NOVEMBER 2026

Waipapa Taumata Rau
University of Auckland

UniNews



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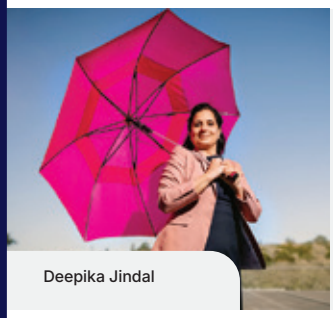
Something to share? The next *UniNews* is December 2026, copy due 10 November.
Email: uninews@auckland.ac.nz

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.

When posted, *UniNews* is delivered in certified degradable EPI packaging in keeping with our sustainability goals. In PDF, this document has clickable links to any URLs.

IN THE NEWS

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



Deepika Jindal

Valuing older people's work

Dr Deepika Jindal (Management and International Business) talked with *NZ Herald* about her research on the work experiences of older people, who have decades of experience and expertise, and strong networks. "From an economic perspective, from a business perspective, if that is not used, it is going to waste," she said.

tinyurl.com/jindal-nzherald-workers

Sustainable tourism: not a box-ticking exercise

In *The Post*'s Brainwaves section, Dr Claire Beach (Business School) drew on her doctoral research to challenge the idea that sustainability is a simple checklist. Her study of New Zealand tourism businesses found lasting progress requires constant adaptation and learning.

tinyurl.com/beach-post-tourism



Claire Beach



Justin O'Sullivan

Sequence in time

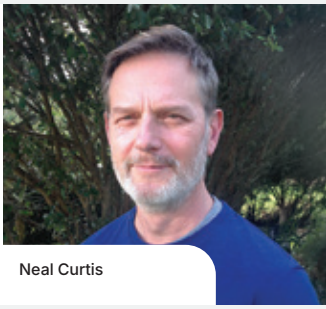
Professor Justin O'Sullivan (Liggins Institute) told the *New Zealand Listener* that rapid DNA sequencing technology, which saved the life of a newborn with an extremely rare disorder, can potentially be used to develop individualised treatments for Kiwi babies with hard-to-diagnose conditions.

tinyurl.com/osullivan-listener-dna

Seeking comic collaborators

Professor Neal Curtis (Media and Screen Studies) talked to RNZ's *Nights* about his Comics Colab project. The initiative aims to turn important public information, in areas like health and science, into comics to increase its relatability and reach. The project is currently seeking more funded ideas and artists to join its stable.

tinyurl.com/curtis-rnz-comic-colab



Neal Curtis



Selina Tusitala Marsh

Sharing stories in Tuvalu

PMN News featured Professor Selina Tusitala Marsh's (Humanities) recent visit to Tuvalu. The inaugural Commonwealth Poet Laureate spent eight days working with students, teachers, aspiring writers and community leaders to help them put their own stories into words.

tinyurl.com/tusitala-marsh-pmn-tuvalu

Blue-sky research pays off

RNZ reported on research to help miniaturise the laser tools used for ultraprecise measuring in atomic clocks and quantum computing. Professor Miro Erkintalo (Physics) said blue-sky research led him to explore a new design for optical frequency combs, now successfully demonstrated by collaborators in the US.

tinyurl.com/erkintalo-rnz-blue-sky



Miro Erkintalo

Celebrating the 2026 Blues Awards winners

A taste of some of the stories behind the University's top student achievers, who were recognised at a ceremony on 2 October.

Silver Fern balances netball and medicine

Catherine Hall's standout season with the Silver Ferns, alongside her honours research and resilience in the face of injury earned her the Blues' Sportswoman of the Year title.

The recognition comes after the Silver Fern defender stepped away from her Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery studies in 2025 to complete a Bachelor of Medical Science (Honours) part-time over two years while continuing to compete at the highest level of netball.

Catherine progressed through regional and national development programmes before securing a full contract with the Northern Mystics. She represented New Zealand in age-group and development sides and made her Silver Ferns debut in 2025.

"I've put a lot into both my studies and my netball, so it's special to be recognised for both. It feels like two important parts of my life coming together."

This year's international season included the Silver Ferns' Commonwealth Games campaign, in which Catherine contributed to the team's gold-medal success. However, a ruptured anterior cruciate ligament prevented her from playing in the campaign's final stages.

She credits her family with inspiring both her netball and medical ambitions.

"My mum was the reason I got into netball," says Catherine.

"Mum took me along to a little give-it-a-go session when I was young and I've loved it ever since. She later became a doctor, so it's funny that I've ended up following both those paths too."



Full story: auckland.ac.nz/2026-blues-hall



Dual awards for scholar, artist and activist

A commitment to Māori knowledge and ensuring Indigenous voices are heard was recognised with two major Blues Awards for Em-Haley Kukutai Walker: Arts and Culture, and the Major Māori Award.

