

MAY 2026



Waipapa
Taumata Rau
University
of Auckland

UniNews



Crafting care

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Sacred space

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Something to share? The next *UniNews* is June 2026, copy due 12 May
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For the fortnightly Whaimōhio The Loop newsletter, email: staff-comms@auckland.ac.nz.
 Deadlines are on the intranet under News, Events and Notices, The Loop.

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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.



Alistair Woodward

Call to target 'car bloat'

Super-sized vehicles, including utes, are ever-more popular in cities and a big contributor to air pollution. With oil shocks hitting, it's time to tackle 'car bloat', Professor Alistair Woodward (Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences) told RNZ's *Checkpoint*. "They are inefficient and bad for the climate," he said.

tinyurl.com/woodward-rnz-car-bloat

Peptide potential

Diabetics have a greater chance of developing heart disease, but Dr Toan Pham (Auckland Bioengineering Institute) told the *Sunday Star-Times* his research into a newly identified peptide – a kind of mini-protein – shows promise for improving the diabetic body's ability to produce energy and potentially prevent heart disease.

tinyurl.com/pham-sst-peptide



Toan Pham



Molly Swanson

Son's condition inspires brain scientist

The Centre for Brain Research's Dr Molly Swanson talked to *NZ Listener* about her work on motor neurone disease. Molly, who was recently granted \$877,000, said her passion for the work is fuelled by having a son with a life-threatening genetic condition: "Having that experience myself has grounded me in my research."

tinyurl.com/swanson-listener-mnd

Alcohol is the new smoking

In a profile of cancer survivor Kate Twigg, who has gone sober, Centre for Cancer Research director Professor Andrew Shelling talked to *NZ Herald* about the cancer risk associated with alcohol consumption. "It is probably going to overtake cigarette smoking as a single risk factor in cancer in the next few years," he said.

tinyurl.com/shelling-nzherald-alcohol



Andrew Shelling



Justine Skilling

Making Māngere green again

PhD student Justine Skilling (Sociology) spoke to outlets including RNZ and Radio Waatea about the focus of her thesis, which looks at how a Kāinga Ora-funded initiative took a collective approach to making Māngere a more pleasant place to live, using te ao Māori principles.

tinyurl.com/waatea-skilling-green

Harakeke in the lab

Harakeke shows promise as a material for removing 'forever chemicals' called PFAS from water, PhD student Shailja Data (Chemical Sciences), told *The Spinoff*. The same properties that make PFAS good for manufacturing, also harm the environment and human health as they build up, she said.

tinyurl.com/data-spinoff-harakeke



Shailja Data



Photos: Simon Young

The University's research community came together at Fale Pasifika to hear from its world-leading researchers.

Academics' global influence celebrated

TED-style talks offer a window into the high-impact work being carried out by some of the University's world-leading researchers.

A research paper from a University of Auckland researcher has been cited an astonishing 304,274 times on Google Scholar; that's more than 40 times a day, every day, as calculated to 15 April 2026.

By the time you read this, the number will have increased again.

The author of that paper is Professor Virginia Braun (pictured above, lower right) from the Faculty of Science. Her paper, offering a framework for thematic analysis, has the notable distinction of being the third-most cited paper of the 21st century in an analysis by *Nature*. The paper and the books that have followed it have been published

in Chinese, Spanish, Polish and other languages – evidence, if any was needed, that excellence in research from Aotearoa New Zealand has influence globally.

Virginia and five colleagues were the guest speakers at the 2026 Researchers with Global Impact showcase recognising the worldwide influence and reputation of the University's researchers.

Speaking at the event, the host, interim Vice-Chancellor Professor Frank Bloomfield (top right), said the researchers' work reflects not only individual excellence, but the collective effort of teams, collaborators and whānau.

Frank says the national research and innovation system is facing its biggest change in 30 years. "In response to the constantly changing research environment, the University is developing Signature Research Areas as a long-term, strengths-based framework designed to articulate and elevate our bold and distinctive research excellence."

The Signature Research Areas are near finalisation and will be launched to the University community later this year.

Each of the speakers delivered a five-minute TED-style talk to an audience representing the University's research community. The talks were designed to offer a 'small bite' of what has been the work of

many decades for each of the speakers.

Alongside Virginia's significant contribution to thematic analysis, a fundamental tool used across many disciplines, speakers highlighted research from across the University's faculties and large-scale research institutes.

From the Faculty of Arts and Education, Professor Francis Collins, who appeared via video (top left), spoke of a migration policy that delivered 'racialised inequity'.

