

# Adelaidean

NEWS FROM ADELAIDE UNIVERSITY

JULY 17, 2000

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# COMMENTARY

## HOW CAN WE IMPROVE POST DOCS?

**Dr Evan Evans**  
Post Doctoral Fellow  
Department of Plant Science

I was interested to read recently in the *Adelaidean* that a post doctoral fellowship (ie, non-tenured research worker) was still considered an "education/training" position. A quick perusal of the selection criteria or duty statements for recent post doctoral positions would quickly dispel this belief. Conversely, any university academic (post doctoral or tenured faculty) who is not constantly training and developing is stagnating!

In today's university, post doctoral fellowships are quasi-professional positions.

There is at least a tenfold oversupply of qualified PhDs for the available tenured faculty positions in Australia. This oversupply of PhDs, along with postgraduate students, is utilised by the universities to drive the research wheel, from which a considerable amount of the universities' prestige and income is based.

The post doctoral career is generally short-term and is based, if you are good and lucky, on a series of short-term contracts. This "flexible employment" philosophy has much in common with that employed by the hamburger industry. The apparent lack of suitably qualified students to undertake postgraduate scholarships suggests that the prospective student marketplace is fully aware of the limited future of the "McPhD" and "McPostdoc" career path.

This situation has, of course, been highlighted and discussed on many occasions. However, being part of a university we are expected to be innovative thinkers, which suggests that there should be some solution to this problem. The most obvious is money, but adequate funding is

unlikely in the current political environment. Rather than complaining further, I would like to suggest the following pragmatic strategies to alleviate the worst aspect of a career in research.

In many of the successful departments in the university, there has been a gradual attrition of tenured faculty staff due to budgetary constraints. In practical terms, this means that many faculty staff have most of their time allocated to teaching, administration and research grant supervision; so much so that a number of the granting agencies are now questioning whether the grantees have sufficient time to devote to new projects. This restriction could be overcome with a more widespread mentoring program for post doctoral fellows, not only to win grants to secure their own funding, but to initiate new projects to employ further research staff.

This strategy would require a change in attitude toward post doctoral fellows by the upper echelons of the university and could be beneficial to all. At the very least, whenever a post doctoral fellow is the successful initiator and primary author of a grant application, they should be allowed to be the first author or supervisor for that grant. In addition, encouragement in terms of payment of a proportion of the infrastructure funds associated with each successful grant would assist with building the research program and facilities of the post doctoral fellow. In short, post doctoral fellows should be treated as fellow professionals.

Perhaps the number one problem for post doctoral fellows is security of tenure in the current contract system. This is also an obstacle for the initiation and supervision of grants. For most research staff at this university who submit continuing grant

applications there is generally a high probability of success. However, this probability does not equal 1.0 because of the fickle and competitive nature of granting organisations such as the Research and Development corporations and the Australian Research Council in particular. Even with an excellent grant application, a researcher may miss out on the grant and lose their job with little notice if the application makes it through to later evaluation rounds. This small probability of failure plays heavily on the minds of professional research workers, particularly if they have a mortgage and/or a dependent family.

The solution is what I call a "safety net" or "second chance" grant scheme. If a grant application is culled at the later stages of the grant review process, then it automatically becomes eligible for a competitive subsistence grant for one year. This would allow for new and improved grant application/s to be submitted the following year for funding. It would also allow the completion of publication of manuscripts from the previous project, and prevent the loss of talented here i superprnivers

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## Adelaidean

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## Greater choice and better quality

It's a great time to be a student. Or to be thinking of taking up study again. This might sound strange at a time when public funding of universities is decreasing in real terms. Certainly a possible response to the fall in public funding is to cut the range and quality of offerings in universities. But we're seeing another phenomenon as well: attempts by universities to explore how they can work together in mutually-beneficial ways to increase choice and quality for students.

The way universities are interacting with each other and with private sector partners is bringing a new emphasis on the variety, mode and quality of higher education courses available. In Australia, when we think of universities working together, I suspect we tend to think of Universitas 21, the consortium of 18 universities from various countries. It has three Australian participants, the Universities of Melbourne, Queensland and New South Wales.