Em-Haley (Ngaati Tiipaa, Ngaati Kaiaua) is a Master of Indigenous Studies student and an award-winning musician, known as Theia. Her work merges bilingual protest music, Indigenous scholarship and Māori advocacy to challenge colonial narratives, celebrate wāhine Māori and carry Indigenous voices to the global stage.

"They're all connected by a shared commitment to Māori knowledge, Indigenous resistance and the restoration of matriarchal perspectives," she says.

Her debut album, *Girl, In a Savage World* brings together her scholarship and artistic practice and saw Theia receive the Best Māori Songwriter prize at this year's Waiata Māori Music Awards.

Em-Haley is also active as a performer and advocate on the global stage.

In April, she travelled to New York to represent her iwi at the UN's Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, where she delivered two interventions before global government and tribal leaders.

Reflecting on what motivates her to create art as a form of advocacy and activism, she says: "It's our responsibility to be fearless in our art, because there are so many peoples around the world who don't have that choice."

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/2026-blues-kukutai-walker



Pursuing success on and off the water

At just 23, Arie Rasmussen Magasiva (Lefagaoali'i, Safotu, Lepea/Sāmoa and Cook Islands) has established himself among New Zealand's top rowing talent while also pursuing postgraduate study at the University.

Arie's achievements saw him recognised with the 2026 Blues Major Pasifika Award.

A member of Rowing New Zealand's High Performance Programme, he represented New Zealand at the 2026 Rowing World Cups in Spain and Bulgaria. He placed thirteenth at World Cup I and achieved an impressive fifth-place finish at World Cup II.

Following more than a decade of his dedication to the sport, Arie was named as a reserve for the World Rowing Championships and selected for New Zealand's 2026-27 summer squad. This places him among the country's leading rowers and firmly on the path to Olympic competition.

After completing a Bachelor of Global Studies and Bachelor of Commerce conjoint degree, he is now studying for a Postgraduate Certificate in Business Management at the Business School.

While many elite athletes focus solely on their sporting careers, Arie says his mother, Meccedes Rasmussen, encouraged him to pursue education alongside rowing, recognising that athletic careers have a finite window.

"One thing we weren't willing to budge on was making sure I got the degree I wanted," he says.

"It wasn't the path most people take, but it was really important to me. Now I feel reassured knowing I have something outside of sport that will benefit me in the future."

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/2026-blues-rasmussen-magasiva

For the full winners list: auckland.ac.nz/2026-blues-winners

University leads country in start-up creation

When it comes to creating start-ups and spinout companies, the University of Auckland leads New Zealand and ranks third-equal in Australasia, according to a new survey.

The latest Survey of Commercialisation Outcomes from Public Research (SCOPR) compared 72 universities, medical research institutes and public research organisations across Australia and New Zealand.

The survey found the University is the highest-performing New Zealand university in several key categories and ranks among the region's leading institutions overall.

For example, it ranks third in Australasia for commercialisation revenue and among the top ten organisations in Australasia for active licensing and commercialisation agreements.

In 2025, University researchers generated 194 invention disclosures, filed 40 new patent applications, launched seven new start-ups and spinouts, and maintained equity holdings in 38 active spinout companies. The total commercialisation revenue was $74 million.



Photo: William Chea

Professor Simon Malpas of the Auckland Bioengineering Institute is also the founder of University spinout company Kitea Health.

Will Charles, executive director investments at UniServices, says the survey results reflect the quality of research at the University and the strength of its support systems.

"These results confirm the University of Auckland's position as New Zealand's leading university for research commercialisation and place us among the top-performing institutions across Australasia.

"Our researchers are developing world-class ideas that are attracting investment, generating new companies, creating commercial partnerships and delivering benefits to society."

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/scopr-2026

Māori economy leaders converge

Investment, innovation and Indigenous leadership took centre stage at the Māori Economy Symposium and Awards Dinner at the University on 16 October.

Keynote speaker June McCabe (Ngāpuhi, Te Rarawa, Te Aupōuri, Ngāti Kaharau and Ngāti Kahu), a Māori business leader, highlighted opportunities in technology, energy and education, and called for investment that aligns with Māori values and directs capital towards those who need it most.

Fellow keynote Dr Rongo Wetere, ONZM (Ngāti Maniapoto) reflected on establishing Te Wānanga o Aotearoa in 1994, overcoming funding challenges and successfully challenging inequities through the Waitangi Tribunal.

Panel discussions explored Indigenous trade, business research and innovation, including data sovereignty and aligning economic development with Indigenous values.

The symposium was followed by an awards dinner recognising achievements in Māori business, leadership, community development and research.