Professor Charl de Villiers, from the Faculty of Business and Economics, outlined the need for big business to recognise that a focus on sustainability benefits both the planet and shareholders.

On the day of the event, Charl had attended Government House where he was awarded a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit in recognition of his services to accounting and sustainability.

Researchers with Global Impact is one of two key events on the research excellence calendar. The other, Celebrating Research Excellence, is held later in the year and recognises achievement and excellence from all research levels at the University.

Watch the speaker videos online:
auckland.ac.nz/rwgi-2026

Gilbert Wong

Royal Society fellows named

Five University of Auckland academics are among the 21 new Ngā Ahurei Fellows recently elected to the Academy of the Royal Society Te Apārangi.

The fellowship recognises researchers, scholars and innovators from across New Zealand who have achieved excellence in their disciplines spanning science, technology and the humanities.

Professor Yvonne Underhill-Sem, a Pacific Studies and Geography scholar of Cook Islands, Niuean and Pākehā descent, has been elected for her intellectual leadership on gendered social relations and development studies in the Pacific.

She has been instrumental in establishing Pacific feminist development geography as a critical field in social sciences, based on Pacific research.

Professor Craig Elliffe, from the Faculty of Law, has been recognised for his research of complex international taxation issues. A global leader in international taxation law, his most recent works addressed widespread



Professor Yvonne Underhill-Sem

public and government concern about the light tax burden on companies operating in the digital economy.

Three further fellows have been named from the University's Faculty of Engineering and Design.

A leader in wireless power transfer and advanced power electronics, Professor Aiguo Patrick Hu has been recognised for leading tech advancements enabling power delivery without electrical contacts.

Professor Andy Philpott has been elected for leading research in the field of optimisation in electricity markets and other

industries. The engineer's research has been used as a basis to decarbonise and cheapen electricity in several countries.

And elected for pioneering research and utilisation of bi-directional wireless power flow, Professor Udaya Madawala has fundamentally advanced this field by enabling two-way wireless energy flow, allowing devices to seamlessly exchange electrical energy without physical connections.

[Full story: auckland.ac.nz/ngā-ahurei-fellows-2026](https://auckland.ac.nz/ngā-ahurei-fellows-2026)



Photo: Elise Manahan

Obituary: Dante Giovanni Bonica

20 February 1951 – 7 April 2026

The University recently held a tangi to honour Dante Bonica (Māori Studies, Archaeology), who passed away on 7 April 2026, aged 75.

For more than 30 years, Dante, a respected master of Māori materials knowledge, could be found in his campus workshop, a space taura described as 'like a Hawaiki'. At its centre was Dante, patient, exacting and generous with his time and knowledge.

In his beloved Te Ruawhaihanga, the Māori Material Culture Workshop, near the Fale Pasifika, Dante worked with materials including stone, fibre, bone, wood and shell, reviving ancestral technologies many feared had been lost.

Born in Gisborne to a Sicilian family and raised for a time in Ahuriri, Dante's fascination with Māori material culture began early.

While at Napier Boys' High School, he

worked at Napier Museum and joined local archaeological projects.

Though not Māori by blood, his mastery of stone tools, particularly toki, earned the respect of leading kaumātua and tohunga whakairo Piri Poutapu. In the early 1970s, he helped carve the wakataua *Taheretikitiki II* at Tuurangawaewae, among other significant projects.

In 1991, Emeritus Professor Ranginui Walker requested Dante join Te Ruawhaihanga, where generations of students watched him work. Dr Tiopira McDowell reflected at the tangi: "As a historian, I got goosebumps watching Dante carving a waka with stone tools ... These are the magical ancestral spaces Dante transported us to in our everyday lives."

Pro Vice-Chancellor Māori, Professor Te Kawehau Hoskins, said hosting Dante's hui mate at Waipapa Marae reflected the esteem in which he was held and his contribution to the University and te ao Māori. "Dante's contribution to Māori material knowledge and cultural revitalisation was extraordinary. He leaves behind an enduring legacy in the knowledge he upheld, the communities he served, and the many lives he influenced."



Emā Tu'ako

[Full story: auckland.ac.nz/dante-bonica](https://auckland.ac.nz/dante-bonica)

New te reo Māori strategy launched

Fresh opportunities for staff and students to learn and use te reo Māori are part of a plan to enhance the use of the language across the University and help shape its future.

The development of courses taught in te reo Māori and expanded pathways for students to submit coursework and postgraduate research in the language are among the initiatives outlined in *He Makau Mauroa*, the University's te reo Māori strategy for 2026–2030.

