of land for such housing, so people can feel secure in their old age.”

Professors Webb and Freilich are collaborating with a research team at the University of Alberta, Canada, which is studying seniors in rural areas.

“WA and Alberta are both big states which have become prosperous through their resources,” Professor Webb said. “I think we’ll also find similar problems for the older citizens in each state.”
Two of the nation’s best teachers

An accountant and a doctor are UWA’s nominees for prestigious national teaching awards.

Winthrop Professor Phil Hancock from the Business School and Associate Professor Paul McGurgan from Women’s and Infants’ Health, are short-listed for the Awards for Australian University Teaching. The AAUT replaces the former Australian Learning and Teaching Council awards.

Both nominees’ expertise can have far-reaching effects on families. Professor McGurgan’s role in caring for women, in particular during pregnancy, and bringing babies safely into the world is obvious. But Professor Hancock says that everybody requires some level of financial literacy and that many problems in families arise from financial pressures and an inability to manage the family budget.

Wrapped around their professional knowledge and capabilities is a pure love of teaching and learning. While the word ‘passionate’ has become almost clichéd in its overuse, it is the one word that best sums up these two teachers’ attitudes and dedication to passing on their skills.

Finding the excitement in accounting

Phil Hancock is Winthrop Professor of Accounting and Associate Dean Teaching and Learning in the Business School. He has been teaching for 39 years at university level, 20 of them at UWA. He has taught the breadth of the accounting curriculum to more than 6,000 students.

“I am passionate about inspiring my students to enjoy learning, practise reflection and recognise that we all learn throughout our lives. During my career I have taught undergraduate classes in Accounting with class sizes ranging from 30 to 300. I have also taught Honours and Masters level classes and have successfully supervised PhD and Doctor of Business Administration students. I have taught MBA students in Hong Kong, mainland China, Taiwan, and Singapore.

“Good teaching is, in my opinion, critical for universities because without students most universities would not survive.

“My personal teaching philosophy is founded on my desire to inspire student interest in the subject matter whatever it may be. I also encourage them to think about the importance of accounting to them in whatever professional careers they pursue and in their personal lives.

“I believe that as accounting provides information that is relevant to the making of many different types of resource allocation decisions, everyone requires some level of financial literacy. Indeed many problems in families arise from financial pressures and an inability to manage the family budget.

“Unfortunately, given widely held views about the nature of the accounting discipline and the concepts and techniques that define accounting practice itself, many come to their studies of accounting with some apprehension and a belief that not only will it be a difficult learning experience but also one that will be dry, dull and boring.

“I also believe that, apart from being well prepared for each class, you must also have a passion for teaching. If you can teach with passion and enthusiasm, a solid foundation for student interest will be laid despite any prior negative perceptions. To be passionate about teaching is easy for me as I relish the opportunity to interact and talk with learners.

“In my very first class I set out to dispel notions that accounting is boring and to impart enthusiasm for the subject and establish a foundation from which students are motivated to learn over the duration of the trimester.

“Accounting is not boring but is indeed very exciting, given the political nature of the setting of accounting standards is how I start my first class. This always brings raucous laughter and disbelief but I assure them by the end of the unit they will have a much better understanding and appreciation of accounting.
“In my classes I use many real life examples involving accounting issues with companies like ABC Learning, Centro, Enron and WorldCom failures together with humour and fun. I am also able to draw on my wide experience both as an accounting educator, administrator, credit union director, chairman and a member of various professional and regulatory committees to provide students with many real life examples to illustrate various principles.

“In my various leadership roles I have mentored and helped many early career staff as they learn the craft of teaching. I impress upon them the importance of preparation and enthusiasm for the subject. I ask them how they reacted to a lecturer who sounded bored with the subject. I reiterate the point that it may be their fourth class for the week, but it is still the first class for the students and it is absolutely essential to student learning that we as teachers maintain the same level of enthusiasm for the fourth class as we did for the first. Thus, apart from showing my passion for teaching by the way I conduct myself in class, I also judiciously call upon many stories and activities that reveal the humorous, if not funny, side of accounting.”

