



# UniNews

## CUTTING EDGE

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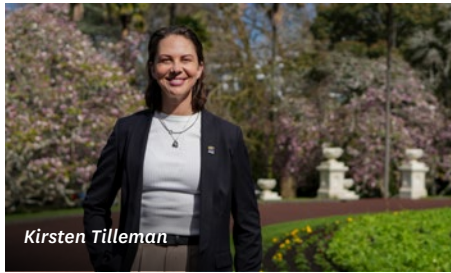
## HIGH NOTE

Celebrating ten years of a musical-theatre legacy

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A selection of University staff and students who provided expert commentary in the media recently. Let us know! Email: [uninews@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:uninews@auckland.ac.nz).



Kirsten Tilleman

## SILENCE ISN'T GOLDEN

PhD candidate Kirsten Tilleman (Faculty of Engineering) told *The Listener* that empowering 'active bystanders' – people who step in during incidents of verbal harassment – could help vulnerable groups feel safer on public transport. "No one deserves to be harassed," she told the publication.

**Link:** [tinyurl.com/listener-tilleman](https://tinyurl.com/listener-tilleman)



Karen Waldie

## CHILDHOOD DEPRESSION

Professor Karen Waldie (School of Psychology) told the *NZ Herald* that children may be at greater risk of depression if, around the time of pregnancy, their mothers smoked, suffered poor mental health, or lived in deprivation. Health interventions should be directed towards helping parents during the perinatal period, she said.

**Link:** [tinyurl.com/nzherald-waldie-depression](https://tinyurl.com/nzherald-waldie-depression)



Gertjan Verdickt

## TRUST ISSUES

Investors trust human analysts over AI for stock predictions, with AI-generated advice viewed sceptically, senior finance lecturer Gertjan Verdickt told RNZ's *Afternoons*. Gertjan's study also shows that women, Democrats and people with higher AI literacy are more responsive to AI-generated financial forecasts.

**Link:** [tinyurl.com/rnz-verdickt-ai](https://tinyurl.com/rnz-verdickt-ai)



Hakkan Lai

## CLIMATE CHANGE HITS KIWI KIDS

Climate-related heat is posing particular health risks to young children. A major new study found under-fives, especially Māori, Pacific and Asian children, were at significantly higher risk of needing hospital care when temperatures hit 24.1C. Dr Hakkan Lai (FMHS) told the *NZ Herald* children's bodies gained heat faster.

**Link:** [tinyurl.com/nzherald-lai-climate](https://tinyurl.com/nzherald-lai-climate)

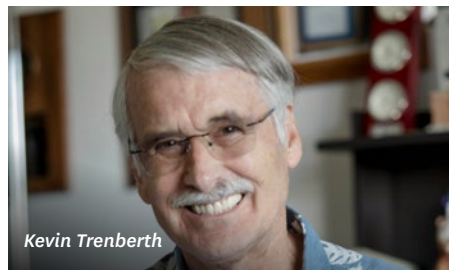


Scott Optican

## SELECTING JURY TRIALS

Law professor Scott Optican spoke on RNZ, 95bFM and TVNZ's *Breakfast* about the government's proposed changes to raise the threshold for selecting jury trials in the hopes that delays will be reduced. Any decisions to change the jury trial election system should be part of a more comprehensive examination, he said.

**Link:** [tinyurl.com/optican-jury-trials](https://tinyurl.com/optican-jury-trials)



Kevin Trenberth

## HURRICANE WATCH

Climate scientist and honorary academic in the Department of Physics Dr Kevin Trenberth talked to 95bFM about the supercharged hurricanes slamming into Florida. Water vapour from the Gulf of Mexico's unprecedentedly high sea temperatures were making storms bigger, longer lasting, and less likely to fade in strength, he said.

**Link:** [tinyurl.com/bfm-trenberth-storms](https://tinyurl.com/bfm-trenberth-storms)

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Cover photo: Chris Loufte

Editor: Caitlin Sykes  
[caitlin.sykes@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:caitlin.sykes@auckland.ac.nz)  
 Photography: Chris Loufte, William Chea  
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Something to share? The next *UniNews* is December 2024, copy due 13 November.  
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## HELPING BIG IDEAS HAPPEN

Alexandra Thomas, director of the University's Research and Innovation Office, Te Puna Tiketike, shares how the recently launched entity is helping enable research excellence and impact.

### Tell us a bit about yourself, and how you came to be here in Aotearoa and in this role?

I was born in Aotearoa, New Zealand and spent my early years growing up here. My mother is a Kiwi and my father is English. At the age of nine, my family emigrated to a small town near Liverpool, in the north-west of England, where I grew up.

I always knew I wanted to move back to Aotearoa; it had been my life goal to bring up my own children here. So, just over seven years ago, my husband and I packed up everything and emigrated here with our two daughters – then two years old and five months old. I haven't looked back.

### When you were little, what did you want to be when you grew up?

I wanted to be a ballet dancer. There are many video clips of me dancing around the living room, dressed up in my mother's old dresses, and I practised ballet until my late teens. But I was also excessively shy when I was young and didn't really like an audience; my mum made me do speech and drama to push me out of my comfort zone. I don't think dancing was ever really on the cards as a career!

### Is there any alignment with that fantasy and your job?

Not at all. My career found me. I was lucky that I had a fantastic part-time job at the University of Essex when I studied there, and that created a pathway for me to move into a university role directly after I graduated.