Launched in late March, the strategy builds on the inaugural language plan that ran from 2020 to 2025. It renews a commitment to normalising te reo Māori across teaching, research and campus life.

The University's first language plan resulted in thousands of staff and students engaging in te reo Māori learning opportunities. This strengthened confidence, and supported both Māori and non-Māori researchers and other staff members to embed the language more frequently.

The plan's next phase aims to go further – expanding Māori-medium education, strengthening partnerships with Māori language communities, and supporting new research that advances language revitalisation.

Kaīarataki Deputy Pro Vice-Chancellor Māori Michael Steedman (Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei, Ngāti Whātua ki Kaipara, Te Uri o Hau) says the new plan reflects a growing commitment across the University to actively



Kaīarataki Deputy Pro Vice-Chancellor Māori Michael Steedman

support the revitalisation of te reo Māori.

“We gave the next phase of the plan the name *He Makau Mauroa*, meaning ‘a closely held friend’. It reflects the enduring relationship people have built with te reo Māori and the important role the language plays in their lives,” he says.

The plan also focuses on strengthening relationships with iwi, hapū and Māori language experts, recognising that revitalisation efforts must remain grounded in the communities who carry the language.

Across campus, the strategy aims to further normalise the presence of te reo Māori through bilingual signage, digital platforms and dedicated spaces for speaking the language.

One example is ReoSpace, an environment launched in 2024 within Te Herenga Mātauranga Whānui, the University's General Library, where people can speak and practise te reo Māori at all levels.

Alongside these initiatives, researchers at the University are exploring how technologies, such as AI, can support the next phase of language revitalisation.

Te Kūaha refreshed


Have you ever been asked to open with a karakia but didn't know what to say?

Or joined in a waiata tautoko without knowing the words and found yourself lip-syncing along?

Te Kūaha, the University's te reo Māori and tikanga app, helps with exactly that, and has been relaunched with a new look and features aligned with the refreshed te reo Māori strategy.

The app gives users easy access to karakia and waiata commonly used at the University, helping people take part in meetings, events and gatherings with confidence.

It also helps people – Māori and non-Māori – create their pepeha, strengthening connections to their identity, place and community within the University environment.

 **Full stories:** auckland.ac.nz/he-makau-mauroa and auckland.ac.nz/te-kuaha-2026

Critic and Conscience award winner

Professor Rod McNaughton's sustained public contributions to important national debates on innovation, entrepreneurship and tertiary education have earned him a 2026 Critic and Conscience of Society Award.

Established in 2017, the award encourages academics to provide expert commentary on issues affecting the New Zealand community and future generations. Sponsored by philanthropic trust the Gama Foundation and administered by Universities New Zealand Te Pōkai Tara, the annual award recognises the impact of an outstanding critic and conscience of society.

Rod, a professor of entrepreneurship and academic director of the Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the University, says New Zealand's longstanding productivity challenge is not primarily a failure of ideas, but a failure of institutional design.

Over the past few years, particularly as the government has been restructuring the science, innovation and technology system, he's been raising awareness of the need to reframe entrepreneurship and research commercialisation as a national capability system.

“For decades, we have produced high-quality research and celebrated innovation, yet struggled to convert knowledge, talent and discovery into enduring, high-value enterprises at a national scale,” says Rod.

 **Full story:** auckland.ac.nz/mcnaughton-critic-conscience



Professor Rod McNaughton

A portrait of Professor of Nursing Andrew Jull. He is a middle-aged man with a white beard and mustache, balding on top. He is wearing a vibrant, multi-colored paisley shirt and a dark, patterned vest. He is standing outdoors with a blurred background of green trees and a grey stone wall. A red semi-transparent banner is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing text.

Andrew Jull

Crafting care

Empowering nurses to do what they are trained to do – save lives – is the theme of International Nurses Day on 12 May. Professor of Nursing Andrew Jull reflects on how simple, respectful actions are at the heart of providing the highest levels of care.

When Andrew Jull meets UniNews for an interview, he is wearing remarkable multi-coloured shoes, a paisley velvet waistcoat, floral shirt and yellow and black plaid trousers.

The professor of nursing, promoted to personal chair in 2017, says he gave himself permission to break the unspoken rules of the male wardrobe – with its greys, blues and blacks – around a decade ago.

Like his wardrobe, his career choice suggests he's comfortable challenging convention.

Reflecting on what propelled him to embark on a nursing career, he confirms this was among his reasons.