“Teaching is a privilege”

Paul McGurgan is an academic obstetrician/gynaecologist with research interests in teaching, medical professionalism, evidence-based medicine and simulation training. He is a keen advocate of medical student-led research. His goal in teaching is to fulfil his compatriot WB Yeats’ idiom that ‘Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire’.

“I feel that I have the best job in the world. To be a doctor and a teacher is synonymous; the term ‘doctor’ originates from the Latin word ‘doctors’ meaning teacher. I was appointed to a clinical academic position (specialist obstetrician and gynaecologist) in 2007. This role means that I work as a specialist doctor three days a week, and then have dedicated time for the remainder of the week to pursue my research and teaching interests.

“One of the great strengths of being an academic doctor is the opportunity to incorporate teaching into my clinical practice. The medical students can be a pedagogical challenge – they often hail from diverse backgrounds, both undergraduate and mature postgraduate. My specialist field (obstetrics and gynaecology) deals with the health issues that women face throughout their lives. It is a great privilege to teach and mentor students and junior doctors through the many challenging clinical and ethical situations that can arise. For example, students may see women dealing with miscarriage, termination of pregnancy, childbirth, incontinence and cancer all in one day.

“I teach medical students, junior and senior doctors, nursing and midwifery staff and, last but not least, patients and their families. As such I need to be versatile, able to impart knowledge, skills and behaviour, and be attuned to the different perspectives and needs of the people I teach.

“There is not one way to teach and there are many ways to learn. Students need individualised approaches to their learning and it is the responsibility of the teacher to facilitate this. This is best demonstrated in my work with the UWA Personal and Professional Development program as I co-ordinate the mentoring program, teach other doctors how to be effective mentors, and have developed have a multi-modal teaching and assessment using mentoring, reflective portfolios, seminars and online resources.

“Teaching is a privilege. My goal in education is to engender in students the same degree of enthusiasm and interest that originally inspired me and continues to keep me motivated. Having been in my role for five years, I now see the medical students I once taught become the junior doctors on my clinical team; a vivid demonstration of the process of lifelong learning as a doctor.

“I am responsible for 12 undergraduate students who rotate through my unit every 10 weeks. The small numbers mean that we form a close teaching relationship during this time and often remain in contact after the rotation is completed. As part of the students’ orientation to the hospital, I meet with them and have a get-to-know-you session: asking them about their backgrounds, interests, family lives, career expectations and anxieties.

“Students remark that it is unusual for senior doctors to do this, but I have found that this conversation is a great investment in obtaining an insight into the students’ lives and what problems or issues to be mindful of. The open communication approach means that the students are less reticent about admitting when they are struggling which gives me the opportunity to put in place additional teaching or support processes.

“Obstetrics and gynaecology can be a confronting area of clinical practice, particularly for young, non-Australian, male medical students. These students can feel overwhelmed during the rotation and often approach me for advice and support. Students respond positively to my interactions as noted in these comments:

“I had the privilege of sitting in a consultation with him with a difficult patient. His manner of consultation and discussion with the patient reflects years of experience, tact and knowledge, something that is very inspirational to watch and I aspire to be more like him some day in my professional career. (Year 5 student 2011).”
Despite the progress in many areas that characterises the 21st century, perceptions of mental illness are going backwards.

Professor Johanna Badcock from the School of Psychology and the Clinical Research Centre at Graylands Hospital, is examining stereotypes and mental illness. She has found that the stigma surrounding mental illness is still a major problem in society.

“Society’s views of people with psychosis are still very negatively stereotyped,” she said. “And research indicates that they are even becoming more negative, despite positive publicity initiatives.”

(Psychosis is a severe mental illness, characterised by loss of contact with reality.)

Professor Badcock and A/Professor Milan Dragovic from the School of Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences are working with the North Metropolitan Area Health (Mental Health) Service to combat the negative views.

They have designed and are distributing an online survey on social group stereotypes.

“This is not just a survey based on schizophrenia or other mental illness, but an opportunity to understand Australians’ perceptions of many different social groups,” Professor Badcock said. “They include flying doctors, teenagers, people with drug abuse problems – all groups that most people have strong feelings about.”