I completed a postgraduate qualification while working in the university's employment service, where my job was to help other students find jobs. I realised early on that I was good with people, pragmatic, organised, and had a common-sense approach to tackling problems.

### Do you have a research background, and if so, in what area?

No, I didn't find a topic that I was passionate enough about to attract me to commit to a PhD.



*Reducing administrative burden for researchers is a goal of the new Research and Innovation Office, says its director Alexandra Thomas.*

I have always had so much admiration for my academic colleagues and am inspired by what they do, but I wanted to utilise my strengths and work alongside academics.

I am a hands-on, practical, and solutions-oriented person and my skill-set complements my academic colleagues, who often have wonderfully big ideas that I can help make happen.

### What prompted the redesign that resulted in the Research and Innovation Office?

Mainly we were operating under a highly complex organisational model, with many different parts of a puzzle that we were never quite able to piece together. The hope is that a simpler structure, comprising one central hub and faculty/LSRI-based research service teams, will create opportunities to build a more cohesive community of research management professionals.

### What feedback are you getting from the many staff across the University who sit in the newly established R&I office?

That the new structure 'makes sense'. We no longer have the invisible organisational barriers that were making things harder than they needed to be. We now have a simplified structure that allows us to focus efforts on ensuring our services are more effective for researchers and not spending all our time trying to figure out who should be doing what.

### What is the significance of the te reo Māori name Te Puna Tiketike?

Puna is a natural spring of water or a well, symbolising a source of sustenance. Tiketike reflects the Waipapa Tōitu symbolism of Waipapa Ngā Maunga Whakahi – the mountains that stand as kaitiaki of the knowledge held by our community and embody the pride of our people.

My hope is that these symbols will guide and inspire our collective mahi to support and enable our community of researchers.

### What kind of things, in your experience, keep researchers happy, creative and motivated?

Taking away administrative burdens and making things simple for researchers to allow them to focus on their research.

Our locally based teams are critical to providing the support that researchers really value. The team's role is to ensure we build specialised, high-quality services.

### What's the thing you really love about the job?

I have the most incredible team and am exceptionally lucky to be surrounded by talented people, both professional and academic staff.

I am also proud to work for such a highly reputable university. We have so many stories to tell about the impact the University is having, and we have our researchers to thank for that. They are our engine.

■ Gilbert Wong



## GOOD TO KNOW

### UNIVERSITY IN TOP 8 PERCENT GLOBALLY

**The University of Auckland recorded another strong result in the 2025 Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings.**

Waipapa Taumata Rau also retained its position as New Zealand's number one university in the prestigious rankings, which were released in October. It is the only New Zealand university ranked in the top 200 universities worldwide; all others in Aotearoa are ranked 350+.

The University is now ranked at =152 (=150 last year), but its relative position improved in the latest rankings given the growth in the number of universities evaluated. There were 2,092 global institutions ranked this year from 115 countries and regions, up from 1,907 the previous year.

Waipapa Taumata Rau now sits in the top 7.3 percent of universities in the world, up slightly from being in the top 7.9 percent in 2024.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Dawn Freshwater, said: "Maintaining our position in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings amidst growing global competition is a testament to the resilience, innovation and dedication of our entire University community. It underscores our unwavering commitment to academic excellence and research impact on a global scale."

The University also showed improvements in several areas, including its Teaching rank and Research Environment, and showed a strong performance in International Outlook, at 150th in the world.

Earlier in the year, the University was ranked in the top one percent in the world in the 2024 Times Higher Education Impact Rankings for sustainability.

**Full story:** [auckland.ac.nz/2025-THE-rankings](https://auckland.ac.nz/2025-THE-rankings)

### BLUES WINNERS ANNOUNCED

**An Olympic gold medallist, an actor who performed at London's Globe Theatre, and a cancer survivor and advocate were among those recognised at the 2024 Blues Awards.**

Nine major awards and 116 Blues were announced at the awards ceremony on 4 October, recognising students excelling across four areas: arts and culture, business and innovation, service and leadership, and sports.

Three-time Olympic medallist Black Fern Theresa Setefano, who was part of the rugby team that won back-to-back Olympic golds at Paris and Rio, won Most Meritorious Performance (Sport), Sportswoman of the Year and the Pasifika Major Award.

Gabriel Luis Gerente, who represented New Zealand in London as a member of the Shakespeare Globe Centre New Zealand's Young Shakespeare Company in 2024, won Most Meritorious Performance (Arts and Cultural). Gabriel was selected to perform in a production of *Much Ado About Nothing* at the Globe Theatre after two weeks of intensive training with Globe Theatre professionals.

Josh McMillan, an advocate for youth cancer, was another major Blues Awards winner, awarded for the Most Outstanding Contribution in the Service and Leadership category.

The third-year Arts student, who majors in politics and international relations and history, is vice-president and board director of youth cancer charity Canteen Aotearoa, and involved internationally in advocacy, fundraising and advancing youth cancer care.

He is also a cancer survivor. Josh was diagnosed with a rare form of acute lymphoblastic leukaemia at age nine, five years after his older sister received the same cancer diagnosis.

Josh lives with many long-term side effects



*Arts student and youth cancer advocate Josh McMillan was recognised for his service and leadership at the 2024 Blues Awards.*

from having the disease, but, alongside his university studies, has represented Canteen and rangatahi impacted by cancer at international cancer events. In December, he will head to Melbourne to attend the sixth Global Adolescent and Young Adult Cancer Congress, where he's chairing a symposia session on survivorship, and will also present the results of his own study.