In the 1980s, friends and flatmates who were second-wave feminists “challenged some of the masculine roles I'd grown up with”, he says. His decision “came down to wanting to be part of a movement for change”, he says, “and to show that men could be caring, to disrupt masculine role models. It was political.”

Besides, he was “bumming around” doing a degree he felt wasn't particularly relevant. “I needed a career.”

Andrew has since spent decades in nursing practice and research, and the theme of this year's International Nurses Day – empowering nurses to do what they are trained to do, which is to save lives – resonates with him.

He clearly prioritises the importance of caring for others and the personal fulfilment that comes with it. However, he says chronic understaffing of nursing in New Zealand is putting patients' lives at risk.

It's also causing what he calls “moral injury” to nurses. Burnout is an obvious harm, but being prevented from providing good quality care due to resource constraints also causes “vicarious trauma, maybe even PTSD”, he says.

He believes nursing care is rooted in simple, respectful actions, and he recalls the best shift he experienced as a nurse as an example.

Assigned a six-bed room in an orthopaedic ward, he was caring for a group of older women who had “a reputation for being demanding and difficult”.

He introduced himself to the women and helped one with a bedpan. “Then I got a flannel and moistened it, wrung it out and gave it to her, and she asked me what that was for. I said, ‘so that you can cleanse your hands’. She said, ‘nobody has ever done that for me!’

“The whole vibe in the room changed. It was like she was the switch for all the other women in that room. And we had a blast. They were so funny.”

Such simple respectful actions can shift power, build trust and shape patient experience, he says.

“Caring for people is a privilege. We get to do stuff that the general person in the street would not be allowed to do. We work with people's bodies in a way that is invasive and reinforces vulnerability. And people have to be able to trust us.

“If we can't do simple things like call them by their right name, pronounce their name the way they pronounce it, then why would they trust us with all those other intimacies?”

While Andrew has reached the highest levels of his profession, there were some rocky moments in the beginning. During his first year of training, at age 24, he was shown through North Shore Hospital's haematology lab and fainted in front of a fridge full of blood bags.

“I had no problems giving blood,” he recalls. “I had no problems working with deep wounds that exposed the subcutaneous layers, muscle, tendon and bone.”

Yet something about all those packets of blood sent him to the floor, in front of his fellow students.

Following graduation from ATI (now AUT), Andrew began his clinical career at Auckland Hospital (now Auckland City Hospital), working in orthopaedics. These early years coincided with significant changes in New Zealand's health system, including restructuring hospital services and introducing competitive, efficiency-driven funding models.

He moved into research in 1999, first completing a masters at Victoria University of Wellington: “It was never a question of if I would do research, just when and how.”

His thesis, a systematic review of a drug treatment for venous leg ulcers, was published first in the Cochrane Library and then in the *Lancet*.

Venous leg ulcers, he explains, occur when blood pumped out of the heart down to the feet has trouble getting back up to the heart. When the valves in the deep veins in the legs fail, inflammation becomes chronic, and tissue breaks down in the form of ulcers. These can be life-changing, both for patients and their families, with everything revolving around the condition.

Andrew's work has since been informed by his development of New Zealand's guidelines for the management of people with chronic leg ulcers, and he remains committed to evidence-based nursing practice.

His ambition to find where the evidence was missing and fill the gaps also led to work on the Cochrane Collaboration (now called Cochrane), a global independent network of researchers, professionals and patients that provides evidence-based health information.

He puts much of his research trajectory down to having the right mentors at the right time, including those who pushed him to apply for the HRC Foxley Fellowship in 2002. That funded a year's research sabbatical at

the Clinical Trials Research Unit (CTRU) at the University of Auckland.

The Foxley Fellowship led to more grants, which led to more trials, including a large randomised trial using honey to treat venous leg ulcers – a study involving 368 participants across Auckland, Waikato and Christchurch. It also became his PhD. (The findings? “Better to use it on your toast, not your leg,” says Andrew. “We found that it made no difference in healing or infection rates when used as a first-line treatment.”)

He spent seven years with the CTRU, chasing grant funding for his research and salary; he loved the work but not the precarity, especially once he had three children.

Andrew approached the School of Nursing, where he had longstanding connections, and asked about vacancies, and he was appointed an associate professor in 2009. Until 2019, he split his time between Auckland City Hospital, where he worked as a nurse adviser in quality and safety, and the University.

“Caring for people is a privilege. We get to do stuff that the general person in the street would not be allowed to do”



Professor Andrew Jull, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences

His research interests have expanded beyond wound care to include childhood weight-gain prevention, gambling addiction, and the development of national weight-management guidelines for adults and children. The recurring theme is emphasising rigorous evidence and translating research findings into practice and policy.