Mā Te Huruhuru Charitable Trust received the Mānuka Hēnare Award for tackling youth poverty and homelessness through initiatives including a transitional housing complex supporting 18 young people.

Property graduate Jerome Te Paa received the Dame Mira Szászy Alumni Award for his leadership and mentoring, while Ngāroimata Reid received the Outstanding Māori Postgraduate Business Student Award for her advocacy work and doctoral research focusing on the leadership resilience, identity and efficacy of wāhine Māori.

Professor Jason Mika, Associate Dean Māori at the Business School and director of the Dame Mira Szászy Centre, said the events provided opportunities to strengthen relationships and advance research.

"Grounded in kaupapa Māori, the symposium and the awards saw Māori and Indigenous business leaders, researchers, industry partners, and students come together to advance Indigenous trade, business research and innovation."

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/2026-maori-economy



Photo: Richard Ng

Management and International Business doctoral candidate Ngāroimata Reid, winner of the Outstanding Māori Postgraduate Business Student award, pictured with Professor Jason Mika (left) and Taiaha Hawke of Ngāti Whātua Orākei (right).

Correction
The October 2026 issue of *UniNews* incorrectly noted that Alberto Garcia-Alvarez passed away in July. In fact, the artist died on 1 September. We sincerely apologise for the error.

Research community celebrates excellence

The breadth, depth and contribution to society of University researchers and their work was recognised in October at the 2026 Celebrating Research Excellence awards.

Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation Professor Frank Bloomfield told the audience of researchers, friends and whānau that the achievements of the researchers who were honoured strengthened the entire University.

"Thank you for your courage in asking the difficult questions, for the excellence of your craft in whichever discipline that is, for your persistence and tenacity, and the generosity with which you contribute to our research culture and the education of our students."

Keynote speaker Nic Blakeley, chief executive of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, said the common feature in models of economic growth was that innovation and the cultivation of new ideas and ways of doing things is created by research. "There is no other pathway to prosperity in the future."

He said New Zealand's productivity lagged that of comparable small, advanced countries. Research excellence and innovation were the ways to rectify this.

"Those honoured tonight embody a courageous, future-focused spirit, pursuing new ideas, translating them into knowledge, capability and opportunities that New Zealand needs for its future growth and prosperity."

See video of the award winners: tinyurl.com/uoa-2026-research-excellence



Photo: Simon Young

Dr Amy Lovell, receiving an Early Career Research Excellence Award from Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation Professor Frank Bloomfield.

Repair Cafe gives items a second life

A broken bicycle, a toaster and a giant model crane were among the items given a second life at the University's Repair Cafe on 16 October.

From morning to noon, dozens of volunteers from across the University poured into Unleash Space on Symonds Street to help repair household items that might have otherwise ended up in landfill.

Volunteers put their skills in sewing, electrical work, furniture and jewellery repair, and bicycle maintenance to use.

For the Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship's Naomi Bradshaw, the event was an opportunity to fix a giant model crane with a broken motor that had cluttered her hallway for far too long.

"I couldn't bear the thought of it going into landfill. I was waiting for an opportunity to have it fixed," she says.

"Job done, thanks to the wonderful volunteers at Repair Cafe. And though my son has outgrown it, it will now get to be enjoyed by a colleague's kids."

Repair Cafe is now in its second year and the initiative continues to grow the University's sustainability and community engagement efforts.

"Beyond extending the life of household items and reducing waste, it also encourages the sharing of practical repair skills and brings people together through a culture of reuse and circular economy thinking," says co-organiser Dr Matthew Sidford.

"It's a great example of how small actions can contribute to a more sustainable future."

Repair Cafe was hosted by the Faculty of Engineering and Design Sustainability Committee in association with Repair Network Aotearoa, with staff and student volunteers from across faculties and service divisions assisting on the day.

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/2026-repair-café



Photos: Sav Schulman





Joshua Fisher

The business of restoring nature



Photo: Chris Loufte

Professor Joshua Fisher hopes the Nature Positive Hub will drive better outcomes for our environment and communities.

The inaugural director of the University's Nature Positive Hub learnt early that our livelihoods and well-being rise and fall alongside the health of our environment.

Utah's semi-arid desert landscape was the backdrop to Joshua Fisher's early life.

He grew up tending cattle, sheep and crops on his family's ranch in Cornish, where the farming community depended on rainfall and a good winter snowpack (accumulated snow) for water.

In years when water was scarce, tensions "were very real", says Joshua (Josh).

"People would argue over water for their crops and livestock, and I was particularly attuned to that as a young farmhand because irrigation was one of my responsibilities. Any time there was a shock to the system, like the canal failing or a prolonged drought, tensions would flare, and we'd have to find some way to resolve the conflicts."

