

April 2011

Research News


Southern Cross
UNIVERSITY

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

Pro Vice Chancellor (Research)
Research Directions

Welcome to the Division of Research's first update for 2011.

The most important development over the past couple of months has been the release of the Excellence in Research Australia (ERA) ranking. The outstanding result for the University was the 5 achieved in Geochemistry. Congratulations to all those who contributed to this result. The university was also rated as achieving world standard (ERA rating 3) in Agricultural and Veterinary Science, Forestry Sciences and Nursing. The ERA rating system has flaws, but it is the closest proxy of quality research available in Australia at present. It will also be an instrument used by government, in future, to determine research block grant funding, and Compact negotiations.



Professor Neal Ryan
PVC (Research)

Accordingly, University research strategy needs to take account of ERA. It provides some insight into how scarce research funding dollars might be focused to support the areas that demonstrate quality, and determine the areas that might meet world-class research standards. ERA will also assist our strategies with respect to research entities.

On March 28, the University met with Commonwealth officials as part of its Compact negotiations. Compacts are a contract between the Commonwealth and universities, relating to achieving specific performance outcomes. Improvements in our ERA performance, increasing research funding (particularly national competitive grants and industry funding) and focusing research resources are the main focus of attention in SCU Compact negotiations with respect to research. The clear message to the Australian University sector is that the research bar has been lifted, and expectations with respect to the quality and quantity of outputs are much higher.

There has been some significant progress with respect to SCU's proposal for a Regional Innovation CRC. SCU is leading a consortium of eight Universities developing a proposal for submission by the first of July. The other Universities are the University of the Sunshine Coast, University of Newcastle, University of Ballarat, Deakin University, University of Tasmania, University of South Australia, Curtin University and the University of West Australia. All Universities have committed funding to this proposal and industry partners have now started committing resources.

Finally, I wish to congratulate academic staff on the attention being given to winning grants. There has been a significant increase in the engagement of staff in applying for grants. While the volume of this activity has been stretching the grants staff in the Division of Research, this activity provides encouraging signs for our future performance with respect to national competitive grants. In addition, our new compliance processes with respect to grants provide some confidence that the quality of applications is also improving.



Welcome

Welcome Robert Weatherby to the Division of Research. Robert joins the division as Professor of Research Strategy. He is taking a senior role in the administration of Higher Degree Research, and the conduct of DoR processes and policies. Professor Weatherby will also be taking an active role in SCU's Rail Innovation CRC activity.

Research and Commercial Services Unit

We are delighted to welcome Liz Key to the team as Administrative Assistant. Liz has worked most recently in Health and Human Sciences and brings a great wealth of knowledge and experience from this and previous roles at SCU. For general queries or appointment requests, contact Liz at research.admin@scu.edu.au or by phoning 6626 9361.

Our grants team has been extraordinarily busy with a number of Australian Research Council (ARC) and other funding rounds open. The team held three separate ARC workshops in February and March, providing over 100 participants with information about Discovery, Linkage and Discovery Early Career Research Awards (DECRA) schemes and processes.

SCU submitted 13 proposals to the recently closed ARC Discovery Projects round and there is substantial interest in the current DECRA and Linkage Projects rounds. For more information about ARC and other grants opportunities contact grants@scu.edu.au.

There has also been a lot of activity in Research Services. Among the recently finalised agreements are two projects with the new CRC for Wound Management Innovation. The larger of the two projects, looking at plant compounds for wound healing, will be led by Dr Hans Wohlmuth of SCU Plant Sciences (Centre for Phytochemistry and Pharmacology). The combined funding for the project is in excess of \$1.2 million.

Research Training Unit

The unit will be prioritising developing links with international research partners over the next three years with a view to attracting more international Higher Degree Research students to SCU and encouraging greater mobility and networking of SCU students with international centres.

Professor Philip Hayward, Director of the RTU, recently visited Naresuan University in Thailand (with the head of the School of Tourism, Professor John Jenkins) and the Vietnam Institute of Culture and Arts (with the head of the School of Arts and Social Sciences, Associate Professor Rebecca Coyle) to foster such links.

Indonesia is also a key target and progress is occurring in the form of a visit to SCU by Professor Luky Adrianto from Bogor University in June to discuss HDR exchanges with the School of Environmental Science and Management.

