Flinders University has announced that the construction of new teaching facilities for the School of Medicine is expected to be completed in 2009.

Flinders Vice-Chancellor, Professor Michael Barber, said the new facilities, funded by a $10 million grant from the Federal Government, would include a lecture theatre complex to seat more than 200 students, eight new tutorial rooms and an upgrading of existing teaching spaces.

Professor Barber announced the construction timeline – which will see builders invited to tender later this year – during a visit to Flinders University by the Federal Minister for Health and Ageing, Ms Nicola Roxon, earlier this month.

“The new lecture and tutorial complex will complement Flinders new Health Sciences building which is nearing completion and will provide state-of-the art teaching facilities for the training of our future health professionals,” Professor Barber said.

“The grant, an election commitment delivered by the Rudd Labor Government in the May budget, will also fund new educational facilities at the Repatriation General Hospital in Daw Park and the Noarlunga Health Services centre,” he said.

“We also appreciate the commitment the Federal Government has made to higher education infrastructure which, in Flinders case, will see an additional investment of $8.9 million from the Better Universities Renewal Fund in the upgrading of our facilities.”

continued on page 2
Maritime archaeologists from Flinders University hope to shed new light on a fierce 13th century battle fought by the Vietnamese against the invading fleet of China’s emperor Kublai Khan.

A recent visit to Vietnam by Associate Professor Mark Staniforth and Flinders PhD student Jun Kimura viewed areas that still contain the remnants of the pointed stakes that were fixed into the riverbed and along the banks by the Dai Viet defenders.

Vietnamese general, Tran Hung Dao, defended the mouth and lower reaches of the Bach Dang River, which at the time connected the coast with the capital of Hanoi, by filling expanses of the estuary with the stakes designed to hole or trap Chinese vessels as the tide fell.

Associate Professor Staniforth said that he and Jun Kimura were keen to be involved in fieldwork that will map the extent and shape of the stake fields, in a bid to provide insights into the Dai Viet strategy and the likely course of the battle. Their work may also point to the likely location of the wrecks of Chinese ships.

With a view to setting up the proposed project for 2009, Associate Professor Staniforth discussed possible collaborations in Vietnam with Dr James Delgado, the CEO and President of the US-based Institute for Nautical Archaeology (INA). Jun Kimura has made initial contact with Vietnamese government’s Institute of Archaeology seeking their collaboration in the project.

Contemporary accounts of the battle in 1288 relate that large numbers of a massive fleet of Chinese junks were destroyed. Even allowing for exaggeration by the victors, the battle was decisive, and Associate Professor Staniforth said that once the dimensions of the stake fields have been fixed, there is a good possibility that remote sensing techniques may be used to find wrecked Chinese vessels.

Charles Gent

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Dean of the School of Medicine, Professor Paul Worley, welcomed the significant investment in future training facilities. “Flinders sees itself as a responsible and socially accountable medical school and one of the major concerns at the moment in society is a workforce shortage. “As a result we have increased the numbers of medical students and have accepted increasing numbers of both Commonwealth and fee paying students,” Professor Worley told Flinders Journal.

“The new facilities to be funded by the Federal Government will enable all of our students to have the high quality education that they have come to expect at Flinders,” he said.

“In particular, this investment will enable us to improve the distribution of our clinical education to the Repatriation General Hospital and Noarlunga sites. Flinders has a reputation as the leader in community-based and distributed medical education with our campuses extending from Darwin to Warnabool in Victoria.

“This new initiative will enable us to reflect the significant academic presence we already have at the Repatriation Hospital, in terms of research and teaching, and to develop that presence at Noarlunga.

“It also enables the high standard of anatomy and pathology teaching which Flinders is known for to be delivered for the large group of students at the Flinders Medical Centre campus.”

Peter Gill

Professor Paul Worley

COVER: Flinders University first year medical student, Chris Mitchell, and the Federal Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon, at the Flinders Medical Centre. Photo: Bryan Charlton
Funding boosts crime fighting potential

Flinders University’s contribution to solving crime in South Australia and beyond has been further strengthened with SA Government funding to enhance the University’s forensic DNA capability and build on the long established relationship between the University and Forensic Sciences SA. Flinders will use the $200,000 a year funding to boost forensic science research across the Schools of Biological Sciences and Chemistry, Physics and Earth Sciences, with a particular focus to explore new frontiers in DNA testing and other areas of research to meet Forensic Science SA’s needs.

Forensic science specialist, Professor Hilton Kobus said “the new funding from the State Government will allow Flinders to expand its research work into ‘non-people’ areas of DNA, including the analysis of illicit drugs seizures”.