He didn't realise it then, but those experiences would set him on a course for a career that has taken him from Mozambique to the Amazon, with roles as a wildfire fighter, river ranger, research scientist, independent consultant and Ivy League academic.

Now, he's the inaugural director of the University's Nature Positive Hub, shaping its strategic direction and impact.

The hub aims to foster and support a thriving community of scholars, scientists, iwi, businesses and policymakers to advance regenerative stewardship of Aotearoa New Zealand and the world.

Through a flagship research programme, doctoral students, postdocs, faculty members across disciplines, and community partners will explore how business, finance and public policy can move beyond reducing environmental harm to restore biodiversity and ecosystems. Their solutions also aim to support long-term social and economic well-being.

"My start on the farm helped me see the urgency and need for the nature positive initiative," says Josh.

"Biodiversity loss and the disruption of ecosystems have real, tangible consequences for communities like the one I grew up in. Regenerating ecological integrity is crucial for enhancing resilience and for creating a world in which all inhabitants, human and otherwise, can thrive.

"For me, it's very personal."

In 2027, the hub will welcome its first cohort of fully funded, nature-focused doctoral students. Their research will tackle pressing environmental and economic challenges, from regenerative forestry and the future of fisheries management to how communication shapes public trust, and what it would mean for Aotearoa New Zealand to treat nature as a form of shared sovereign wealth.

"When I think about the technological innovations needed to create a world in which all beings can thrive, when I think about the value chains that need to be linked for all beings to thrive, the growth potential in that is infinite. There's so much space for a regenerative economy.

"There's something both ambitious and pragmatic about the nature positive work at Waipapa Taumata Rau that I think is unique.

"The potential of the Nature Positive Hub to have real impact stands out among peer institutions that focus either on academic research or on practice. The hub will integrate across both."

From the farm to fighting wildfires

Josh grew up in a small town of 200 people, but his parents encouraged a broader outlook. They invited international students from a nearby university to their farm to share stories of their home countries.

"We were able to enjoy a grounded farming experience, paired with a bigger worldview that was nurtured by my folks. It got me interested in trying to work on environmental management in an international setting, but there wasn't a clear pathway for that from my hometown."

There were, however, seasonal jobs in Utah that provided an entry point.

At 20, Josh joined the US Forest Service as a wildland firefighter and later became a backcountry river ranger with the US Bureau of Land Management.

Fighting wildfires in the western US taught him about the pressures facing communities in fire-prone landscapes, and the natural cycles of disruption and regeneration in ecosystems that depend on fire.

As a river ranger, he managed competing demands on shared natural resources, working with ranchers, fishers, recreational users, government agencies and Native American land managers.

"Throughout my formative years, I became committed to supporting communities to navigate environmental conflicts and develop collaborative solutions."

Those commitments led him to pursue an undergraduate degree in international law and environmental policy at Utah State University, followed by graduate studies in international conflict resolution and environmental conflict.

After his masters, he worked as a land-use planner in conservation, restoration and the interagency management of public lands. He then completed his PhD at George Mason University before working for private-sector firms.

In 2012, he joined Columbia University's Earth Institute, first as a postdoctoral researcher and later becoming director of AC4, a research centre focused on conflict, peace and sustainable development.

"I'm a somewhat non-traditional academic in that I always wanted to do applied work rather than fundamental research and science," he explains.

"I was lucky to spend the first decade-and-a-half of my academic career at the Earth Institute at Columbia University, which was explicitly focused on cross-university, solutions-oriented, interdisciplinary research. It was about using science to find solutions to fundamental social and environmental problems."

Josh has carried that practical focus throughout his career, engaging in projects where his work and research can deliver value to the people facing the problems.

"I've always aspired to deep collaboration, treating the research environment as an ecosystem where each researcher, community organisation, policymaker and funder has their own niche to fill and function to serve. For me, being an academic is about finding my own niche within that ecosystem."

New Zealand via Mozambique

Josh's international career began with a stint in the Peace Corps in Mozambique, a country he has continued to work in almost every year since 2005.

It's also where he met his New Plymouth-born partner, Natasha Anandaraja. Both were invited to contribute to a major national park restoration project, where he was working in social and environmental science, while she, a University of Auckland-trained doctor, was working in public health.

In Mozambique, Josh and Natasha examined the social and environmental benefits of conservation, building evidence on how collaborative environmental management can improve both community well-being and ecosystem health.

They've built that knowledge into their work ever since: Josh as a researcher and scientist, and Natasha, who founded a non-profit organisation, Women Together Global, focused on supporting women and communities to build environmentally responsible businesses.

Across his career, Josh has continued to collaborate with NGOs, conservation organisations and scientists, using applied research to inform conservation planning and resource management in some of the world's most vital ecosystems.