And those children have also grown. Andrew and his wife (whom he met at nursing school and is now a midwife) live in Titirangi, with their youngest, who hopes to study physiotherapy. Their eldest, a son, works as a nurse and their daughter in hospital administration.

He must be chuffed that their children have gone into healthcare?

He chooses his words carefully: “I'm glad that they are kind,” he says. “I'm proud that they like each other. I'm happy that they are finding work that they enjoy.”



Margo White

Patrick Savage

Why does music do this to me?



Photo: Chris Loufte

Musicologist Dr Patrick Savage researches why all humans make music – but in such different ways.

The research of musicologist Patrick Savage has included drawing on a classic Exponents anthem to reveal insights into why humans create music.

As a scientist, Dr Patrick Savage theorises that music evolved in humans to facilitate social bonding; as a singer and performer, he has firsthand experience of this phenomenon at play.

The musicologist's recently published book, *Comparative Musicology: Evolution, Universals and the Science of the World's Music*, explores why all human societies make music, but in such different ways. It draws on recent advances from musicology and related fields, including psychology, linguistics, computer science and evolutionary anthropology, to outline ways to understand and compare all the world's music.

Comparative musicologists such as Patrick study music's evolutionary purpose, digging into a mystery first identified by Charles Darwin in 1871, which remains unresolved: since humans didn't need to make music to survive, why did we evolve to make it?

It's a challenging question when even hitting on a precise definition of music is "close to impossible", says Patrick, who last year won the Royal Society Te Apārangi Early Career Research Excellence Award for Humanities.

"Sound organised into regular pitches or rhythms" seems workable, he says, as a way of distinguishing music from most speech, but exceptions persist.

What of a ritual in Papua New Guinea where the mix of human moans and noises from assorted instruments features neither regular beats nor discrete pitches? A sung recitation of the *Qur'an* may seem enchantingly musical to many but not to those Muslims who consider music forbidden.

But back to that question of music's evolutionary purpose.

Patrick is the director of the CompMusic Lab for comparative and computational

musicology, which he began in 2018 at Keio University in Japan (where he holds tenure). He's been continuing the lab's work since winning a five-year Rutherford Discovery Fellowship, which saw him relocate in 2023 to work in the University of Auckland's School of Psychology.

(In what he describes as "an amazing coincidence", Patrick is in the same school as Dr Samuel Mehr, the music researcher who runs the citizen science platform The Music Lab, who arrived from Harvard on a Rutherford fellowship the previous year.)

One of Patrick's most ambitious – and fun – projects compared singing, music and speech across 46 countries and 55 languages, including Mandarin, Cantonese, Hindi, Hebrew, Arabic, Ukrainian, English, Balinese, Cherokee, Spanish, Māori, Basque and Yoruba.

Researchers around the world each sang a traditional song, recited its lyrics, and

performed it on an instrument, from whistle to sitar, or by clapping or tapping.

With rare exceptions, the rhythms of songs and instrumental melodies were slower than for speech, with higher and more stable pitches. Slow, predictable sound patterns, Patrick speculated, may be particularly well suited to facilitating synchrony, harmony and social bonding through group singing.

A follow-up study designed by Patrick and collaborators, including PhD students Zixuan Jia and Danya Pavlovich (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Hine), investigated how group singing increased social bonding compared with talking in a group.

“That’s the greatest bonding experience I’ve had through music ... we all sang together again and it was just super-powerful.”

>>>

Patrick Savage, Faculty of Science

After a small pilot study in Auckland using the classic Exponents song ‘Why does love do this to me?’ researchers around the globe facilitated singing and speaking in small groups involving more than 1,000 people speaking 30 languages.

Singing, it was found, did more for bonding than speaking.

A resurgence in musicology

Music has played a part in the scientist’s life since childhood. The Wisconsin-born Patrick moved to Wellington as a nine-year-old when his geophysicist mother took up a job at Victoria University of Wellington.

Growing up in the capital, he excelled at chess, classical piano and basketball, sang in a barbershop chorus and learned the English folk songs that his father loved.

He returned to the US for university where he studied music composition at Amherst College in Massachusetts. While there, he joined an a cappella chorus called The Zumbyes, which he says was transformative.

“That’s the greatest bonding experience I’ve had through music,” says Patrick. “I went

back to a reunion with those guys last year and we all sang together again and it was just super-powerful.”

He was considering career options, including musician or composer, when he came across *The Origins of Music*, a book that showed tools from evolutionary biology, linguistics and anthropology revitalising musicology, a field that he says had lost its way during the 20th century.