But there are plenty of other consortia. One, operating predominantly in the United States, is UNext.com, an internet education company which has a range of high-profile investors and has among its education partners Carnegie Mellon, Chicago, Columbia and Stanford Universities and the London School of Economics and Political Science.

The President of UNext.com Learning Systems, Donald Norman, described recently how UNext.com emphasises pedagogy and content and the structure of courses to promote learning through a rigorous process of course development and testing. All their courses are problem-based with substantive content. In addressing whether UNext.com courses are better or worse than those offered by traditional universities, Donald Norman said: "Our courses are of the same quality as the best traditional ones, but they are also very different, for they are aimed at a different audience, with the material delivered over different media and with no in-person interaction."

We might ask how this differs from the various distance-learning offerings provided by Australian institutions such as Charles Sturt University and Deakin University. Probably the big differences are the big brand names associated with UNext.com and the significant private sector resources available to the course developers.

There are other sorts of consortia, too. For example our course leading to a Masters of Science and Technology Commercialisation is offered by a consortium of ourselves, the University of Texas at Austin, and the Mexico-based Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey. We are also developing Masters courses with consortium partners at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand, Waseda University in Japan and the Universiti Putra Malaysia.

All these Masters courses have, or plan to have, a considerable video-conferencing element, not only for the delivery of lectures but also for tutorial and project groups, enabling students based in different countries to interact to solve problems or to produce major project solutions. As well as getting quality course material and challenging problems to solve, students learn how to communicate and interact effectively across cultural and technological boundaries.

We are bound to see more offerings from new consortia and groupings, public and private. As I said, it is a great time to be shopping around for university courses. And it will be an exciting and very challenging time to be working in universities around the world.

MARY O'KANE

A VIOLENT attack on a student near the North Terrace campus has prompted Security Services to issue an alert to all students and staff.

The student was walking to her parked car shortly after 7pm on 5 July when she was attacked from behind at Plane Tree Drive (near the Zoo). Her attacker was a male jogger dressed in a dark-coloured tracksuit and baseball cap. The student fought him off but suffered facial injuries and required stitches.

Security Services has urged all students and staff to report any other incidents or suspicions to the Security office at Hughes Plaza or to the police.

It has also issued a reminder about the Escort Service which is provided to the university community 24 hours a day. This service is available to anyone who has to walk around the University—or to and from

the University from off campus—and does not feel safe doing so alone. A security officer can escort you on foot, or in a security vehicle. To ensure that someone is available when you need them, it is best to give the Security Office prior notice if you would like to use the service.

This is a free service to staff and students for occasional situations of safety. If you expect to be working late regularly you should try to make arrangements to walk with other members of staff.

Security Services offers the following additional advice for night time personal safety:

- be alert and aware of your surroundings
- avoid dark, vacant or deserted areas; use well-lit, well travelled routes
- dress in clothes and shoes which will not

• l18.d

AUSTRALIA'S deregulating dairy industry can learn important economic lessons from its booming wine counterpart and become another export-led success story for Australia, according to the latest research from Adelaide University.

A discussion paper written by the director of the University's Centre for International Economic Studies, Professor Kym Anderson, says the dairy industry is already poised to build on its own achievements of the past 10 or so years—but could expand even further if it heeds the example of wine.

"There is no more spectacular rural economic success story in Australia than the wine industry during the past decade," Professor Anderson said.

"Increased export demand explains much of the industry's growth over the 1990s, and has come about mainly through an increasing emphasis on quality, and a much bigger effort trying to boost Australia's image overseas as a producer of good value-for-money wines.

"The clearest implication for the dairy industry is that dramatic export-led expansion is possible, but not without substantial hard work and large investments of time, effort and money.

"This effort must be invested in all three stages of the production process: primary production, processing, and marketing and distribution."

Professor Anderson said the dairy industry was being forced to compete more at a global level: it became fully deregulated on 1 July 1 2000,

after decades of being supported by domestic consumers via artificially high prices.

"While this means increased competition for local producers at a national level, it means the industry will be regarded more favourably by other countries as it strives to increase its profile outside of Australia. In particular, it will make it easier to try and convince other countries to provide greater market access for Australian products when we have no protective regulations in our own country," he said.