Meanwhile, he was happy to win a Blues award and have an evening of celebration.

"It was honestly unexpected. I was just happy to be there at all receiving recognition."

**Full story:** [auckland.ac.nz/blues-2024-McMillan](https://auckland.ac.nz/blues-2024-McMillan)

**For full details of the 2024 Blues Awards winners, visit:** [auckland.ac.nz/blues-winners-2024](https://auckland.ac.nz/blues-winners-2024)



### IT TAKES A VILLAGE

**Installations by Te Pare School of Architecture and Planning students helped draw crowds to the Urban Art Village, held as part of ArtWeek and run by Heart of the City, on O'Connell Street on 10 October.**

Among the works was *Tapestries of Tāmaki* (pictured left), by masters student Sahil Tiku, which invited participants to place a flag on a topographic map of Auckland's isthmus,

signifying a location of personal importance tied to an emotion or memory.

After marking their chosen spot, participants used a loom to weave a ribbon into a communal tapestry, contributing to a living artwork embodying the diverse emotional connections Aucklanders have with their city.

**Full story:** [auckland.ac.nz/urban-art-village-2024](https://auckland.ac.nz/urban-art-village-2024)

# MĀORI BUSINESS LEADERS RECOGNISED

**The best and brightest Māori business leaders of Aotearoa were honoured at the 2024 Ngā Tohu Kaiārahi Pakihi Māori o Aotearoa – Aotearoa Māori Business Leaders Awards, held at the University on 23 October.**

A macadamia pioneer, sustainable fisheries champions, and a business turning plastic waste into products were among those honoured at the event, which celebrates the contributions of Māori entrepreneurs, leaders and organisations.

Six awards were presented, each acknowledging the contributions of leaders who have their own inspiring stories.

Vanessa Hayes, founder of kaupapa Māori business Torere Macadamias, won the Entrepreneurial Māori Business Leader award. Her passion is to develop and grow the New Zealand macadamia industry, which has historically relied on imported nuts.

Torere Macadamias is working on research with Plant and Food Research and others. It is also expanding its nursery, and encouraging other growers and grower collectives by providing training and workshops, and supplying trees from its nursery.

The company's orchard produces around 20 tonnes of macadamias annually, and last year won a contract to supply Air New Zealand's long-haul and business-class flights.

The Dame Mira Szászy Alumni Award was presented to Karleen Everitt, a University of Auckland Business School graduate who leads Te Ao Māori Strategy at ANZ Bank.

Federation of Māori Authorities chair Traci Houpapa – who holds a number of other directorships and Ministerial appointments, including with Chiefs Rugby and New Zealand Trade and Enterprise – won the Māori Governance Leader award.

The Outstanding Māori Business Leader award went to Harry Burkhardt, co-founder and managing director of Replas, which transforms waste plastic into valuable products.

Moana New Zealand was honoured with the Kaitiaki Business Leader award for its dedication to sustainable fisheries management. The seafood company is the only organisation owned by all Māori (58 iwi across Aotearoa).

And Māori Women's Development Inc – a charitable trust formed, managed and operated by Māori women – earned the Mānuka Henare award for its continued support of Māori women in business. The trust offers loans and wrap-around support.



## NEW DEAN OF SCIENCE WELCOMED

**Professor Sarah Young and her family were welcomed to the University and the Faculty of Science in a pōwhiri at Waipapa Marae in October. She has moved to Tāmaki Makaurau to head the faculty after previously serving as executive dean of science at the University of Canterbury.**



## SUPERCHARGED START-UPS

**From wave-powered aquaculture to an AI-powered badminton coach, the 2024 Velocity \$100k Challenge showcased a diverse range of innovative ideas, with six ventures sharing the \$100,000 prize pool.**

Run by the Business School's Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CIE), the annual challenge has a track record of helping start-ups find success on the global stage.

First place and a \$25,000 prize went to agritech solution QuickMas, designed to help in the fight against antibiotic resistance in dairy cattle.

Liz Cunningham (pictured above, centre), a research technician at the Liggins Institute, along with four teammates from the Auckland Bioengineering Institute, Faculty of Engineering, and Liggins Institute, developed QuickMas.

The tool detects mastitis in cows, identifies the pathogens causing the disease and determines if

the cow has responded to antibiotics. QuickMas will also help farmers decide if their cow is safe to put back in the herd or if she may still be harbouring infectious bacteria.

Second place and \$15,000 went to ROSS, an AI-powered troubleshooting platform for the food and beverage manufacturing industry. ROSS streamlines diagnosing and fixing equipment breakdowns, reducing downtime and operational costs while enhancing global knowledge sharing among engineers.


Four ventures tied for third place, each receiving \$5,000 in seed funding:

- MoveInsight, an AI-driven badminton app that provides real-time motion analysis, personalised feedback, and equipment recommendations. It aims to improve players' training quality and prevent injuries.
- Align, an AI tool for GPs that gathers patient information, allowing doctors to maximize their consultation time.
- Harnessing Ocean Wave Energy for Sustainable Aquafarming, a solution that uses wave energy to power aquafarms, offering a scalable and sustainable energy source for the rapidly growing aquaculture industry.
- RAPIDOSE, a paediatric dosing tool that reduces the risk of errors in emergency situations, ensuring safer, more accurate weight-based medication dosages during resuscitations.