Inspired, Patrick contacted musicologist and psychologist Steven Brown of McMaster University in Canada, one of the book’s co-editors. Patrick’s Master of Science under Steven’s supervision at McMaster focused on

musical and genetic diversity in Indigenous tribes in Taiwan and the Philippines. Advanced degrees in musicology followed, at Tokyo University of the Arts.

Mindful of the racist and Western-centred biases that shaped much 19th and 20th century cross-cultural research, Patrick emphasises inclusivity in his research and says more Indigenous and non-Western researchers are needed in musicology.

He also aims to foster this inclusivity through his world music podcast, *Many Voices*. Shining a light on songs sung in the world’s more than 6,000 languages other than English, the podcast involves Patrick asking musicians and music lovers around the world to share seven songs from their own language and culture, teaching listeners what they mean and why they are important.

Home and away

While working as a senior research fellow at the University of Auckland, Patrick has been based in Wellington. He’s back living in his childhood home in Karori, where his parents Mike and Martha still live, along with

his wife Sawa, and their children Maika and Kazushi. The family plan to return to Japan in late 2028, but in the meantime, Patrick says he’s grateful his children are getting the opportunity to attend Karori Normal School (as he once did), spend time with their grandparents and learn te reo Māori.

One absence in the home that weighs heavily, however, is that of Patrick’s younger brother Kelly. While teaching English in Japan, he died of a cardiac arrest in 2017 after being admitted to a Japanese psychiatric hospital during a manic episode, subsequently being restrained over ten days. The scandal received extensive news coverage and the family has since campaigned against such practices in Japan.

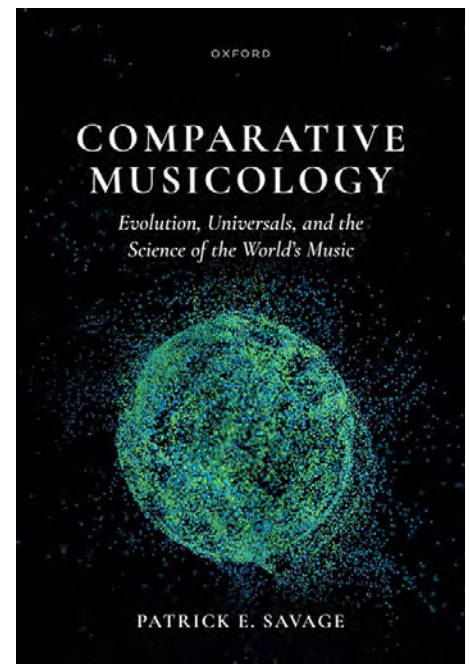
Outside of work and family time, Patrick has been enjoying mountain biking at Mākara Peak in Karori and has rejoined Vocal FX Chorus – a Wellington barbershop group he sang with in his early 20s.

He may not be able to define exactly what music is – but he knows it when he sings it.

>>>

Paul Panckhurst

Comparative Musicology: Evolution, Universals, and the Science of the World’s Music is available free online.



The Katy Perry connection

When pop star Katy Perry denied plagiarism in the song ‘Dark Horse’ (2013), Patrick provided expert evidence supporting her case.

His evidence drew on a method he’s developed in his research that looks at melodies as if they were mutating viruses. Along with the School of Psychology’s Professor Quentin Atkinson, he

created an algorithm to compare the sequences of notes in songs to create a kind of ‘family tree’ of ancestor and descendant songs, based on alterations that have occurred in the music as it has been passed down.

Patrick has applied the technique to collections of thousands of Japanese folk songs and traditional British-American ballads such as ‘The Elfin Knight’, a song from the 1600s that mutated into what we know today as ‘Scarborough Fair’.

VC portrait a twist on tradition

After six years, Professor Dawn Freshwater has exited her role as vice-chancellor and unveiled a portrait recognising her tenure.

When a portrait of Vice-Chancellor Professor Dawn Freshwater was recently revealed, it continued a tradition of honouring each vice-chancellor with an artwork depicting their image.

However, this most recent portrait has a distinct difference: the University's first female leader is depicted in a photographic work, rather than a painting.

Created by award-winning artist and photographer, Elam alumna Roberta Thornley, the portrait, like those of other former vice-chancellors, now forms part of the University of Auckland Art Collection.

Dawn says the portrait, unveiled at her farewell event on 23 March, came out of early conversations with Roberta about taking a new approach.

"We saw it as an opportunity to do something a little different, while keeping a sense of tradition," says Dawn. "Photography felt like a more accessible, contemporary medium, and one that our students engage with every day."