“We need to know what drives stigmas and stimulates stereotypes so we can target them effectively,” she said.

“One thing we are hoping to understand is the influence, on firmly-held stereotypes, of having contact with somebody with a mental illness.

Increased contact may not necessarily produce the expected success in terms of dispelling some forms of stigma.

“Of course, social inclusion is absolutely necessary for people suffering from mental illness but it may not be the answer to changing negative stereotypes,” Professor Badcock said.

She said that young men tended not to seek early help if they suffered with a mental illness. “This, to me, says that they may have a stigmatising view of mental illness and can’t accept it in themselves.

“So this survey is a great opportunity for men, especially young men, to have their say. The survey takes about 20 minutes. You can find it at health.wa.gov.au/ccrn/home/stereotypingsurvey.cfm

Emotion runs high in academic research

Psychologist Colin MacLeod’s early research was considered ‘subversive’ and his work part of a ‘revolution’.

But the Professorial Fellow in the School of Psychology and Founder and Director of the Elizabeth Rutherford Memorial Centre for the Advancement of Research on Emotion (CARE) is now one of Australia’s most highly cited academics.

Thomson Reuters, the company which keeps global professional statistics, has recently awarded Winthrop Professor MacLeod a Citation Award for his spot among the country’s top 12 researchers.

These researchers, ranging across the sciences to the social sciences and humanities, have had the highest impact in their field. Professor MacLeod’s field is emotion, in which he is a world leader.

His work has helped to bring together the two fields of cognitive psychology, which involves the study of how the brain processes information, and clinical psychology, which seeks to explain and remediate psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression.

“As a young scientist completing my PhD at Oxford University I was privileged to work with the late Donald Broadbent, a very
influential experimental psychologist who is widely regarded as the father of cognitive psychology,” he said. “This approach conceives of the brain as a biological computer and attempts to explain normal mental capability and experience in terms of how the brain takes in information, transforms it into different codes, stores it and retrieves it.

“This was very different from the approach taken at the time by clinical psychology researchers, who attributed emotional and behavioural problems to simple learning or ‘conditioning’ mechanisms, and considered unusual patterns of thinking to represent only the symptoms of psychological disorders. So in the late 70s and early 80s these fields could not have been further apart.

“Then, in what has since become known by clinical psychologists as the ‘cognitive revolution’, the radical idea arose that the negative thinking styles commonly observed in people with clinical anxiety and depression might instead actually cause these disorders. This realisation that dysfunctional emotion may result from dysfunctional thinking led me and others to ask what patterns of underlying information processing gave rise to these negative styles of thinking.”

At the time, Professor MacLeod was completing his training in clinical psychology at London University’s Institute of Psychiatry, then run by the late Hans Eysenck, a world-renowned advocate of conditioning explanations of psychological dysfunction. So in that context his early efforts to explain emotional disorders in terms of biased information processing were considered somewhat subversive in nature.

“But it was clear to me that the huge continents of cognitive and clinical psychology were on a collision course. Perhaps my early work may have made some contribution to this, but really my good fortune was to stake out my research career at the intersection where these two areas of the discipline would shortly come together at speed. When the resulting collision threw up mountains, those of us working at this juncture found ourselves in their peaks,” he said.

“These mountains have since become well populated, giving rise to the huge contemporary field of cognition and emotion research. Because we were here right at the start, mapping out the key phenomena and establishing many of the major methodologies still in common use, our work had a significant early influence that has endured as we have continued to break new ground across the ensuing years.”

Most recently, Professor MacLeod has gained international recognition for developing and pioneering a new approach to treating anxiety and depression, known as cognitive-bias modification (CBM).

The treatment can be effective after only a few 15-minute sessions, and does not involve drug or counselling therapy. All it requires is sitting in front of a computer and using a program that subtly alters the patterns of information processing that give rise to harmful thought patterns.
A sporting mid-winter break

Thousands of primary school children have enjoyed holiday sports programs at UWA and, this year, their big brothers and sisters can join in.