CIE director Darsel Keane says the ventures have potential to solve real-world problems, and all winners will join the CIE's incubator, Venture Lab, to further develop their start-ups.

**Full story: [auckland.ac.nz/velocity-2024](https://auckland.ac.nz/velocity-2024)**





*Innovation is required to help address the health issues facing Pacific men, says Associate Professor Vili Nosa.*  
Photo: Chris Loufte

## VILI NOSA: HEALTH RESEARCH AT THE CUTTING EDGE

The associate professor is leading an innovative project exploring if barbershops can help deliver better health outcomes for Pacific men.

**There's a little line in the 2002 movie *Barbershop* that says a lot about barbershop culture.**

As the film's central character, a young barber on Chicago's South Side, wrestles with inheriting his family's struggling barbershop, he's told to hold onto his father's belief that "something as simple as a little haircut could change the way a man felt on the inside".

A good haircut can give you a boost, for sure,

but the line points to something deeper: the confidences clients share when they're in the barber's chair, and the connections men can develop in the community of a barbershop.

It's those confidences and connections that Dr Vili Nosa, an associate professor in Pacific health, is digging into with a project exploring the role that barbershops can play in boosting the health of Pacific men.

The project, which will involve interviews

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*"We came to this country for better things, but our health profile didn't go that way; instead, we got sick."*

– Associate Professor Vili Nosa, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences

with Pacific men, barbers and healthcare providers, will culminate in a three-month pilot in a real barbershop, testing its effectiveness as a place to deliver health messages or simple interventions like blood pressure testing.

Vili recently gained Health Research Council funding for the project through a Pacific Health Explorer Grant, designed to foster transformative health innovation.

“This project is a passion for me,” says the Niuean health researcher, who specialises in Pacific men’s health, particularly in the field of addiction. “I want to try something different, because I’m sick and tired of our men having poor health outcomes. We need to look outside the box.”

### Exploring the local context

As shown in *Barbershop*, the US has a rich cultural heritage of barbershops as a place where African American men not only get a haircut but can connect with each other and gain a sense of community, says Vili.

Phase one of the New Zealand project, already completed, has been a literature review, which has revealed the effectiveness of some health programmes delivered through US barbershops. One study, published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, for example, showed the blood pressure of African American men was lowered to healthy levels through a project that paired barbers and their customers with pharmacists.

However, there’s been no similar research undertaken in New Zealand, says Vili, despite several of our barbers championing health activity and innovation, particularly in mental health for Māori and Pacific men, in recent years.

One of the best known is Mataia (Matt) Faafetai Malietoa Brown MNZM, who drew on his own experiences of family violence to found Christchurch barbershop My Fathers Barbers and foster it as a place where clients could share their experiences and heal. Matt, along with his wife Sarah, went on to develop a successful anti-family violence movement, called She is not your Rehab.

Another is Flaxmere barber and Hastings’ first Pacific city councillor Peleti Oli-Alainu’uese, who rose to fame as the star of *The Barber*. The Whakaata Māori TV show highlighted the barbershop Peleti established to provide a safe space for men to tackle issues like domestic violence and their mental well-being.

It’s both offshore and local context that Vili is considering as he’s developing the two-year research project.

“I’ve read a lot of different research that’s been published on barbershop programmes in the US that show they work, but what I didn’t want to do was just take something from the US.

We have to tailor-make something that will fit us culturally, because we’re a different population.”

He sees the project as complementary to initiatives developed by barbers like Matt and Peleti in New Zealand.

“What I’m trying to do is coordinate what’s being done here and to potentially validate their work through research. I want to empower and support what they’re doing and understand how this could work best for our men here.”

### In search of better things

From the village of Avatele and Hakupu in Niue, Vili moved to New Zealand with his parents as a toddler in the late 1970s. Primarily a sociologist

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*“What I’m trying to do is coordinate what’s being done here and to potentially validate these barbers’ work through research. I want to empower and support what they’re doing and understand how this could work best for our men here.”*

– Associate Professor Vili Nosa

by training, his shift to health research was sparked during his PhD in behavioural science, in which he looked at alcohol use amongst Niuean men in Auckland. He has since been driven to undertake research to improve health outcomes for Pacific people.

“My family, like many Pacific people, came to this country because it was supposed to be the land of milk and honey. But look at what happened – Niueans are ranked among the highest in New Zealand in terms of health problems, particularly for issues like diabetes and obesity. We came to this country for better things, but our health profile didn’t go that way; instead, we got sick.”

Niuean is his first language and the country “is where my heart is”, says Vili, who has been involved extensively in health research projects spanning addiction, men’s health, and infant and maternal health there. He’s also involved in research projects across the Pacific – from the Cook Islands, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Hawai’i and Australia (he is an adjunct associate professor of public health at the School of Public Health in the University of Queensland’s Faculty of Medicine).

### Bringing about real change

Underpinning his work is the use of traditional cultural concepts to improve health promotion messages, and always with a focus on bringing about tangible change, he says.

Phase two of the barbershop project will involve interviews with men from Niue, the Cook Islands, Samoa and Tonga, while phases three and four will respectively involve interviews with Pacific barbers and health providers. This will ensure the interventions that are piloted in the barbershop (phase five) will best meet the needs and aspirations of those stakeholders.

Some US projects have involved barbers receiving training to deliver health interventions alongside cutting hair; an aspect of the Confess Project of America, for example, involves training barbers to identify clients in mental distress and connect them with support.