“Such analysis could lead to a DNA profile of a particular drug sample that might then be linked to other drug seizures and provide new lines of investigation for the police and regulatory agencies,” he said.

“Other emerging areas of analysis include soil sampling where microorganisms provide the DNA material to develop a profile that could be helpful in a diverse range of situations, from crime scenes to bioremediation of polluted industrial sites.”

The new State Government funding will establish a Chair in Forensic Science at Flinders to be filled by a professorial level appointment to continue the ground-breaking role of Emeritus Professor Leigh Burgoyne – which included the invention of a DNA sample paper that has changed the way sampling, storage and extraction occurs around the world.

Flinders University’s strength in the forensic science field was underscored in July when Flinders’ graduates and postgraduates dominated the inaugural Forensic Science SA Awards – winning 11 of the available 16 awards and scholarships.

Attorney General, Michael Atkinson, told the awards night, “that the Government hopes the investment will lead to the creation of a pool of well-trained forensic scientists and help to tackle the severe local and international skill shortage we find ourselves faced with.”

Responding, Flinders Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor Chris Marlin, said “the funding which has been announced by the SA Government is both recognition of the reputation which has been built up by Flinders University in the area of forensic science and an important catalyst to further develop forensic science in South Australia, in partnership with Forensic Science SA”.

Peter Gill

SA economy to slow in 2008-09

South Australia has not converted enough of its resources potential into actual mining developments to avoid a slowing of the State’s economy in the year ahead, according to Flinders economist, Associate Professor Owen Covick.

Discussing the latest research commentary from the South Australian Centre for Economic Studies, Associate Professor Covick said the State’s employment growth would be less than that experienced elsewhere in Australia.

“One of the consequences of an economic situation where, on the one hand, there is a resources boom driving strong growth in incomes but, on the other hand, the Reserve Bank is attempting to curb growth in domestic spending by increasing interest rates, is that it is going to be the less resource-rich States that do most of the economic slowing down,” Associate Professor Covick said.

“This is the situation facing South Australia at the current time. Exploration activity over recent years has confirmed there is an abundance of resource riches within South Australia, and our mining sector is expanding significantly. But in terms of actual mining operations the sector is still much smaller in South Australia relative to Western Australia and Queensland,” he said.

The Centre’s latest forecast is for employment growth for Australia as a whole from 2007-08 to 2008-09 to be around 2.2 per cent, slightly lower than the current year growth of 2.7 per cent. However, in South Australia employment is expected to increase by only 0.5 per cent as Gross State Product advances by only around 1 per cent.

Peter Gill

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A Flinders University research team has revealed a locally-developed community network may help to improve the levels of attendance, behaviour and achievement of students at three schools located in Adelaide’s northern suburbs.

A collaboration between the University’s School of Education and the Family Learning Network, the study also uncovered a strong sense of community pride running within the students and parents in the area, despite years of negative representation in the media.

Presented last month, the findings were from the first stage of a three-year evaluation of the Family Learning Network, a program established by the Northern Area Community & Youth Services (NACYS) and three primary schools in the Elizabeth area, designed to enhance the health and wellbeing of families in disadvantaged areas and promote student achievement through collaboration.

According to Dr Judith Peppard, who led the research team, the aim of the first stage of the study was to ascertain the life experiences of teachers, parents and students living in the area and to analyse school data relating to student attendance, behaviour and achievement. Despite generating some negative findings in relation to behavioural patterns and achievement, Dr Peppard said the study team was impressed by the high level of community spirit present within each of the schools, especially from the parents and students, as well as the commitment of teachers.

“The early indications are that the incidence of problematic sleep is much higher than we anticipated,” Dr Gradisar said.

Early results show some adolescents take almost an hour to fall asleep, contributing to bad sleep patterns.

To address these problems, Dr Gradisar and his team have set up the Child and Adolescent Sleep Clinic where they correct sleep problems in school-aged children. Treatments are also offered for infants and toddlers. For further information visit http://socsci.flinders.edu.au/casc or phone (08) 8201 7587.

Charles Gent

Bad marks for kids

Grumpiness and lethargy are well recognised behaviours in school kids with insufficient sleep, but a new study at Flinders University shows that lack of sleep impairs children’s ‘working memories’, negatively affecting their academic ability and ultimately dragging down their marks and grades.

Flinders psychologist and sleep researcher Dr Michael Gradisar led a study of adolescent schoolchildren to assess the performance of complex tasks that require information to be retained while other information is processed are affected by levels of sleep. Previously, investigations of links between poor sleep and working memory performance based on simple memory tasks suggested that performance was unaffected.