This took him to Peru, where he supported forest conservation in the Amazon, and to the Altiplano in Argentina, where he studied hydrological connections among aquifers in areas of lithium extraction. Lithium is essential to the shift away from fossil fuels and a key component of EV batteries; the question, Josh says, is how to obtain it without undermining the water systems communities depend on.

He has taken similar approaches elsewhere, conducting human rights and environmental impact assessments of Papua New Guinea gold mines, supporting social and environmental transitions in the Basque Country, and studying sustainable watershed management in Japan.

His emphasis on relationships has shaped his work and the opportunities that have come his way.

Connecting with the Kiwi community in New York made the move to Aotearoa possible, he says, having learned about New Zealand's nature positive initiative at a Flat White Meet-up of New Zealand expats. He later connected with the University of Auckland through that network.

"I've always tried to do work that's interesting, has real potential for impact and the right enabling ecosystem. The plans for the Nature Positive Hub just checked all those boxes.

"What stood out to me about the hub's philosophy was its recognition that we live in systems that have been disrupted, but that there is opportunity for regeneration.

"It takes me back to my firefighting experience and those cycles of stability, disruption and regeneration. There's something really special about working within a philosophy that recognises those cycles and sees the potential for renewal."

Josh's appreciation for nature's cycles extends beyond his professional life. Outside of work, he's drawn, unsurprisingly, to activities that take him outdoors.

He grew up rock climbing in Utah's mountains; running has been a constant, and he also swims and surfs (badly, he says). He's drawn to the sense of flow these activities bring: their rhythms of exertion, recovery and renewal.

Sophie Boladeras

A story of survival

Mark McConnell is drawing on his academic teaching experience to give back after surviving cancer.

At the end of last year, University of Auckland academic Mark McConnell joined some of Australasia's leading gastro-intestinal (GI) cancer specialists for a two-day 'preceptorship' – an intensive process for mentoring and supporting incoming specialists in the field.

But Mark wasn't there to impart his experiences as a clinician or health researcher; he was there to talk about survival.

A professional teaching fellow in commercial law at the Business School, Mark is also a Community Advisory Panel member for GI Cancer Trials – a network of clinicians, researchers and community advocates working to improve outcomes for those with the disease.

As a panel member, he shares his lived experience of having colorectal cancer to ensure patients' perspectives are considered in research priorities, directions and how clinical trials are designed and delivered.

It was through his involvement with the panel that he was invited to speak at the preceptorship, where he talked about cancer 'survivorship' with the oncology and surgical trainees.

"It was an amazing experience to be in the room with the preceptees and preceptors; to hear them talking about cases and asking for my perspective as a patient. There was also a lot of talk about the latest research and what that means for treatment – conversations you don't get to be a part of every day, which was a real privilege."

Mark was a few weeks into teaching in the second semester of 2020 when a colonoscopy revealed he had a large tumour in his colon. Despite his only symptom at the time being fatigue, which he put down to his age and fitness level, the cancer had spread to his stomach and liver. It was stage four and his chances of survival were 3-5 percent.

A gruelling series of procedures and treatments followed, including three major surgeries. Mark describes his mindset when dealing with cancer as 'defiant realism', with his acts of defiance including teaching classes while hooked up to chemotherapy medication.

Thankfully, the chemo worked, allowing a previously inoperable tumour on his liver to be removed, and in May the following year Mark was told there was no longer evidence of cancer in his body.



Photo: Simon Young

Mark McConnell is part of an initiative that helps clinicians and others understand the patient's experience of cancer.

"I saw my oncologist and he said, 'Okay, go live your life'," recalls Mark. "And I remember thinking, after everything I've been through, what does that mean?

"There's this idea that once there's no evidence of disease, you're off the hook, you're free. But you're always going to live with that experience, that trauma and that sense of dread when you go for your scans every few months."

The experience has diminished his tolerance for certain things, he says, and the question, 'Did I survive cancer for this?' has become a touchstone when considering whether something is worth his time, energy or attention.

After a stint working for local government in Queenstown, in 2023 Mark returned to his 'dream job' teaching at the University where he is now the Business School's associate dean teaching and learning. The role involves dealing with everything from academic integrity issues, to setting policy around AI use, and procedures around student feedback.

"For me, it's an opportunity to contribute something significant and that's making a difference. It gives me a sense of meaning and purpose."

Volunteering his time with GI Cancer Trials has also provided a way of giving back that draws on his teaching experience, helping clinicians and researchers increase their understanding of how their approaches, activities and attitudes impact patients.

Mark says allowing people to talk about their experiences of cancer is an important way to support them. He formulated aspects of his talk at the preceptorship into a blog post for the GI Cancer Trials website, where he reflects on what it means to survive cancer.

"Survivorship, for me, hasn't so much been about strength or positivity," he writes at the end of the post.