However, Vili says given our barbers are already busy cutting hair, he anticipates the New Zealand pilot will involve a barbershop with an adjacent health provider, with the latter providing the interventions.

While the project aims to leverage the personal connection and communication that barbers foster with their clients, there are other factors that potentially make barbershops good outlets for promoting better health outcomes among men, says Vili.

Some men might struggle prioritising a doctor’s visit, he says, but most are likely to visit a barber regularly. Being able to talk to a health professional or get a quick, simple health test done at the same time as a haircut could prove convenient for many men.

And if the concept proves effective, Vili says it could possibly be rolled out in other places where men regularly meet, such as fai kava clubs or sports clubs.

“What I’m hoping is it will help men make their health a priority and capture those who don’t go to the doctors and get them going. Because in terms of health status, Pacific men are not doing well, so I’m trying to find another way, and a way that feels culturally comfortable.”

All, potentially, from something as simple as a little haircut.

■ Caitlin Sykes





## COULD TINKER BELL EXIST?

Hummingbirds, butterflies, beetles, dragonflies, bees and even salamanders provide inspiration for an exploration of fairy physiology.

**Could Tinker Bell exist? This captivating question was a focus of a recent cover story in the student-led publication *UoA Scientific*.**

Viewing imaginary creatures through the lens of real-world biology is a creative challenge for students in a fourth-year School of Biological Sciences paper taught by Professor Tony Hickey. Mermaids, dragons – you never know what you’ll investigate in BIOSCI 725: Ecological Physiology.

How animals survive in diverse and extreme habitats is a focus of the course, including situations such as metabolic arrest (hibernation), low-oxygen environments, and a warming world. Long-distance seabird migration and the question of whether dinosaurs were cold-blooded are topics, along with why birds (modern dinosaurs) live so long.

In a one-off assignment each year, students are also given the task of imagining the physiology of a mythical creature.

In his *UoA Scientific* article, Aryan ‘Ari’ Muzumdar – a former student in Tony’s class now studying for a postgraduate diploma in biosecurity and conservation – blends scientific principles and whimsy to explore the intricacies

of how Tinker Bell might flutter into reality. For this, he draws inspiration from hummingbirds, butterflies, beetles, dragonflies, bees – and even salamanders.

Created in 1904 by the Scottish playwright J.M. Barrie, Tinker Bell was the fairy companion of Peter Pan, the boy who wanted to never grow up. A tiny, flying creature with mercurial moods, her speech was like a tinkling bell. On stage, she was depicted simply as a darting light.

Today, Tinker Bell is best known through The Walt Disney Company’s depictions, which is where Ari turned for inspiration.

Looking to nature for analogues, he fixed on hummingbirds, which can hover with precision thanks to their rapid and controlled wing beats; dragonflies with their aerial agility; and bees, with their short yet powerful wings for carrying loads. A hybrid wing structure based on all three creatures could be just the thing, he notes.

What about energy intake for this darting, hovering, magical creature?

Like other tiny fliers, Tinker Bell might eat energy-rich foods, such as aphid honeydew or flower nectar, supplemented by tiny insects or pollen grains, according to Ari. She would have a high metabolic rate to sustain her long-range flight and magical feats.

The basal metabolic rate (BMR) is a measure of the energy used when a creature is at rest. Metabolic rates of animals scale predictably with size, with smaller creatures sometimes exhibiting incredibly high metabolic rates relative to their body mass; they’re moving fast and using lots of energy. If Tinker Bell were, say, a mammal weighing 35 grams, her BMR might be around six or seven calories per day – which, gram for gram, is about 20 times that of an African elephant, according to Ari.

Where do the salamanders come in? ‘Cutaneous respiration’, where gas exchange occurs through the skin rather than lungs or gills, is used by salamanders. Insects have tracheal tube-like systems that deliver air right into flight muscles, and hummingbirds have very efficient lungs with parabronchi. A mix of such strategies could be useful for flying fairies.

For those intrigued by blending fantasy with biology, Ari’s article offers a full exploration of fairy physiology. It’s a reminder that science and imagination often go hand in hand, “pushing the frontiers of what we believe is possible”, he says.

Tony got the idea for the assignment after reading a dragon-related spoof scientific paper and seeing how students could apply lessons from BIOSCI 725 and BIOSCI 335 through such an exercise.

“In these courses, they see how animals, including humans, have often solved physiological issues through evolution,” says Tony. “This makes students think about how things work and limits on life. How big is too big to fly? How would Tinker Bell get enough oxygen with human-like lungs?”

Through the fairy project, Tony himself learned that many insects have a separate heart just for their wing circulation (he’s not an entomologist).

And there’s scope for a lot of fun: in a dragon assignment, a student took a depiction of a T-Rex’s food intake in *Jurassic Park* as indicative for dragons. From this, he came up with ‘lawyer’ as a measure of caloric intake, based on the famous scene where a dinosaur eats a lawyer.

Next year’s assignment? Possibly unicorns.

■ Paul Panckhurst



## UO A SCIENTIFIC

*UoA Scientific* began as *Moonshot*, a 2020 magazine from the Science Students’ Association.

Spotting the potential for something bigger, the founders launched *UoA Scientific* in 2021, creating a platform for science communication where students could share their research and passions.

There are now five editions a year, with physical copies available in the Science Centre and PDFs on the club’s website. Content spans topics from space exploration to anauralia – the inability to imagine sound.