The portrait shows the vice-chancellor front and centre, in black against a dark background, wearing an academic cap and pounamu.

Roberta says the portrait draws on Dawn's life and career, capturing her strength and warmth.

"In this portrait we meet Dawn looking at the viewer and beyond the viewer, her eyes are gentle and focused. The symmetry, along with the objects and her expression, give the photograph an archetypal and emblematic quality that, I think, is important in our celebration of Dawn's leadership and what she has achieved," says Roberta.

"The cap, a symbol of education [as a path] to freedom, underpins what I have come to understand about what education has provided for Dawn. For an object born out of the twelfth century, it looks thoroughly brilliant and modern when worn by Dawn."

Roberta, who has widely exhibited across New Zealand and abroad, received a Prime Minister's sports scholarship to attend Elam, where she studied sculpture, painting and photography and graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 2008. In 2017, she was



Artist Roberta Thornley with Vice-Chancellor Professor Dawn Freshwater.

awarded the Marti Friedlander Photographic Award by the Arts Foundation.

The artist says working with the vice-chancellor was a privilege. "She was incredibly forthcoming, generous and fun."

Dawn's last day at the University was 10 April, and prior to her departure she shared reflections on her six years in the role.

She recalled arriving at the University on the eve of the Covid-19 pandemic, immediately faced with profound changes to the ways students and staff had to teach, learn and work.

"What followed revealed something important about this University and its people," says Dawn.

"There was a shared sense of purpose and a remarkable collective effort to keep things moving. That experience showed us

what we were capable of, and set the tone for everything that followed. It shaped how we worked together and what we achieved together as a University community."

She noted that it had been a privilege to serve as the University's vice-chancellor – a role she described "as one of stewardship, building on what came before and working alongside others to help shape its next chapter".

"What we have achieved has been a collective effort. It reflects the commitment, care and ambition of our staff, our students and our wider University community."

Vice-Chancellor Professor Dawn Freshwater's portrait is now displayed alongside those of other former vice-chancellors on Level 1 of the ClockTower.



(Clockwise from top left) Professor Margaret Mutu, Associate Professor Sereana Naepi, alumna Rachel Paris and Associate Professor Paula Morris are among the speakers with a University connection at this year's Auckland Writers Festival.

Festival feast

Booklovers converge for writers festival

High-profile international names and top local talent, including a strong showing from the University of Auckland, will feature at the Auckland Writers Festival, which runs from 12–17 May.

Among them are Professor Margaret Mutu (Māori Studies), Associate Professor Sereana Naepi (Social Sciences) and Associate Professor Paula Morris (English and Drama).

A specialist in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Māori rights and Māori resistance to British colonisation, Margaret (Ngāti Kahu, Te Rarawa, Ngāti Whātua, Scottish) will be taking part in two events.

On 16 May, she'll be talking about 'How to be a good ancestor' at an event looking at how the choices we're making today will shape the lives of those coming after (with Tāme Iti, Richard Shaw and Gabriella Brayne).

And on 17 May, 'The Waitangi Tribunal – 50 years' will focus on a collection of essays to which she is a contributor: *50 Years of The Waitangi Tribunal – Whakamana I Te Tiriti*, which surveys the landmark decisions, results and reports of the tribunal over its half century.

Author, essayist and director of the Master of Creative Writing programme, Paula Morris (Ngāti Wai, Ngāti Whātua, Ngāti Manuhiri) will be in conversation with festival headliners Canadian author Yann Martel (*Life of Pi*) on 15 May and US writer Louise Erdrich (*The Night Watchman*, *Love Medicine*) on 17 May.

Yann Martel's major new novel *Son of Nobody* has been described as bridging 'the 3,000-year gap between a Trojan war soldier and a modern-day Oxford scholar, to explore the universality of homesickness, regret, ambition, love and grief'.

A Pulitzer Prize-winning author of Ojibwe (Chippewa) and German heritage, Louise

Erdrich's novels examine Native American life, identity and community, often through interconnected stories set in the American Midwest. She will be talking to Paula about her career, her latest novel *The Mighty Red* and short story collection *The Python's Kiss*.

And on 16 May, the busy Paula will host a session with top Korean contemporary writer Bora Chung. Described as a 'unique, unsettling blend of speculative fiction, horror, folktales and societal critique', Bora Chung's work has seen her shortlisted for the International Booker Prize and National Book Award for her short-story collection *Cursed Bunny*.