“I thought that despite getting inadequate sleep, kids could tolerate it and still function,” Dr Gradisar told Flinders Journal.

“But we have found that when challenged with a more complex task, adolescents who have been having less than eight hours sleep begin to have trouble,” he said.

Dr Gradisar said adolescents who had insufficient sleep displayed an impaired ability to encode, store and retrieve information. In the school setting, these difficulties affect tasks such as dictation, which requires information to be retained while writing, and multi-step problems in mathematics.

“Kids learn a whole range of different abilities at school, and we have shown that some of these abilities are susceptible to sleep loss. This has implications for their learning and their overall grades,” Dr Gradisar said.

Following the small-scale studies, PhD student Michelle Short has embarked on a larger project to determine the prevalence of inadequate sleep among school students in Years 9 to 11. As well as completing a questionnaire, participants keep a sleep journal for a week, and their activity levels are logged by a wrist monitor.

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Charles Gent

Local input may lift school outcomes

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“Schools were seen as a positive aspect of community life by both parents and children, especially in relation to the support that each of the schools gave parents as well as their children,” Dr Peppard said.

“Parents spoke highly of the concern and care the teachers have shown towards their children and believe that, despite a lack of adequate services now, the Family Learning Network does have the potential to deliver some tangible positive outcomes for residents of the northern metropolitan area.”

However, in order for the Network to achieve its goals Dr Peppard warns that support in the form of funding and policy must be provided by the government at both a State and Local level.

Emma Kibble
Indigenous education vital to health

Australia must address the critical lack of Aboriginal teachers and researchers if gains in Indigenous health are to be achieved, according to Flinders University Associate Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney.

Drawing a direct link between education and health, Associate Professor Rigney, the Director of the Yunggorendi First Nations Centre for Higher Education and Research, said that a national “intervention” was required to boost the education system.

“Aboriginal health in this country is only going to get better if we start to address, from the very outset, education,” Associate Professor Rigney told the Fulbright Symposium in Adelaide.

“South Australia is the only state in Australia that has a curriculum from birth to Year 12 – no other State has this. So this as a major intervention that needs to be on a national scale,” he said.

“We need to target Aboriginal teachers particularly because there is no other profession in our society that directly impacts upon the next generation. For instance, only 0.3 per cent of all teachers in Australia are Indigenous – we have an Aboriginal teacher education crisis.

“We need to address this because Aboriginal people are turning away in their droves from the teaching profession yet, to teach an Aboriginal child health skills, teaches a fundamental skill.

“What we do need at this stage is a national transition strategy to be able to take indigenous students to Year 12 and then move them into universities.

“We not only need teachers, educators and medical doctors and nurses.

We also need Aboriginal researchers. The concept of reform in this country is built upon research, and Indigenous researchers are needed.

“And we must throw out the poisonous ideology of educating an Aboriginal child out of an Aboriginal education – indigenous languages are fundamental, indigenous pedagogies and literacies are important.

“I think, at a time when some of my colleagues inside the education discipline are advocating that Aboriginal languages and cultures should stay at the door, that such views are poisonous to the future of Aboriginal health in this country.”

Flinders University and the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health co-hosted the prestigious Fulbright Symposium in Adelaide this month. Entitled Healthy People, Prosperous Country, the Symposium brought a range of international and Australian experts together to examine how such issues as education, employment, housing and the economy impact on health.

Peter Gill

Symposium hears inequalities impact on health

More than a quarter of the deaths from cardiovascular disease in Australia in 2002 were caused by socioeconomic equality, according to Professor Sir Michael Marmot.

A leading international researcher who chairs the World Health Organisation’s Commission on Social Determinants of Health, Sir Michael told the Fulbright Symposium that many factors contributed to individual and national health.

He said action was required on a broad front – from the circumstances in which children are born to the way in which they grow, work and age.

“In Australia, if everyone experienced the same death rates as those in the least disadvantaged areas 28 per cent of deaths from cardiovascular disease (CVD), over 3,400 CVD deaths would have been avoided in 2002,” Sir Michael said.

“These excess deaths are due to socioeconomic inequality,” he said.

Citing evidence from the United States, Sir Michael made the case for the positive role to be played by improvements in education.

“Medical advances averted 180,000 adult deaths in the US between 1996 and 2002. Addressing educational inequalities in mortality would have saved 1.4 million lives,” he said.

The Federal Minister for Health, Ms Nicola Roxon, told the Symposium that a National Indigenous Health Equality Council would be established to advise the Government on how best to achieve the closing of the health gap between Aboriginal and other Australians.