Uni Sport for Kids (US4K) is a program run by the UWA Sport and Recreation Association during all school holidays, to keep children active in a safe, healthy environment, offering them new skills and new friends.

This winter vacation, for the first time, US4K is running basketball skills training, with the West Coast Waves and students from the School of Sport Science Exercise and Health.

Joshua Van Kampen, who is co-ordinating the program, said the basketball sessions were for 12 to 15-year-olds. “During the first week of the holidays, we are offering three days (Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday) for boys, then the same training on those three days in the second week, for girls,” he said.

Younger children can attend US4K for a week, a day or part of a day. Rates start at $42 for a half-day session. They are well-supervised and kept busy. Many parents on the staff at UWA like the fact that their children are having fun close to their workplaces.

Gymnastics, floorball and fencing have recently been very popular with the children. And they will also have the chance to join in playing cricket, basketball, soccer, football, tennis, squash and badminton.

To see the program, read the parents’ handbook and download enrolment forms, go to sport.uwa.edu.au/us4k or call Joshua on 6488 7661 for more information or to enrol by phone.

There are incentives for early enrolment for the basketball skills sessions.

He could never be described as retiring

Fifty-five years to the day from when he took up a position at UWA, Winthrop Professor John Melville-Jones went off the University payroll.

“Some people might refer to this as my retirement, but I prefer to say that I am changing my pecuniary relationship with the University,” said the 79-year-old Latin and Greek scholar, who is known to many as the Prince of Punctuation, for his attention to grammar.

Professor Melville-Jones will continue his research in the discipline of Classics and Ancient History as an honorary staff member.

Deputy Head of the School of Humanities, Dr Neil O’Sullivan, told a group of well-wishers at his party in the Vice-Chancellor that Professor Melville-Jones had generously moved to a fractional appointment 16 years ago, to free up funds for Classics to keep going.

“But he took a teaching load far in excess of that fraction,” Dr O’Sullivan said.

Professor Melville-Jones said that, arriving from England as a young Cambridge graduate, he very quickly developed a love for his new country and its culture.

“One of the first things I did was to translate Waltzing Matilda into Latin,” he said, and proceeded to perform it for his colleagues and friends, teaching them the chorus.

When the crowd had finished singing the iconic Australian song in Latin, Vice-Chancellor Professor Paul Johnson presented Professor Melville-Jones with an Honorary Bachelor of Arts in Disambiguation, which amused all those who had had their grammar and syntax corrected by him over the years.

In his farewell speech, Professor Melville-Jones didn’t dwell on formal thanks, but turned his attention to the practical elements of his long career on the Crawley campus.

He thanked Human Resources (for paying his salary), the mailroom (for delivering his mail), the security staff (“for ensuring I was not set upon and thumped at my desk”) and UniSuper (for funding the next phase of his life).
A group of about 30 staff and students were excited as they sat down to a meal of four bean dahl last month.

It was not the simple food but the historic gathering that sparked their enthusiasm. It was the first time people from many different faiths (and no faith), had joined for dinner at UWA and initiated a discussion about working together to address issues of social justice and extreme poverty.

Michael Sheldrick, a fellow with UWA’s Religion and Globalisation Initiative, helped organise the dinner, which was held at St George’s College.

“We were hoping the evening wouldn’t descend into a ‘my religion’s better than yours’ debate,” Michael said. “And it didn’t, it was great. It was exciting to see that people from different faiths, and agnostics like me, were able to embrace our common humanity and share a meal together.”

Religion and Globalisation is a multidisciplinary unit in the discipline of Anthropology and Sociology, led by Assistant Professor Debra McDougall.

The Initiative runs in partnership with former British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s Faith Foundation.

“Debra is the driving force behind the unit and the Initiative,” Michael said. “A very diverse group of students take the unit, which is ground-breaking for a secular institution such as UWA.

“Students, many of whom are not necessarily religious, receive a rich educational experience as they critically examine the impact of religion on an increasingly interconnected world.”