Professor Anderson's paper, *Lessons for Other Industries from Australia's Booming Wine Industry*, identifies five key strategies which could be considered by the dairy industry in light of the wine industry's phenomenal growth in the past decade:

\*Market opportunities—need to be identified and reinforced. For example, demand in both Australia and other countries for high quality specialty products (such as non-cheddar cheeses), and for reduced-fat products including liquid milk, is increasing quickly. Another area which should be expanded is both domestic and export sales of speciality cheese as sales of premium wines grow, given the strong relationship between wine and cheese consumption.

- Exploiting economies of scale—in marketing and distributing dairy products, especially overseas, which may not be fully exploited yet. To do that probably involves further mergers, acquisitions and contractual and alliance

**Advertisement**

# Tailoring new cotton genes for industry

IT was once the proud boast that Australia rode on the sheep's back. We were known worldwide for the quality of our wool, and export income showed it. Synthetic fibres changed that picture. Modern fabrics are often blends of natural and man-made fibres, and Australian wool exports have suffered accordingly.

The other major natural fibre is cotton. Traditionally grown offshore, it has recently been introduced as an Australian crop. Like wool, it is often blended with synthetic fibres, but Adelaide University scientists are working to improve the quality of natural cotton fibres themselves.

Cotton fibres are unique. Each is a single cell up to 2.5 cm long. Thousands of them together form a white, fluffy cotton boll that is harvested when mature, and all the fibres from a single boll are developmentally identical. Identifying and modifying the genes that control the development of these fibres promises many potential benefits in changing their properties and, therefore, the properties of threads and fabrics produced from them.

In Australia, Upland cotton is mainly grown in Northern New South Wales and Southern Queensland. In the 1998-1999 season, 553,000 hectares were planted to cotton, with 15% of the crop being genetically modified (transgenic).

Ingard, Australia's transgenic cotton, has a natural resistance to a major pest, the cotton bollworm. Growth of Ingard cotton has resulted in a drop of 40-50% in overall pesticide use as measured over three seasons from 96-99.

90% of Australian cotton is exported to buyers in Indonesia, Korea and Japan and its value is more than \$1 billion per year, recently overtaking export earnings from wool for the first time. Lake Tandou near Broken Hill grows Pima cotton; lower-yielding than

Upland cotton but finer, and exported mainly to Italy and Switzerland.

Dr Sharon Orford and her colleagues in Adelaide University's Genetics Department are interested in the regulatory aspects of fibre development. They have already characterised several genes that are Tepverrmon

**Advertisement**

# INTERVIEW

## *MOLECULAR BIOSCIENCES TAKE CENTRE STAGE*

ON 5 June, the departments of Biochemistry, Genetics and Microbiology & Immunology combined to form a new Department of Molecular Biosciences.

*Advertisement*



# Adelaide percussionist takes music to world stage

AN ADELAIDE University music graduate and now world-class percussionist believes many more Adelaide students could follow in his footsteps and succeed on the world stage—they just have to be more confident about their abilities outside the local community.

Tim Jones graduated from Adelaide in 1995 and has spent the last three years obtaining his Masters in Percussion at the University of Las Vegas-Nevada.

He said after spending time in Australia and the United States, he has realised the supposed gulf in players' abilities from both countries is next to nothing.

## ACCOMMODATION

**BEACHFRONT:** Townhouse, fully furn & fully self-contained, 2 br plus study, balcony, sea views, avail now. Ph Anne 8400 8137.

**EASTERN SUBURBS:** 3 br, fully furn, fully equipped homette, gas space heating, air cond, close to transport, avail now. \$290 pw including utilities (bond required). Ph 8333 1279 or email: <dryland@senet.com.au>.

**FREWVILLE:** Fully furn, 3 br townhouse, close to Waite/Adelaide campus, security, sprinkler system,

avail immed. \$275 pw. Ph 8295 8542.

**HOUSE SITTER AVAIL:** Responsible, mature woman visiting from interstate avail from mid-Dec to end Jan. Will care for pets & garden. Ph Prue 8222 7541.