"It's been about holding the contradictions: joy, ambivalence, thankfulness, an ongoing sense of trauma, a reviewed appreciation of beauty, the awareness of death and the desire to experience life in all its fullness.

"I don't think this is what the oncologist had in mind when he said, 'Go live your life'. But maybe this is, in fact, what life is about."

Caitlin Sykes



Professor Danping Wang has grown the University's Chinese language programme significantly since arriving in 2016.

Danping Wang: the language of connection

The University's head of Chinese will take on a new role at Oxford University.

"If we can get to Mars, we can learn Chinese!" says Professor Danping Wang, the University's departing head of Chinese.

After ten years in the role and about to lead a new programme at the University of Oxford, Danping is used to people assuming that learning Chinese is so difficult it's out of reach.

"A lot of people feel it's impossible, but my response is, never underestimate yourself. It's completely manageable with a good teacher, a good attitude and effort."

She has obviously convinced many naysayers over the years, transforming the University's Chinese programme into what she believes is the largest of its kind in New Zealand. Most of the more than 400 students who currently enrol at Stage One each year are New Zealand-born students with no Chinese heritage.

"We – my graduate teaching assistants and I – do a lot of innovative teaching, because of the course size, which includes hybrid teaching so students can access the lectures online at any time."

Students also co-create the course and share aspects of what they've learned with their own communities as a graded assignment – "reading a simple picture book in Chinese at their child's kindergarten, for example," she says. "That way they're giving back and not just keeping the learning to themselves."

Over the years, her students have taught her a lot about why people take up Chinese and what keeps them learning.

"Their motivations change, but their lives and communities give them reasons to learn that I couldn't anticipate on my own. Involving them in shaping the course has helped me understand Chinese language education in Aotearoa much more deeply."

She also opened up a Certificate of Proficiency in Chinese to make learning the language accessible to a wider range of people.

"I've even had Kiwi boxers signing up because they want to communicate with their Chinese boxing students, and nurses wanting to talk to their patients."

The key to good teaching is relationships, says Danping.

"Once you have this people-level connection, students open up so much and progress so well."

Originally from Beijing, Danping spent ten years teaching in Hong Kong before arriving in 2016 to teach at the University of Auckland.

She says her ideas about teaching have evolved significantly while in New Zealand, particularly after studying te ao Māori.

"Aotearoa profoundly changed what I believe language learning is for. Generations of language teachers, including me, have been trained to think its purpose is to develop skills and enable communication.

"I now see it as a way of building relationships, bringing people closer, creating belonging and sharing human warmth."

Prior to coming to New Zealand, Danping twice received Sino-British Fellowship Grants, which support academic exchanges and research between the UK and China.

"I was about to visit Oxford with that second grant, but I got the offer to come to New Zealand at the same time, so I didn't go," she recalls.

However, fast forward to 2026, and she has beaten out global competition to be appointed chair of Oxford's Centre of Excellence for Learning and Teaching Chinese. The new centre is focused on improving access to Chinese in schools, innovative teacher education and cutting-edge research.

"So, it kind of makes me feel like they were waiting for me!"

Danping will make the move to the UK with her partner and three-year-old son. She'll also take with her a passion for snowboarding (which she teaches as a hobby); an advanced proficiency with AI and language learning, which she has led at Auckland; and her Māoritanga.

"My son was even singing *Tūtira Mai Ngā Iwi* on the plane down to Queenstown on our trip to the snow and the whole plane joined in, so I know he will have that cultural memory as well."

She says she hopes to leave a flourishing programme, as well as teaching approaches that colleagues can develop further, and relationships that continue.

"At Oxford, I want to be ambitious about change but grounded in care, human connection and participation: all things I learned here in Aotearoa."

Julianne Evans



Photo: William Chea

Collaborators John Kim, Dr Andrea Young and Komako Silver perform *Kōriporipo* – a soundscape that now plays at the General Library entrance.

Musical flow

The latest iteration of a University artwork merges the sounds of taonga pūoro and voice with the movement of visitors flowing through the entrance to the General Library.

As taonga pūoro artist Komako Silver (Ngāpuhi) stepped into the centre of a crowd and began swinging a poi āwhiowhio, the soft, bird-like whistle emanating from the instrument signalled the launch of a new work in the University's art collection.

Kōriporipo is a sound installation, which launched at the University's General Library on 8 October with a live performance of the work that blends traditional Māori musical instruments, voice and technical wizardry.

It is the third composition designed for *Karanga*, a soundscape artwork commissioned for the library's entrance.

The soundscape consists of two main elements: the instrument, which is made up of software, CCTV cameras and speakers; and a composition, which combines sounds with an algorithm that controls those sounds using movement data.