“We’re excited to keep inspiring scientific curiosity and connections within our community,” says magazine president Nargiss Taleb.



## SETTING THE STAGE

It's the tenth anniversary of a student prize championing excellence in musical theatre, established by long-time University staffer Margaret Crannigan Allen.

### **Anyone who has been to live musicals will understand their magic.**

While for those working behind the scenes, each production is brought to life through hours of work – from designing costumes and building sets to assembling lights and rehearsing. It's a labour of love, dedication and passion.

That passion fuelled a lifelong affinity with musical theatre for Graham Allen – the late husband of professional staff member Margaret Crannigan Allen.

The University's scholarships and progression manager for 17 years, Margaret established the Graham Allen Prize in Musical Theatre in 2014 to continue Graham's memory and celebrate his devotion to performing arts. This year marks a decade of the prize, which has supported 26 students with more than \$14,000 awarded.

What began as a way of improving his childhood stammer quickly grew into one of Graham's enduring interests. Throughout his life, he directed, produced and performed in a wide range of shows – all while working full-time in the airline industry and then as a hotel director.

Favourite roles included Captain Andy in *Show Boat*, Major General Stanley in *The Pirates of Penzance*, and singing in *Fiddler on the Roof*.

And while performing was his outlet, it was the whole process of a production that he loved.

"He really enjoyed every aspect of the theatre: the dressing up, learning new roles and lines, working with other people, the camaraderie and how everybody supports each other, in and out of acting," says Margaret.

Most of his closest and oldest friends were theatre connections.

She knows he would have loved the prize and its performative element, which sees the University's top music students compete at a free biennial event organised by Associate Professor Te Oti Rakena and the School of Music.

"It reinvigorated him, seeing younger people doing the shows he'd done for many years. He loved seeing people embrace musical theatre."

Students first audition for a place at the event, with those shortlisted performing two songs in



*Many top music students have been supported by the prize Margaret Crannigan Allen established in her late husband's name.*

*Photo: Chris Loufte*

front of a live audience and judging panel. Each competition has a different theme, which could be anything from Disney to shows produced between 1959 and 1969.

The three students with the highest scores receive a monetary prize funded by Graham's friends and family, largely through an annual fundraising quiz organised by Margaret, her friend Steve King and his family.

"It's great fun, and the quality of the singing is phenomenal," she says. "The way the students sing is so heartfelt. They put everything into it."

The prize seeks to challenge students with a live performance and acknowledge their talent, says Margaret. "The boost of confidence students get when they are recognised for being good at something is immeasurable. It's not about the amount of money."

Some students have gone on to perform at graduation ceremonies, and others have forged careers singing with New Zealand Opera or overseas companies.

Alexandra Francis was a runner-up at the 2021 competition and says the event was a highlight of her time at the University.

"It was such a valuable experience. As a classical singer who also loves musical theatre, it solidified for me that I would love to be able to perform across both of these genres."

Alexandra graduated in 2023 with a Master of Music (Classic Performance Voice) and now lives in London, where she is completing a Master of Performance (Vocal) at the Royal College of Music.

"I was incredibly grateful for the prize money, which I put towards my future overseas studies – a dream that has now become a reality.

"It's amazing to be training at the top music institution in the world, with renowned teachers and performance experiences unlike any other."

Margaret hopes the prize will keep continuing Graham's legacy.

"Prizes and scholarships are a good way of keeping someone's name alive, and also supporting students, which is always beneficial. It does make a difference," says Margaret.

The prize also serves as a reminder to continue championing musical theatre, she says, which in a highly digitised world, offers people a chance to step away from screens and embrace live stage performances.

"It would be a real shame to see shows dying out, but I genuinely don't think they will.

"New Zealand is a small country, but if you go to a show, they're always well attended. The level of talent is incredibly high."

■ Nikki Addison



Marcus Hipa. *Herald* (2024). Acrylic and wax pencil on recycled paper. The University of Auckland Art Collection. Photographed in situ by William Chea.

## FROM THE COLLECTION: DAWN OF A NEW BEGINNING

Madeleine Gifford highlights a new acquisition in the University of Auckland Art Collection.

**There are several artworks that speak directly to local environmental and ecological issues throughout the University of Auckland Art Collection.**

Dr Fiona Pardington's photograph *Inseparable Huia* (2016), for example, spotlights a mated pair of now extinct huia birds that survive as objects in the collection at Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand. Or there's Lisa Crowley's suite of black-and-white landscape photographs from her *City of Earth* (2008) series, which captures sites around Aotearoa that have been severely impacted by the exploitation of natural resources.

Many contemporary artists grapple with the urgency of climate change in their artworks, often providing sobering and thought-provoking reflections on how our natural environment is changing in the face of unsustainable practices.

The most recent example on University walls is a moving work titled *Herald* (2024) by Tāmaki Makaurau-based artist Marcus Hipa (Alofi, Niue), which was welcomed into the collection as a new acquisition in 2024.

Marcus grew up in Niue and relocated to Aotearoa later in life, where he attended Elam School of Fine Arts and graduated with both a Bachelor of Fine Arts and a Master of Fine Arts.

His multidisciplinary practice incorporates drawing, painting and carving, all of which he uses to celebrate the traditions and sense of community intrinsic to Niuean culture.

Simultaneously, Marcus interrogates socio-political issues impacting Pacific communities,

with a focus on the increasing impacts of climate change.