Anne Hart has a new position as the HDR Enrolment Officer in Student Services and is now located in Student Services, X Block, Goodman Plaza. Anne takes all matters that will have an impact on the application and enrolment records of a HDR student. All other aspects of Anne's previous SLO role remain in the RTU and are now administered by Sandra Guthrie. See the Division of Research Contacts for Anne's and Sandra's details.

Excellence in Research Australia

ERA 2012

The Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, the Hon Senator Kim Carr, announced on 25 October 2010 that another round of ERA is scheduled for 2012.

1. ERA 2012 Important Dates

Submission data for ERA 2012 will be collected for the following reference periods:
Research Outputs – **1 January 2005 to 31 December 2010** (six years)
Staff census date – **31 March 2011**.

2. Review of the ERA 2010 Ranked Outlet Lists

The ranked journal and ranked conference lists form an integral part of the ERA evaluation process. The lists provide components used in the ERA 2012 methodology, including:

- defining the eligible Field of Research (FoR) codes that research outputs may be assigned during the submission phase;
- defining the outlets from which the citation benchmarks are derived; and
- defining the ranks used in the ranked outlet profile.

ARC is reviewing the ERA 2010 ranked journal and conference lists, with the process occurring in two phases. The first is public consultation, followed by a second phase where contracted peak bodies and academic groups review the public feedback received during Phase 1. The contracted peak bodies and academic groups will be responsible for making recommendations to the ARC regarding the final determination of the ERA 2012 ranked outlets.

Phase 1

Public consultation opens – **14 February 2011**

New Journal and Conference submission – **closed (21 March 2011)**

Public consultation – **closed 8 am, 4 April 2011**

Phase 2

Following the public consultation stage, the ARC will contract peak bodies and other academic groups to assist with the review of the feedback and to make recommendations regarding the final rankings and field of research assignments for the ERA 2012 lists.

3. ERA Consultation – March 2011

In preparation for the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) 2012 round, the ARC invites comment from the sector about any issues relating to ERA. Feedback is particularly welcome on the Discipline Matrix and on specified issues that have been raised in connection with the ERA 2010 evaluations. Documentation relating to the ERA 2010 round, which provides the baseline for the questions asked, is available from the [Key 2010 Documents page](#).

The ARC will consider submissions on any issue. Please note, however, that some issues may require further consideration for potential future rounds of ERA.

SCU has co-ordinated a consolidated response.

Frequently asked questions are available from the [ARC website](#). More information from ARC regarding ERA 2012 will be available on the [Division of Research website](#).



Dr Peter Kraal at the helm during his first field trip.

News from Southern Cross GeoScience

Dr Peter Kraal has joined Southern Cross GeoScience to work on a three-year post doctoral ARC Linkage project investigating the extreme geochemical environments that form in the Peel Harvey estuary south of Perth. The estuary is a major holiday destination and a wetland system of international significance, but poor land management and development has taken its toll. Like other estuaries around the world, it is now choked by massive algal blooms and thick accumulations of black organic ooze. However, surprisingly little is known about the environmental processes involved. Peter joins researchers including Professor Richard Bush,

Professor Leigh Sullivan, Associate Professor Andrew Rose and Dr Mick Cheetham in seeking to develop a model to describe the major processes occurring within the estuary. Peter recently completed his PhD at Utrecht University in The Netherlands and joined GeoScience after seeing the position advertised at the 2010 Goldschmidt conference.

Speaking of Goldschmidt, Associate Professor Ed Burton will chair a session on the biogeochemical cycling of iron at this year's conference in Prague, in August. The Goldschmidt Conference is regarded as the world's premier scientific meeting in the field of geochemistry.

The GeoScience team investigating the bioremediation of the Lower Lakes of the Murray River attracted some extra attention in February as they completed the last of four field trips. Their measurements of soil and water properties and sampling work in lakes Albert and Alexandrina was documented by a film crew for use in an upcoming DVD to highlight SCU's research capacity. The team consisted of Professor Leigh Sullivan, Associate Professor Ed Burton, Paul Cheeseman and Trent McIntyre. During the past two years GeoScience has been contracted by the South Australian Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to investigate how successful the department's bioremediation efforts have been in reducing sulphates and generating alkalinity in the lakes. Years of severe drought brought both lakes to the brink of ecological collapse and the bioremediation project is an important step in protecting this environment.