Michael said the dinner, hosted by St George’s chaplain Richard Pengelley, resulted in very productive discussions, facilitated by UWA’s Anglican chaplain, Michael Wood.

“It was another example of UWA being part of an internationally renowned partnership and leading the way, along with other leading universities such as Yale.”

The meal was prepared for less than $2 a head to remind the guests that this was a typical meal eaten by the millions of people in the world who are living below the extreme poverty line, which is US$1.25 per day.

Michael, who is completing his law degree this year, is a long-time campaigner with the Global Poverty Project and led The End of Polio campaign, which peaked during CHOGM last year.

The guests represented a wide range of religious backgrounds, from Baha’is, Catholics, Muslims and Jews to agnostics and atheists.

One of the guests, student Tracy Herrick, said the group was venturing into unchartered waters and answering the demand for action against poverty and injustice was the next challenge for the Religion and Globalisation Initiative.

“Religion isn’t a threat. It isn’t the enemy and it isn’t going away,” she said. “It can be a force for good in the world but we need to learn how to accept each other and not be threatened by each other’s world views so that we can finally make great strides in helping the sick and the hungry.”

The participants, many of whom used the word ‘inspiring’ to describe the evening, are keen to translate their discussions into action.

In the meantime, five UWA students are on exchange with McGill University in Canada, studying human rights and religion. Students from McGill will be hosted by the Initiative to do similar studies at UWA.

The Religion and Globalisation unit also runs seminars and discussions on topics including gender, violence and peace.

See also The Last Word.
Healthy response to wellbeing survey

People who work at UWA want to increase their physical activity and they would like to see more healthy food options available at University food outlets.

These are some of the findings of a Staff Health and Wellbeing Survey.

Sean Ashton, Injury Management and Wellbeing (Safety and Health) said 1,319 staff responded to the survey.

“We’re very pleased with the response and I’d like to thank everyone who took part,” he said. “It’s invaluable input for planning relevant initiatives.”

All UWA staff were invited to participate in the confidential survey from 17 April to 9 May 2012. Mr Ashton said respondents were fairly representative of the total staff population in terms of age, work areas and type of staff (academic and general staff), although females were over-represented.

The survey aimed to get an overview of staff health and wellbeing in relation to key lifestyle factors; to understand use and structural supports (such as end of trip facilities, food preparation areas, health checks on campus) and supportive policies are seen as important.

A report is now available on the Safety and Health website: safety.uwa.edu.au.

If you are keen to stay informed about staff health and wellbeing initiatives you can sign up to receive the monthly eNews by emailing wellbeing@uwa.edu.au with the subject ‘subscribe’.

NEW STAFF
17 May to 13 June 2012

Lorraine Aziz, Personal Assistant, Student Services

Pierre Bastoul, Mechanical Engineer, Physics

Louise Cox, Accounting Assistant, Financial Services

Lianne Goodwin, Research Officer, Primary, Aboriginal and Rural Health Care

Dr Md Hossain, Research Officer, School of Earth and Environment

Professor Geoff Laurent, Professor, Medicine and Pharmacology

Roslyn Malay, Project Officer, UWA Centre for Medical Research

Jacqueline Mooney, Faculty Liaison Coordinator, Information Services

Dr Amanda Ridley, Future Fellow, Animal Biology

Alex Scholz, Safety Officer, Facilities Management, Administration

Koshala Shanmugakumar, Administrative Assistant, Facilities Management, Administration

Elis Sinclair, Administrative Officer, Graduate School of Education

Sabrina Swift, Senior Project Officer, School of Indigenous Studies

Dr Tania Tabone, Research Associate, Pathology and Laboratory Medicine

Jane Trevaskis, Admin Assistant, Student Services

Guido Wagner, Senior Technician, Centre for Offshore Foundation Systems

Susan Williams, Senior Web Coordinator, Finance and Resources Office

Piyama Withanarachchi, Accountant, Financial Services

CLASSIFIEDS

TO LET

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 over Toby Ired Reserve, and is a great cottage for all seasons. Please go to quindalup.net.au for further information.