*Herald*, which is dedicated to the Piha community following Cyclone Gabrielle last year, makes a meaningful addition to the collection. The extreme weather events experienced across the North Island in 2023 were not unfamiliar to Marcus, who grew up in Niue where cyclones have devastating impacts on local communities.

The work was first shown at West Coast Gallery (Piha) as part of the group exhibition *Tolu, Tolu, Toru* (2024), alongside works by Andy Leleisi'uao and Sefton Rani. The exhibition's title repeats the word 'three' in the languages of Samoa, Niue and the Cook Islands, highlighting each of the artists' cultures and the many links across the Pacific.

Marcus included *Herald* in the exhibition, held in the heart of Piha in the aftermath of Cyclone Gabrielle, as an ode to the local community.

He explained that the work, "aimed not only to honor the resilience of Piha's people and the solidarity within the community, but also to celebrate [them] amidst ongoing recovery efforts a year later. Drawing from personal experiences growing up in the Pacific, where cyclones are a recurring reality, there's a profound sense of shared adversity and unity that only those who've endured such trials can truly grasp."

Executed on recycled card and using his characteristic visual language of line, *Herald* incorporates recognisable silhouettes of emergency services workers taken from media

images during the coverage of the disaster. Road cones and emergency vehicles can also be made out in the composition, representing the services crucial to the immediate recovery effort.

Marcus's symbolic colour palette is an especially prominent aspect of the work.

Though flashes of red are woven into the composition and feel akin to warning signs, it is the shades of lilac and purple that surface as the fundamental tones. Marcus explains that often after a severe storm in Niue, "the first sunrise is tinted with a purple hue and symbolises the passing of the worst and the dawn of a new beginning with the rebuilding efforts". Purple is offered generously here as an enduring symbol of hope and connection.

The placement of *Herald* on level three of Building 201, in the heart of a 6 Green Star-rated and repurposed space with a focus on sustainability, feels particularly poignant.

Most fitting though, is that the artwork hangs adjacent to a window overlooking the Fale Pasifika complex, which includes several significant artworks by Jim Vivieaere, John Pule and Filipe Tohi. That *Herald* has found a permanent home in direct conversation with a suite of outdoor artworks by a group of revolutionary Pacific artists echoes the intrinsic interconnectedness and importance of communities across the Pacific.

**Madeleine Gifford is an art collection adviser at Te Tumu Herenga, Libraries and Learning Services.**





Mermaid and traveller. The Luttrell Psalter, British Library. MS Add. 42130, fol. 70v (N. England, 2nd quarter 14thC)

## MERMAIDS' TALES

**Mermaids, those beautiful, seductive creatures that adorn rocks and lure sailors into wickedness with their magical songs, were a quite different kettle of fish in medieval times.**

Professor Kim Phillips, a medieval historian who is head of the School of Humanities in the Faculty of Arts, says that, in fact, they were nothing like the friendly, curious figure depicted in characters like Disney's Ariel.

"The medieval mermaid, as portrayed in sculptures, carvings and illuminated manuscripts of the time, was originally half woman and half bird, deriving from ancient precedents and called a siren – a fearsome figure associated with danger and sin, rather than beauty and charm."

Kim specialises in the history of gender, sexuality and women in the medieval period, and has long been fascinated with the changing image of the mermaid over time, and how it continues to be so prominent in our collective imagination.

However, for her next book, she has broadened her focus to not only include mermaids, but also nursemaids, milkmaids and what are often referred to as 'hags', a pejorative term these days for an evil old woman, sometimes interchangeable with 'crone' or 'witch'.

"I'm really interested in all of these medieval archetypes, and in particular, the meaning attached to each, especially in relation to the female breast as erotic, or as a source of income – in the case of the wetnurse or nursemaid – and nurturing and healing, and also as subject to disease and ill health."

Kim says the project has had "a long gestation" because of her discomfort with treating the breast as an object, separate from the woman herself, as it has so often been in our own society.

"So, I've taken that focus and widened it to look more generally at the types of women who lived in

the Middle Ages and the imagery that surrounded them and has influenced women ever since."

She says each chapter will start with a well-known archetypal image, familiar to modern audiences, and look backwards from there.

"I've chosen Disney's Ariel for the modern mermaid image, and what she has meant to young girls and women of our age, as a starting-off point; and for the milkmaid, I want to look at Thomas Hardy's tragic Tess, in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, with all that imagery of purity and corruption often combined in the image of the milkmaid ... milk being a pure product that quickly goes off."

And for the nursemaid archetype, she's decided on Shakespeare's nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, a warm figure who had a strong bond with Juliet and remained important in her life beyond her initial role as a wetnurse.

"I've already researched royal families from the 12th to early 16th centuries and discovered 65 to 70 women who worked as wetnurses in royal households, through sources like financial records.

"Kings and princes valued their old nurses highly, so after their services were no longer needed, the royal treasury would pay these retired nurses a pension to live a comfortable life; these royal figures' relationships with these women were often closer than the one they had with their actual mothers, who were often busy at court, travelling or otherwise unavailable to them."

As for the archetypal 'hag' figure, Kim is yet to decide. "I'm open to ideas on that. I do know that they were usually viewed as undesirable by men, powerful and something to be afraid of."

The book will be a blend of cultural and social history, drawing on literary and artistic imagery as it existed in the Middle Ages, says Kim.