Announcing that the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health research director, Professor Ian Anderson, will chair the new Council, Ms Roxon said one of its first challenges would be increasing the numbers of Aboriginal health professionals.

Ms Roxon said that more Aboriginal doctors, nurses and other health workers “may well hold the key to making a lasting difference long term”.

“Closing that gap is what marks us out as a decent, humane, compassionate community, with a commitment to equality which we can be proud of,” she told the audience.

“We are determined to do what is necessary. We are investing in health; we are investing in education; in employment; and in housing.”

Peter Gill
Flinders University will provide the technology and research expertise in a major international collaboration that aims to improve the quality and use of Singapore’s storm-water. The practical applications of the new technology flowing from the project will ultimately be transferred to Adelaide and the rest of Australia under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in Singapore late last month. The MOU commences with a $1.1 million research project that brings together Flinders’ expertise in leading edge water technologies and research capability with a major Australian water company, United Water International, and the National University of Singapore, the Singapore-Delft Water Alliance (comprising Singaporean public utilities and Dutch water experts) and Deltares Netherlands (a Dutch business consortium). The project will install and trial a state-of-the-art filtration system in a major canal in Singapore down which millions of litres of tropical rainfall currently flow from dense urban areas to reservoirs and the sea, carrying with it undesirable impurities. Flinders Business Development Coordinator, Medical Biotechnology, Mr Raymond Tham, said a highly porous, large capacity, modular filter system being developed by Flinders will purify the storm-water and have major cost and efficiency advantages over conventional gravel and sand-based filter systems. “Eventually the technology, if successful, will be trialled on a larger scale,” Mr Tham said. The MOU signing ceremony was witnessed by South Australia’s Water Security Minister, Karlene Maywald. “Partnerships such as these enable institutions like Flinders University to develop their innovative thinking and processes into applications of real value to South Australian and the world,” Ms Maywald said. Flinders Vice-Chancellor, Professor Michael Barber, said the two year project, co-funded by the Australian Research Council, was “an excellent example of international collaboration to address a major environmental issue”.

One of Malaysia’s most celebrated social justice activists and Flinders University graduate, Zaitun Mohamed Kasim, passed away in Kuala Lumpur early last month after a short battle with cancer. She was 41. Known to her friends and colleagues as Toni, Ms Kasim led an extraordinary life of activism and advocacy across a wide range of areas, including migrant and refugee rights, environmental issues, poverty alleviation, workers’ rights, and health education for marginalised groups, particularly for the transgender community and sex workers. However, her greatest passion lay in the area of women’s rights which was fuelled by her deep conviction that without the liberation of women there could be no real end to human oppression. Close friend, Dr Alia Imtoual, from Flinders’ School of Education, said Ms Kasim inspired everyone she met. “Toni made a difference to us all - her sense of humour, love of people and passion for justice prevail even now to remind us of the endless tasks before us,” Dr Imtoual said. “She was tireless in her championing of open dialogue, political accountability and intelligent activism. It is not an exaggeration to say that many working in civil societies and non government organisations today count her as their personal hero,” she said.

Emma Kibble

Ms Toni Kasim

Peter Gill
Science sparks student interest world-wide

A flaming jelly-baby was among the attractions of a recent International Science Fair at the Australian Science and Maths School (ASMS) which brought 35 budding young scientists from specialist science schools in Korea, Canada, Thailand, Japan, Singapore and Western Australia to Adelaide.

ASMS, which is located on the Flinders campus, is a dedicated secondary school for Year 10 to 12 students. As well as providing a specialised curriculum, the school develops new approaches to teaching and learning in mathematics, science and technology.

The theme of the week’s activities for the Year 11 level students was Bio Innovation, and after a welcome from Flinders Vice-Chancellor Professor Michael Barber, the participating students heard presentations from Flinders, ASMS and CSIRO staff on recent developments in biomedical engineering, sports science and food and nutrition.

ASMS Deputy Principal and International Programs Manager, Mr Graeme Oliver, said while the ASMS fair is just one of several junior science events held around the world annually, it is distinctive for its practical emphasis. The jelly-baby, for example, demonstrated the dramatic effects of high oxidation on a high-energy source like glucose during an experimental session on explosive chemistry; other hands-on workshop projects explored ‘Indigenuity’, botanical distillation and the biomechanics of the human body.

The visiting and local students also discussed ethical issues around the use of genetics in medical innovation, and had a crack at solving a murder mystery by employing techniques from forensic chemistry.

In common with real science conferences, there were poster presentations, and a journal covering the students’ research activities during the fair was published.