FRANCE – Dordogne: Holiday accommodation. Self-contained apartment in one of the most beautiful Medieval Villages of the Périgord Noir, Belvès. Train and all amenities. For more details see website belves.info or contact Susana Melo de Howard on 0424 5041 or 0438 878 425. Email: susana@belves.info.

MOUNT HAWTHORN: Fully furnished and equipped accommodation available immediately. A beautiful one bedroom church conversion with new kitchen and bathroom. Huge living room (90m2) with 4.5m ceilings. Close to the Mount Hawthorn café strip and five minutes in the car to Leederville. Short and long term stay available. Please contact David on 0437 803 863 or email david@mill@uwa.edu.au.

ALFRED COVE: Lovely home, fully-furnished, available for lease from December 2012 through to July 2013. Three bedroom, one bathroom (separate w/c), two separate living areas, modern, open-plan extension to kitchen, family, dining area. Polished boards and reverse-cycle air-conditioning/heat throughout. Easy-care gardens and swimming pool.

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pool (will be managed). Great location, walking distance to Canning Hwy for transport to Perth (15 min), Fremantle (10 min) or UWA (25 min). Cafes and restaurants at the end of the road (Alfred Cove and Attadale). Photos available or inspection welcome. $600 (negotiable) per week. Please contact Renee Arnold renee.arnold@uwa.edu.au or 0448 807 414.

HOME EXCHANGE
HOME SWAP—THE NETHERLANDS: Modern home, fully furnished house available for exchange between October 2012 and September 2013. This 2-bedroom, 2-bathroom home was built in 2011, and is fully equipped with all comforts, internet, floor heating, induction cooking etc. There is a separate dining area, family, open-plan kitchen and sunny living area. We have an additional granny flat with kitchen and bathroom that sleeps two. Photos available. Large garden (will be managed). We live in the small town of Venhuizen, near the historic towns of Hoorn and Enkhuizen, and less than 60km from Amsterdam. Would love to exchange homes anytime between October 2012–January 2013. Minimum three weeks, preferably within 20km from Crawley. Please contact our daughter marit.kragt@uwa.edu.au, or 08 6488 4653.

ACCOMMODATION
LONDON: Newly converted fully equipped London accommodation (can sleep four) with panoramic views and excellent transport to Central London. Available in nice area of Peckham from one week to three months, at very reasonable price from £400 and £600 during the Olympics. Cleaning fee of £100 and 50% deposit required at time of booking with £500 damage deposit and remainder of rental due before arrival. Contact: melhon@optusnet.com.au

NOTICES
Endeavour Executive Awards
THERE IS STILL TIME TO APPLY FOR THIS YEAR’S ROUND OF ENDEAVOUR EXECUTIVE AWARDS.

They are awards for mid-career professionals in business, industry, education or government. They are valued at AUD$18,500 for professional development opportunities in Australia for between one and four months.

The deadline for applications is 30 June 2012 for awards taken up in 2013.

The Award enables the recipient to build skills and knowledge in a host work environment through activities such as: management training, peer-to-peer learning, mentoring, and short courses. Applicants must be nominated by an Australian host organisation and the professional development activity must be vocational/educational and not geared toward completion of a degree, academic research or an immediate commercial outcome.

The Endeavour Executive Awards are funded by the Australian Government and aim to deepen professional engagements, while building linkages and networks between Australia and participating countries.

For further information, visit studyinaustralia.gov.au/northamerica/Scholarships-and-Funding/Endeavour-Awards/Endeavour-Executive-Awards/Endeavour-Executive-Awards

HELP TO CHOOSE YOUR FUTURE DOCTOR OR DENTIST
The Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences needs VOLUNTEERS to help interview prospective medicine and dentistry students. Interviews will take place during the non-teaching week 22 to 29 SEPTEMBER. Training is provided in late August.

All you need is enthusiasm. Please contact the faculty on 6488 4646 or at meddentadmissions@uwa.edu.au

St George’s College school holiday program
St George’s College is running school holiday programs for Year 4 to 6 students from Monday 9 to Friday 20 July.