**To find out more about particular women's lives in medieval times, listen to Kim on the Faculty of Arts podcast *Research and Reason*, available on Spotify, Amazon, Google, Apple and YouTube.**

■ Julianne Evans



### He Kupu nā te Māia: He Kohinga Ruri nā Maya Angelou

This poetry selection from the collected poems of Maya Angelou has been translated into te reo Māori by a cohort of female graduates

from Te Panekiretanga o te Reo, the Institute of Excellence in the Māori Language. Poems from the famed African American poet and civil rights leader are presented in both English and te reo Māori on facing pages, along with poetic biographies of each translator.

**Maya Angelou (1928–2014), Auckland University Press, \$35**

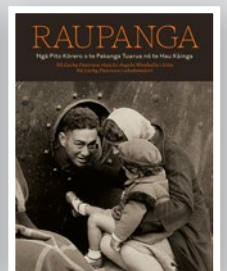


### No One Will Know

The second novel from Master of Creative Writing alumna Rose Carlyle, whose first novel, *The Girl in the Mirror*, was a publishing phenomenon and is optioned for screen.

*No One Will Know* is also a thriller, and follows the story of Eve Sylvester, who is young, broke and pregnant when she meets a charming and glamorous couple who make her a lucrative offer and the plot twists ensue.

**Rose Carlyle, Text Publishing, \$38**



### Te Hau Kāinga: The Māori Home Front During the Second World War

An illustrated account of the profound shift in Māori life that occurred during the Second World War, exploring how Māori society was transformed at home while the Māori Battalion were fighting overseas. Published as a companion to *Raupanga: Ngā Pito Kōrero o te Pakanga Tuarua nō te Hau Kāinga* (pictured above, right), written in te reo Māori,

**Angela Wanhalla, Sarah Christie, Lachy Paterson, Ross Webb and Erica Newman, Auckland University Press, \$60, released 7 November**

## HONOURING A WISH

Dr Brittney Black talks about her work at the AMRF Medical Sciences Learning Centre – Whakaaro Pai.

**With his iconic arms and legs outstretched, Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* occupies the centre of the University's AMRF Medical Sciences Learning Centre – Whakaaro Pai.**

Then, in the style of classical medical lecture theatres, the centre's shelves span out in circles, collectively containing more than 1,100 pathological specimens that tell the story of human anatomy and disease.

The award-winning centre, with its shelves of fascinating specimens and models, looks very much like a museum. However, this is no visitor attraction. The human tissue it contains is crucial for teaching and research, but also inherently sensitive.

Dr Brittney Black (pictured) oversees the space, which hosts students from a range of medical and health science programmes across the University, as well as other student and learning groups by appointment. A former researcher at the University's Centre for Brain Research, she's worked at the learning centre since 2022 – and she loves it.

### How did you come to work here?

I was finishing my PhD, I saw this job advertised, and it needed someone who was used to working with human tissue and enjoyed anatomy. My PhD involved working with donations to the Neurological Foundation Human Brain Bank, so I had that awareness of how to deal with human tissue and a level of comfort around that.

It was a part-time position, but it became full-time due to the specimens and models needing regular maintenance and attention. Also, someone had to be available to teach, and to do inductions for new people coming into the space.

### What does your job involve?

I really love it, because it encompasses all the things I like to do. There's the lab work side of things – taking care of our specimens, getting new specimens in – and I assist with practical teaching in the human anatomy lab.

The other big part is helping people when they're here. Any users of the space must be inducted, and we prefer to do that face to face



because it's such a special, sensitive collection. We tell them about the space, how to use it, what the rules are, and give them a chance to look around and ask any questions.

The other exciting part is hosting groups. I really like it when the high school groups come in, like those involved with [recruitment programmes] Whakapike Ake and Pacific Health Way Finders. Getting them hopefully invigorated or excited about careers in medicine and health sciences is cool.

We also have other groups visit; we had one group of women who were ex-nurses, for example. But while it looks like a museum, it's not an attraction. You need to have a specific purpose for coming into the space.

### How do you deal with the sensitivities of what's contained here?

The inductions are important. Also, at the beginning of every year, we have a major whakanoa ceremony, as well as other smaller ceremonies at other times.

This is for lifting tapu, or restrictions, to make it a safe space to learn and work in. It's also a way of showing respect for those who have donated to the space.

We have kaumātua who conduct the ceremony, and the University chaplain and leaders from other faiths have been involved. And there's a talk about how we get the specimens through the human body

bequest programme, and how we take care of everything, because we are the kaitiaki of these bodies and specimens.

It concludes with a sprinkling of water from our puna wai and sharing of food and drink to complete the transition into a space that is noa.

### How does it feel for you to work in this space?

People often ask me, "Do you detach from it?" But for me, it's not about detachment. I've always worked with human specimens, and one thing I make clear to those who come in is that the tissue here was collected under the Human Tissue Act of the time.

Specifically, under the Act of 2008, the individuals themselves chose to donate their bodies, or parts of them, for teaching, learning or research. They wanted to give a gift that would contribute to knowledge for years to come.

To have these specimens and not use them would be disrespectful to why they are here. By carefully maintaining this space and inviting people in to learn from what's here, we are honouring that precious gift in the best way possible.

This act of respect ensures that their contribution continues to inspire future generations, helps train the next wave of health professionals and researchers, and could even lead to breakthroughs that give back to the community in profound ways.

■ Caitlin Sykes