**LEAVE HOUSE & CAT:** 1 Aug - 10 Sept, dates flexible, nominal rent, transport to city. Ph Miles 8278 6953.

**LOIRE VALLEY:** Renovated, 2 br house on small private estate. Kitchen/dine, sitting rm, luxury bathrm, linen provided, garden, parking, walking distance to town centre. £220-£350 pw. Ph/fax Vera 33 2 4759 9833.

## Adelaidean CLASSIFIEDS

**MYRTLE BANK:** Large br with b-in robe & b-in desk, en suite, share kitchen & living rm, off street parking; mature person pref. \$130 pw + 4 week bond + general exp. Ph Sharon 0414 700 129.

**SOMERTON PARK:** Seaside apartment avail Sept 00, suit couple or 1 person. 100m to beach, close to transport. \$135 pw. Ph 8295 8160.

**SWITZERLAND:** Furn flat 4km from Interlaken, on lake with view of Alps. 2 br, large

lounge, can sleep up to 6, available for 1 week or more. Ph Liliane 8362 4243.

**WANTED:** House and car - US Prof wishes to buy used car/minivan and rent 3 br house close to public schools and transport. Arriving 15 Aug for 10 mths. Email: <rbmartin@ucdavis.edu>.

## FOR SALE

**AGAPANTHUS:** Cobalt blue, 150 plants, \$70 the lot or will

separate. Ph 8363 7375 or 132 0992.

**MAC LC475:** 8 MB RAM, 14" Apple colour monitor, original manuals plus some software, \$100. Apple Mac 2500 Stylewriter colour printer, immac cond, original manuals & cartridges, \$250. Ph Debbie 8303 7298.

**MAC PERFORMA:** 580's. Email: <david.foley@adelaide.edu.au>.

**MISC:** Philips fridge/freezer, single door, \$300. 2 single beds, \$20 ea. Ph 8272 9333.

**MISC:** Victorian cedar oval table, 104cm x 80cm with tripod base, \$740. 2 Jacobean

carver chairs with barley twists (circa 1920), \$240 ea. Ph 8272 8958.

**MOVING SALE:** TV, VCR, computer, fax machine, bike, sewing machine & more. Ph 8338 4152.

**NISSAN BLUEBIRD:** 1982, recon motor, good tyres, exc cond. VRH 232. \$1,300. Ph Belinda 8395 4454 (ah).

## MISC

**SA MENSA:** (Social club for people with IQ in top 2%) has special discount testing session, \$20. Ph 8294 0725 or 8362 1227 to arrange home pre-test (\$35).





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## **The Stephen Cole The Elder Prizes for Excellence in Teaching 2000**

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The Stephen Cole the Elder Prizes for Excellence in Teaching recognise and reward outstanding teaching. The prizes are awarded annually to academic staff whose teaching is regarded by students and academic colleagues as being of excellent quality.

Recipients of the 2000 Stephen Cole the Elder Prizes for Excellence in Teaching at the Adelaide University are:

- Dr Mark Buntine,  
Department of Chemistry
- Dr Nicky Hudson,  
Department of Physiology
- Dr Gerald Schneider,  
Department of Mechanical  
Engineering (awarded for  
excellence in teaching in the  
first five years of teaching)
- Associate Professor Robert  
Woodbury, Faculty of  
Architecture, Landscape  
Architecture and Urban  
Design

The Selection Committee, consisting of student and academic staff representatives, considered the applications to be of excellent quality. Each prize consists of a monetary award of \$5,000 and a certificate presented at the commemoration ceremonies. The prize money is to be used by the winners to help them with the further development of their teaching activities.

Further information can be obtained from Marie Reitano, Office of the Deputy Vice-Chan-

## **Dental treatment for University staff and students**

The Colgate Australian Clinical Dental Research Centre (CDRC) is a state-of-the-art clinical research facility located in the Adelaide Dental Hospital building (adjacent to the Royal Adelaide Hospital and IMVS) and is a unit of Adelaide University and the Dental School.

## Research Grants & Fellowships

The following is a list of grant, fellowship and other research funding schemes available for application. A more detailed electronic version of this listing (Update: Research), together with guidelines and applications for some of the major schemes, are available at: <<http://www.adelaide.edu.au/RB/>>. For hard copy applications and guidelines for the schemes listed below, contact Research Branch, ext 35137; email <[linda.knobben@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:linda.knobben@adelaide.edu.au)>.