“One of the differences of our fair – and one that people like – is the higher level demands we put on the students to contribute,” Mr Oliver said.

“Getting together like this also gives us an indication of how far these other schools are stretching the boundaries of involving their students in leading edge work – we want to be connected with setting the benchmarks around the world.”

Charles Gent

University’s green strategy crucial

Flinders University has a unique opportunity to establish itself as a national leader in the use of energy efficient practices, with the implementation of its highly anticipated environmental strategy later this year.

The strategy, which is currently being developed by the University Council, will also provide Flinders with a chance to strengthen its identity as South Australia’s “green” University and, as such, appeal to more environmentally conscious students, according to Council member Sam Taylor.

“This policy is Flinders’ chance to set itself apart from the other universities in this state and across the country and take a leadership role in using greener energy,” Mr Taylor, one of two student representatives on the Council, said.

“Given that this could have an effect on the University and its community for years to come, it is a crucial time for Flinders and I am glad to be a part of the process.”

A third year marine biology student, Mr Taylor has participated in various levels of University governance throughout his degree, including as a member of the Science and Engineering Faculty Board and as Treasurer of the Marine Biology Students Association.

Mr Taylor’s strong commitment to environmental issues has also inspired him to work with a range of community organisations to tackle similar concerns, including helping Surf Lifesaving South Australia to implement a green policy, as well as participating in a youth roundtable co-hosted by the Conservation Council and the Office for Youth.

With a new-found appreciation for the level of expertise and effort needed to govern the University, as well as possessing a desire to see the environmental strategy through to its conclusion, Mr Taylor is already considering running for a second term with the Council, despite being only halfway through his first year.

“I couldn’t ask for a better learning environment than this,” he said.

Emma Kibble
Advertisements give voice to volunteers

Community service advertisements made by Screen Studies production students at Flinders for 10 South Australian community organisations will be seen by hundreds of thousands of people in coming months.

The advertisements are the product of the Community Voices Program, which receives annual funding of $50,000 from the State Government’s Office of Volunteers. In addition to 30-second advertisements, the project also produced short documentaries for some of the community-based groups.

The videos were launched by the State Minister for Volunteers, Jennifer Rankine, at a screening at Flinders University earlier this month.

Head of Screen Production, Mr Cole Larsen, said the program has proved very successful in its aim of assisting the organisations with their volunteer recruitment and fundraising, and in increasing the public profile of voluntary services. The program also provides students with experience in the process of commercial filmmaking, from the initial brief through to concepts and scripts, casting and sourcing locations as well as shooting and editing.

“Some of the advertisements hold their own with professionally produced products which cost substantially more,” Mr Larsen said.

Mr Larsen said that not only do the students learn the real-life dynamics of problem-solving, negotiating and developing client relationships, but their contact with the organisations exposes them to broader aspects of life they might not otherwise encounter.

“They get to deal with organisations that, for instance, work with disabled kids or help in drug rehabilitation: it’s valuable, eye-opening life experience,” he said.

The community organisations selected in this year’s round were: Community Accommodation and Respite Agency; Drug Arm Australasia; Good Beginnings Australia; Guides South Australia Inc; Interchange; Royal Zoological Society of SA; St John Ambulance SA; Technical Aid to the Disabled SA; The Hut Community Centre; and The Leukaemia Foundation of Australia.

The advertisements will be broadcast during major sporting events and prime time programs, while the documentaries will be distributed to local councils and libraries, as well as being used by the organisations for internal and corporate promotion.

Charles Gent

Diary dates

WEDNESDAY, JULY 30 2008

A new networking forum, designed to “match” Flinders academics with industry figures in the hope of generating greater University-industry interaction and collaboration, will be held on campus later this month.

Hosted by Flinders Partners, the Meet Your Match event will provide academics with a platform through which to meet and discuss their research and ideas with business and industry identities who share common areas of interest.

A “speed dating” session will start the event, enabling all attendees to meet and briefly discuss backgrounds and interests and exchange business cards, before taking part in a larger networking session with drinks and nibbles.

Meet Your Match will be held on Wednesday, 30 July, 2008, in the Function Centre at Flinders University from 5.00pm.

To register interest or for more information, contact Melissa Geue on 8201 7735 or email melissa.geue@flinderspartners.com.

Three nation project to improve water

University World News reports that organisations in three nations are involved in a major international collaboration between Flinders University in South Australia and the National University of Singapore to improve the quality of the island city-state’s stormwater.

University World News – www.universityworldnews.com – is an online global higher education publication focusing on international higher education news and analysis, developments, events and announcements.

Charles Gent

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