The algorithm for the instrument and the original composition for *Karanga* were created by computer scientist and former School of Music academic Dr Fabio Morreale. They were designed to respond dynamically to the movement of people coming and going from the library, captured through camera sensors, and to align with the changing nature of our environment, such as tides and lunar phases.

Fabio's original 2024 composition, *Astrolabe & Anthropocene*, was followed by *Hokinga Mai*, composed by Dr Luk Vitk and Allana Goldsmith (Ngāti Porou, Ngāi Tai) in 2025, but the latter played on a loop, as the 'instrument' lapsed when Fabio left the University.

Kōriporipo, however, has reinstated this technical side of the work, explains composer and School of Music lecturer Dr Andrea Young, who created the soundscape alongside Komako and John Kim.

As a new resident (originally from Montreal, Canada), Andrea says she wanted to create a collaborative work specific to New Zealand. After meeting taonga pūoro artist Komako at a composers' workshop, she decided to create a work combining voice and traditional Māori musical instruments.

John, who is a School of Music senior technician, provided the technical skills to help blend the sounds of taonga pūoro with voice, and create what Andrea describes as an 'electronic abstraction' of these elements. Through technological know-how and sleuthing, he also reinstated the instrument that allows the work to respond dynamically to people moving through the library's main entrance.

The sound this system creates helped inspire the composition's name, *Kōriporipo*, which means to swirl, or eddy.

"When someone enters the space it triggers this blending, or smearing of the sounds. Then when someone enters the space from the other side, their sound mixes with this smearing and you get a sonic 'eddy' – a little pool of sound that's created and left behind," explains Andrea.

"Conceptually, the name carries a sense that wherever we go we leave a residue of ourselves, of our energy, behind us."

Before the live performance that launched the work, Komako explained how different taonga pūoro are associated with various rituals and practices and create associated atmospheres and energies. The composition – playing daily from 9.30am to 3.30pm – conveys this by featuring different taonga pūoro each hour.

Andrea, who has since gained funding to continue her research into the use of taonga pūoro in her composition, says the idea that we leave an impact on each other through our interactions was also reflected among the collaborators on the project.

"I learned so much about how these sound worlds work together through my collaboration with Komako, and John is a genius. He figured out technical details, when I wouldn't have even known where to start. I have been in awe of my teammates on this project."

Caitlin Sykes

Obituary: Christine Hellyar

1947 – 2026

Christine Hellyar, who pased away on 5 October at age 79, leaves a legacy as one of the leading sculptors in twentieth century Aotearoa New Zealand.

Her multi-media practice was considered and thought provoking, informed by explorations of medium, memory and museology, and with a feminist perspective.

Hellyar spent her early life in New Plymouth before relocating to Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland in the late 1960s. She enrolled at the University's then Elam School of Fine Arts, where she studied for four years. There, Hellyar encountered the practices of international sculptors like Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010) and Robert Smithson (1938–1973). Closer to home, fellow New Plymouth sculptor Don Driver (1930–2011) was a lifelong mentor and friend.

Influenced by these contemporary practices, Hellyar specialised in sculpture. Her 1969 dissertation, titled 'Landscape Sculpture', was completed shortly before she graduated with a Diploma in Fine Arts (Honours) in 1970. At this time, she began working with experimental materials, such as textiles, found objects and rubber latex – the latter becoming a mainstay of her oeuvre.

After graduating, Hellyar spent a decade travelling throughout the South Island and Europe, living for a time in Cornwall and later in Edinburgh. She returned to Auckland to a part-time position at Elam in 1981, where she spent the next 15 years teaching and became a respected mentor for generations of artists.

Hellyar's practice thrived alongside teaching, with significant works shown nationally and abroad. She was the first woman to represent New Zealand at the Biennale of Sydney in 1982, and in 1988 she was awarded the inaugural Adam Visual Arts Award for her significant contribution to art. The award allowed her to make her first large outdoor bronze works, for which she is well known. In 1996, she left Elam to focus full time on her studio practice.

Hellyar's artistic legacy at the University is visually remembered through her significant artworks displayed on campus, as part of the University of Auckland Art Collection. In the garden alongside Alfred Nathan House resides *Coronet* (1993), a bronze sculptural triptych depicting native flora: a fern, a Nikau palm and flowering flax.

The title references a type of crown in British heraldry, worn by a non-reigning royal or aristocrat. It was part of a body of works



Christine Hellyar. *Coronet* (1993). bronze with patina, triptych. University of Auckland Art Collection.

each titled to reference historical adornments, here applied to bronzes that draw attention to the beauty of the natural world rather than the human wearer. *Coronet* replaced Hellyar's previous sculpture *Armlet* (1993), which resided on campus between 1993 and 2019.

While travelling, Hellyar visited many galleries and museums, which inspired her lifelong reflections on collecting and the display of objects and 'artefacts' within institutions. This culminated in a significant exhibition at Gus Fisher Gallery titled *Hutton and Cotton* (2011).