**Sponsored Programs Information Network (SPIN):** SPIN Australia - A database containing current and comprehensive information on over 2,600 government and private funding opportunities. The SPIN web site is accessible via the Research Branch web site.

**Gastroenterological Society of Australia Awards For 2000: Grants, Travel Awards and Postdoctoral Fellowship for 2000 and 2001:** Internal closing dates: 20 July, 20 September, 29 September and 20 October. Web Site: <<http://www.gesa.org.au>>.

**Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute: Indigenous Housing Research Project Funding:** Internal closing date: 21 July 2000.

**The Garnett Passe & Rodney Williams Memorial Foundation Awards for 2001 Post-Training Fellowships:** Internal closing date: 21 July 2000.

**Research Training Fellowships:** Internal closing date: 18 August 2000.

**Senior / Principal Research Fellowship, Project Grants, Sabbatical Fellowship, Overseas Research Fellowship:** Internal closing date: 6 October 2000.

**National Health and Medical Research Council Awards for 2000: NHMRC Travelling Award for Research Training**

**NHMRC Training Award Fellowships** Internal closing date: 21 July 2000. Web site: <<http://www.nhmrc.health.gov.au>>.

**Retina Australia - Research Grants:** Internal closing date: 21 July 2000.

**BHP - Community Trust and Community Support Programs:** Internal closing dates: 22 July & 25 October 2000. Web site: <<http://www.bhp.com.au/community/trust.htm>>.

**Australian Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia - Australia/China Exchange in the Social Sciences:** Internal closing date: 23 July 2000.

**Alzheimers Australia Research Foundation: 2000 Dementia Research Grants:** Internal closing date: 24 July 2000.

**APEX Foundation for Research into Intellectual Disability Limited - Research Grants:** Internal closing date: 24 July 2000.

**APEX Foundation Trust for Autism Grant:** Internal closing date: 24 July 2000.

**Australian Academy of the Humanities: Publication Subsidies:** Internal closing date: 24 July 2000. Web site: <<http://www.asap.unimelb.edu.au/aah>>.

**Australian Academy of the Humanities/Academy of Social Sciences in Australia/Vietnam National Centre for the Social Sciences and Humanities - Overseas Program - Vietnam:** Internal closing date: 24 July 2000. Web site: <<http://www.asap.unimelb.edu.au/aah>>.

**Australian Academy of Science - Frederick White Prize:** Internal closing date: 24 July 2000.

Web site: <<http://www.science.org.au/awards/fwhite.htm>>.

**Australian Antarctic Division - Antarctic Project & Grant Applications 2001-2002:** Internal closing date: 24 July 2000. Web site: <<http://www.antdiv.gov.au>>.

**Australian Federation of University Women - Qld Freda Bage Fellowship:** Internal closing date: 24 July 2000. Web site: <<http://www.academicdress.com.au/afuwffi/index>>.

**Chief Executive Women Inc/United Airlines - Science and Technology Awards 2000:** Internal closing date: 24 July 2000.

**International English Language Testing System - IELTS Research Program:** Internal closing date: 24 July 2000. Web site: <<http://www.ielts.org/cfdocs/newsflash.cfm>>.

**JH & JD Gunn Medical Research Foundation - Research Grants:** Internal closing date: 24 July 2000.

**Horticultural Research and Development Corporation - Research & Development Funding:** Internal closing date: 24 July 2000. Web site: <<http://www.horticulture.com.au>>.

**James Cook University - Postdoctoral Research Fellowship 2001:** Internal closing date: 24 July 2000. Web site: <[http://www.jcu.edu.au/office/research\\_office/funding/internal/postdocs.html](http://www.jcu.edu.au/office/research_office/funding/internal/postdocs.html)>.

**Karitane Research Grants:** Internal closing date: 24 July 2000.

**Reg Waite Award for Young Australian Achievers:** Internal closing date: 24 July 2000

**Royal Society of London / The Australian National University / The National Health and Medical Research Council - Howard Florey Fellowships in Biomedical Sciences:** Internal closing date: 24 July 2000.

**Australian Academy of Science - Postdoctoral & Short-term Fellowships to Japan 2001-2002:** date: 24 July 2000.