They will run daily from 7.45 am until 5pm, $95 per day or $450 per week. (includes breakfast, lunch and tea).

The ratio of students to mentors will be about 5:1 with about 50 students expected to attend daily.

Activities include investigations around our historic buildings and gardens, etiquette, cooking, music, first aid and chemistry magic.

For the full program and to enrol, contact the College on 9449 5555 or admin@stgeorgescollege.com.au

IN A CAMPUS EMERGENCY
DIAL 2222
Security staff will call the emergency services, direct them to you and come to help you while waiting for their arrival.

FOR SALE
APARTMENT: A charming, fully renovated two-bedroom apartment in Mt Lawley (Guildford Road) for sale by the corner. Floorboards, dishwasher, a small balcony and breath-taking views of the CBD (fifth floor). Bus-stop in front of the building; ten minutes away from Beaufort street; conveniently located shopping, and twenty minutes away from the University via the Graham Farmer freeway. The apartment is currently fully furnished (excellent washer, dishwasher, dryer, fridge and freezer and Sony TV, a fully appointed kitchen and tasteful quality furniture in plain wood and earthy colours). The entire furniture package could be included in the price of the apartment, leaving absolutely nothing to do but move in. An excellent investment, hide-away or dwelling for students. Price $370K. Please contact danijela.kambaskovic-sawers@uwa.edu.au

Classified advertisements are FREE for all UWA staff.

Send your ad to: staffads@admin.uwa.edu.au before each fortnightly deadline.

Need a photographer?
Prize nights, book launches, significant visitors and events: most staff want them captured by a photographer.

The University does not have an official photographer, but Public Affairs can provide advice and recommend a range of professional photographers.

Contact UWA Public Affairs for more information: Kate on 6488 7302 or Jeantine on 6488 8000.

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Whatever you need to print, UniPrint can print it. From business cards to newsletters, flyers to annual reports.

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UNIPRINT: Print, Copy and Design Services
Religion can be a force for good in a secular world

By Tracy Herrick

UWA takes pride in its diversity and has many vastly different student-run groups open for participation, both religious-based and those dedicated to social action.

But bringing these varying perspectives together, around one table, at UWA’s first Interfaith Dinner last month, to talk about working together toward a greater goal, had never been done before.

The goal of this particular evening was to open up a dialogue around whether or not it is possible for religious cooperation to be a force for good in the world on issues such as global poverty. I felt honoured to be in the presence of such passionate, open-minded and thoughtful individuals. The excitement in the room was palpable. As I chatted with my neighbours during dinner and listened to the dialogue that followed the meal, there were some basic points that resonated.

The first came up during dinner conversation and, to be honest, was not something to which I had given enough thought before. A new friend expressed to me her excitement about being invited to a public event, outside of her own religious group, where it was okay to talk about her faith.

We may not live in Tudor England, where voicing the wrong religious view meant a fiery death, but there is still a subtle sense of oppression creeping in.

Secularism was initially meant to create a neutral space in public life, so that different religious groups would be able to coexist, but it’s taken on an ideological life of its own.

Even as an agnostic, I can appreciate the fact that a person’s religion isn’t just some casual pastime or something akin to a music or movie genre preference. It’s at the very core of who you are. But nowadays religion is quickly becoming a taboo topic.

Now I’m not talking about the radical groups the media loves. I’m just talking about regular day-to-day life with average people who may never spend a moment on television or holding a picket sign, the kind of people who are more interested in turning essays in on time or getting their children to soccer practice than in converting anyone. The casual mention of anything related to their religion causes them to be greeted with sighs, a little eye rolling, and almost always judgment of some kind. So, rather than ruffle feathers, they stay quiet.

In the meantime, it has become perfectly acceptable to be as loud publicly as you want about how terrible and irrational you think religion is. Secular neutrality has morphed into an anti-religion stance, and I’m not sure that’s fair. It’s not the enemy, and it isn’t the threat. It is part of who we are as a race and we can be a force for good. We need to learn how to accept each other and not be threatened by each other’s world views so that we can finally make real strides in helping the sick and the hungry.