The works engaged with the University's own museum history, focused on the McGregor Museum in the School of Biological Sciences. Hellyar questioned the content and the zoological displays in the museum, repurposing the wooden cabinets and drawers that were saved when it was partly demolished in 1991.

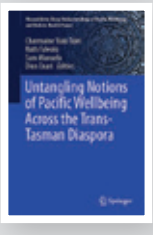
Art historian Associate Professor Linda Tyler worked closely with Hellyar on the project, which she says brought together the artist's longstanding interests in areas like taxonomies, museum classification systems, gardening and natural history.

"She made a delightful exhibition, linking art and science visually and conceptually, and introducing conservation issues," says Linda.

For example, Hellyar's installation ordered exhibits like a cladistics diagram, in homage to Canterbury Museum curator Captain Frederick, who incurred the wrath of church leaders by promoting evolutionary theory.

Hutton and Cotton: the McGregor Museum revisited (Moa Point, Mission Bay, Mt Albert and Deep-Sea Fishing) (2011) was accessioned to the University of Auckland Art Collection soon after. It was poignantly reinstalled alongside the remaining McGregor collections in the Biology Building, where it continues to create an engaging juxtaposition with the collections still on display.

Madeleine Harvey, art collection adviser



Untangling Notions of Pacific Wellbeing Across the Trans-Tasman Diaspora

Co-editors including Dr Charmaine 'Ilaiū Talei (Architecture and Planning) and Associate Professor Sam Manuela (Psychology) explore Pacific well-being through cultural, social, educational, health and community perspectives.

Charmaine 'Ilaiū Talei, Ruth Faleolo, Sam Manuela, Dion Enari (eds); Springer Nature, $99



Sovereignty: The Case for Constitutional Transformation

Professor Claire Charters (Law) challenges the foundations of New Zealand's constitutional system, which she argues fails to protect Māori rights, and examines what we could learn from constitutional reform overseas.

Claire Charters, Bridget Williams Books, $20



The Political Uses of Cultural Diversity

Associate Professor Kathy Smits (Politics) examines how states deploy cultural recognition and inclusion policies to build modernised national identities in diverse societies. Exploring New Zealand, Canada and Australia as examples, she reveals how such policies also pay other useful dividends for governments.

Kathy Smits, Routledge, $324 (hardback)



Issues in Task-Based Language Teaching

Distinguished Emeritus Professor Rod Ellis addresses the issues and criticisms that surround the development and implementation of task-based language teaching, a now well-established approach for teaching foreign languages.

Rod Ellis, Multilingual Matters, $86 (paperback)



Photo: Chris Loufte

Dr Sarah Knox leads a Stage One Dance Studies class in the Kenneth Myers Centre studio on Shortland Street.

Spiritual energy

It was 25 years ago that Dr Sarah Knox first stepped into the dance studio at the Kenneth Myers Centre (KMC), to take a workshop as a final-year dance student with legendary dancer and choreographer Mary-Jane O'Reilly.

"The space holds so much history for me; so many people from the New Zealand dance industry have danced in there at some point," says Sarah, who is now a senior lecturer in the Dance Studies programme and deputy head of Creative Arts at the University.

The KMC on Shortland Street holds a lot of history, more broadly. Built in 1934 as New Zealand's first purpose-built radio station, its windowless brick facade was designed for soundproofing. The building was later the home of television broadcasting in Auckland for many years.

Today, it also houses practice, rehearsal and recording spaces for music students, as well as the Gus Fisher Gallery.

Every dance studio has its own energy, says Sarah, and she has a particular fondness for the KMC studio.

"Because of the nature of what we're doing in the studio – we're so in our bodies – we get attuned to the energy, tone and feeling of a space, and not necessarily consciously. Like, if you're going to warm up, you know just where the sun will hit the floor at that time of day.

"The studio becomes a friend. It's a sacred, spiritual place."

As a teacher of dance and choreography, Sarah aims to make the studio feel safe for students – an experience not every dancer brings with them.

"For some people the dance studio can be a place that's full of trauma and potent memories. This is what I mean when I say it's a spiritual place; it's full of all the things that have happened in dance classes before – our own experiences – and all the people who came into the space before us.

"We're not separate from the spaces that we work in; we make our marks on them and they on us."

The studio door is important, she says, providing a boundary between how dancers behave inside and outside of the studio.

"The studio is a space where we can choose to go to strange, weird and wonderful places with each other because of the art form that we're dealing with. We know collectively that we're allowed to explore ideas in such a way that we would never normally do on the other side of the door.

"It's a real privilege to be able to express ourselves and inhabit our bodies in this particular way, and that's what the studio offers us."

Caitlin Sykes