Her latest collection is *The Midnight Timetable*, which is 'equal parts bone-chilling, wryly funny and deeply political', according to the festival programme.

Pacific people's experiences of racism in Aotearoa is the subject of *Oceans Between Us: Pacific Peoples and Racism in Aotearoa*, edited by Pacific scholar Sereana Naepi (Fijian, Pākehā) and published by Auckland University Press.

The book encompasses perspectives from 13 expert contributors across education, health, climate and justice, and Sereana will be discussing it with spoken word poet Zech Soakai on 16 May.

Other big names in this year's festival include Roddy Doyle, Maggie Farrell, Amitav Ghosh, Ian McEwan, Mick Herron, A.C. Grayling, Fran Lebowitz and M. Gessen.

Also featured will be alumni from the University's Master of Creative Writing course, including Rachel Paris and Saraïde de Silva.

The Faculty of Arts and Education is a festival silver sponsor and is also supporting the masterclasses.



Julianne Evans



Viral Debt

Professor Jodi Gardner (Auckland Law School) co-edits this book, which challenges how social scientists, policymakers, legal scholars and the

public examine household debts and well-being. *Viral Debt* traces how debt moves within and across households to communities and institutions, with devastating effects.

Edited by Jodi Gardner, Mia Gray and Frederick F. Wherry, Routledge, \$79 (paperback), e-book free



The Inner World of Artificial Intelligence

Dr Elham Bahmanteymouri, Dr Mohsen Mohammadzadeh (Architecture and Planning) and former Arts and

Education staff member Fabio Morreale edit this critical and interdisciplinary exploration of how AI is reshaping the contemporary world. It uncovers how AI operates as a transformative technology as well as a sociopolitical force.

Edited by Elham Bahmanteymouri, Mohsen Mohammadzadeh and Fabio Morreale, Routledge, \$147



Blue is a Cracked Vase in Memory

This book by alumna and former staff member Riemke Ensing contains poems from her three previous books, along with

more than 60 previously uncollected poems. Described as intensely visual poems, they reveal the poet's affinity for coastal locations, such as Muriwai and Otago Harbour, her response to the work of artists and fellow writers, as well as the migrant experience.

Riemke Ensing, Cold Hub Press, \$33



Photos: Simon Young



Reverend Petra Zaleski loves the organic feel inside Maclaurin Chapel, and the view of the Canadian oak outside her office window.

A sacred space

With its lanes of tall windows framing the trees outside, Maclaurin Chapel is surrounded by nature.

“It’s the light that I love,” says the Reverend Petra Zaleski of the chapel space, which is crowned by an hexagonal ceiling of golden timber. “It has a very organic feel.”

It’s a favourite place for Petra, who is part of a chaplaincy team that also includes a Roman Catholic and a Muslim chaplain.

The chapel, on Princes Street, was constructed following a gift from businessman Sir William Goodfellow. It was built in memory of his son, Lt Richard Maclaurin Goodfellow, a young pilot killed in 1944 while serving with the Fleet Air Arm.

Completed in 1964, the chapel actually bears the name of Richard’s uncle, Richard Cockburn Maclaurin, an alumnus and distinguished mathematician.

Alongside the chapel, the Maclaurin

complex includes meeting spaces, a hall and kitchen, making it a regular meeting spot for student groups.

Petra is now in her third year at the chapel, and back at the University where she studied theology (her mother also studied with her). With a background working in social justice and addiction services, she “never thought someone like me could be a vicar”. However, she spent seven years as vicar at St Peter’s, an Anglican church in Onehunga, before coming to the Maclaurin Chapel.

Another of Petra’s favourite spaces in the complex is her office. It’s a little damp, giving it an “op-shop feel”, she says, but she loves the outlook.

On the other side of a wall of windows is a large Canadian oak, its branches spreading low across the ground, cocooning the office space and providing a constant companion.

It gives her a sense of continuity and history, she says. “You watch the seasons move through this tree; right now, it’s full of

vibrant green, but then it will be autumnal red and as winter comes its leaves fall off.

“I love trees; the way they communicate with each other through their roots and help each other out, I’m really into that.”

Petra’s vision for the chapel is a space that welcomes the diversity of the University community and provides a place for prayer and contemplation.

Among her recent initiatives are ‘Tea-ology’ events, where experts from across the University community, such as Dame Anne Salmond and Mere Roberts, have been invited to share their insights on the sacred in its many forms and across a range of cultural traditions.

It’s one answer, says Petra, to a question she often asks: “How can we translate the contemplative and hospitable aspects of this space to make it welcoming for all?”



Caitlin Sykes