The GeoScience team under the spotlight in South Australia.

Building upon its success last year, GeoScience's professional short course on acid sulfate soils is about to be rolled out across the country. The course, delivered with the assistance of Caring for our Country, has been developed specifically for consultants, engineers, contractors, environmental officers and town planners. It will run at least once in every state and territory before June and demand has been great, with waiting lists growing for most locations. During the first half of this year, the course will be offered at Sydney, Adelaide and the Gold Coast.

Giving children a bigger voice

Bridging the gap between research and practice is sometimes a challenge, but not so for researchers working at the Centre for Children and Young People (CCYP). Robyn Fitzgerald is one of the researchers working on a number of major projects that could have significant implications for family law and the development of Australian public policy. The projects, centred on the way that children might participate in some of society's toughest arenas, also demonstrate the many benefits of collaboration with community partners working at the coal-face.

"We hear all the time about the importance of hearing the voices of children in making social policy, but there is little research that has explored how this might translate into practice," Robyn said. "Our project stands to give children a bigger voice in some important debates and so address some of the larger issues surrounding their social exclusion."



CCYP Post Doctoral Fellow Robyn Fitzgerald

With research partner Interrelate Family Services, the CCYP team is developing and trialling a range of new ways that children can have more input into decisions that are made following significant changes in their lives. Interrelate helps families struggling with issues following separation and divorce, and provides supervised contact services for children where there is a history of family violence, neglect and mental health issues.

"Our work is important because it is challenging the way people think about the contribution children can, and should, have in family law decision-making," Robyn said. "Important relationships exist between participation and well-being and self-esteem. Early suggestions are that children's participation enables kids to help shape a better outcome for Mum, Dad and themselves, and we hope our findings will help to inform family law debates."

Robyn, a teacher and lawyer, is well placed to understand the complexities. She said that family law debates tend to be dominated by discussions about the amount of time children spend with parents following separation and how shared parenting arrangements impact on child safety. However, children's voices tend rarely to be heard.

Twelve Interrelate centres across NSW are now exploring how best to give children greater input. Their discoveries will help to shape the organisation's strategic direction and stand to influence wider community attitudes.

"Children have historically been excluded from these domains, mostly on the basis that to include them would be harmful, but also because, traditionally, they have been seen as not having the maturity or capacity to contribute in any constructive way," Robyn said. "Children have been told the contact and resident arrangements and off they go. But kids are telling us that they want more say in these sensitive matters and the practitioners who support them (including family dispute resolution practitioners, child consultants and sex educators) are grappling with the tensions that causes."

This major project – titled *Strengthening Social Inclusion: Developing the Theory and Practice of Children's Participation* – also feeds into broader research that the CCYP is conducting to investigate parenting capacity after separation and divorce, led by Professor Anne Graham. Robyn is also working with the CCYP team on another exciting initiative being undertaken in partnership with the NSW Commission for Children and Young People evaluating the Uniting Care "child-led" research program, which is training children and young people aged 10-14 years to become researchers and to carry out their own research projects.

Each of these projects serve to further the CCYP's vision to work collaboratively with organisations, particularly in regional and rural areas, and to enhance policy and practice related to the well-being and rights of children and young people. The centre keeps its projects "real and relevant" with the help of its ground-breaking advisory group – Young People Big Voice. This team of young people, aged from 12-21, meets with CCYP staff once a month to have their say on the centre's research and evaluation activities. Their input is highly sought-after not only by CCYP researchers, but by those working in child and youth research nationally.

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General Information

We welcome any contributions staff would like to make to *Research News*, especially identifying opportunities to engage in collaborative projects, to join in with joint research proposals or to inform staff of other research opportunities which might exist. *Research News* will provide one means of communicating research across the University. If you wish to contribute to future *Research News*, or have suggestions on how to improve the way in which we inform staff and students on research activity, please contact Louise Gordon louise.gordon@scu.edu.au – or phone 02 6620 3172.

Website

The website of the Division of Research is regularly updated. It provides all the latest research news and forms, as well as a link to this newsletter. The website is: <http://www.scu.edu.au/research/college>.