



# UniNews

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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).



Jennifer Curtin

## DOUBLE STANDARDS FOR WOMEN

Professor Jennifer Curtin (Public Policy Institute) discussed female political leaders facing double standards. She told TVNZ's *1News* that JD Vance's 'childless cat ladies' quip had echoes of tactics used against other female leaders. "We live in a populist moment, which allows for this kind of speech," she said.

Link: [tinyurl.com/Curtin-1News](https://tinyurl.com/Curtin-1News)



Tracey McIntosh

## ACKNOWLEDGING ABUSE IN CARE

Comments by Professor Tracey McIntosh, a sociologist in the Faculty of Arts, were published in dozens of global media outlets about the Royal Commission into Abuse in Care report. She said: "The most important element is to recognise and acknowledge the survivors for the reality and the truth of their lives."

Link: [tinyurl.com/McIntosh-state-care](https://tinyurl.com/McIntosh-state-care)



Joanna Strom

## HEALTHY FOOD UNAFFORDABLE

The costs of feeding a family a healthy diet are making it unaffordable for those on low incomes, according to Dr Joanna Strom (FMHS). Prices increased by a third from 2018 to 2023, with lower-cost healthy foods rising more steeply than other groceries, said Joanna, also a South Auckland GP, in the *NZ Herald*.

Link: [tinyurl.com/strom-nzherald-food](https://tinyurl.com/strom-nzherald-food)

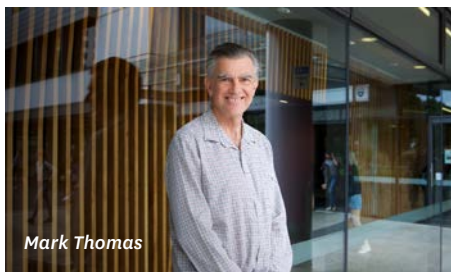


Mariana Muelbert

## BEST FOR BABY

Dr Mariana Muelbert (Liggins Institute) told RNZ's *Nine to Noon* that New Zealand urgently needs a network of breast milk banks to allow safe milk donation for vulnerable newborns. At present there are only four hospital-based breast milk banks in the country. Auckland, home to the two busiest neonatal intensive care units, has none.

Link: [tinyurl.com/muelbert-rnz-milk](https://tinyurl.com/muelbert-rnz-milk)



Mark Thomas

## MPOX RISK CURRENTLY LOW

Mpox has been declared a global health emergency after an outbreak in the Congo spread beyond its borders. Associate Professor Mark Thomas, an infectious diseases researcher in FMHS, told 95bFM the risk in New Zealand is currently infinitesimal, but that could change if more cases pop up in the developed world.

Link: [tinyurl.com/thomas-bfm-mpox](https://tinyurl.com/thomas-bfm-mpox)



Chanelle Duley

## THE FUTURE OF MONEY

The Reserve Bank of New Zealand is working on a government-backed digital currency, but economics lecturer Dr Chanelle Duley (Business School) told RNZ that all four countries that had launched a central bank digital currency – The Bahamas, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Jamaica – were struggling with adoption.

Link: [tinyurl.com/duley-rnz-currency](https://tinyurl.com/duley-rnz-currency)

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## FINDING THE WORDS

Manuhiri Huatahi, a Kaiārahi at Te Tumu Herenga, talks about her journey with learning te reo Māori.

**On the path to reclaiming her language, Manuhiri Huatahi says she's faced many hurdles and triumphs.**

But ultimately, she describes a deeply personal journey.

"When I was 12, I told my family I wanted to learn te reo Māori," recalls Manuhiri (Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Ngāti Kauwhata), a Kaiārahi at Te Tumu Herenga Libraries and Learning Services, where ReoSpace – a new space to kōrero te reo Māori – is based.

"Their response was, 'Why do you want to do that? It won't get you a job.'"

At the time, she struggled to voice why learning the language was so important to her.

"I didn't have the right words at the time to articulate that, deep down, it was a yearning for connection – to my identity, my heritage and my mana as Māori," she says.

"Now that I'm older, I also regret that I never got to converse in te reo with my mother, who was fluent. I remember feeling envious watching her kōrero with my paternal grandmother. My mother passed away when I was 19."

## KIA KAHA TE REO MĀORI

**ReoSpace is a place to kōrero te reo Māori in a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment.**

Hosted by Te Tumu Herenga Libraries and Learning Services on Level One of the General Library, it's open to all kaimahi (staff), taura (students) and manuhiri (guests/visitors) from outside of Waipapa Taumata Rau.

Speakers of all levels, from absolute beginners to those who are fluent, are welcome. Kaiāwhina (helpers) are available for kōrero in ReoSpace every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 12-2pm. And keep an eye out for special events that are being planned in September to coincide with Mahuru Māori and Te Wiki o te Reo Māori (14-21 September).

**For more information, visit:**  
[facebook.com/libraryuoa](https://www.facebook.com/libraryuoa)  
[auckland.ac.nz/en/library/reospace](https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/library/reospace)



*Kaiārahi Manuhiri Huatahi believes everyday kōrero is the way to keep te reo Māori alive.  
Photos: Elise Manahan*



*ReoSpace has regular times when kaiāwhina Maringi James and Kaaka Te Pou Kohere are available for kōrero.*

Instead of te reo Māori, Manuhiri studied French at school and even spent a year in Honduras as an AFS student, where she learned to speak Spanish.

"Spanish and French were more accessible to me than te reo Māori. That shouldn't have been the case, given its significance as a taonga passed down by our tūpuna for all Aotearoa."

But her passion for te reo Māori never waned.

"I started learning by correspondence as a high school student in the Eighties," she explains. "I picked up the language again at Victoria University in 2003, and then again in 2015 at AUT, and last year at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa."

At times, however, personal and professional priorities have taken precedence over her learning, she says.

"Access to reo learning is still problematic, but I'm at a point in my journey where I feel comfortable enough to give it a go, even though the kōrero doesn't flow with the ease I hope to achieve one day."

Hence her passion to champion the creation of ReoSpace. She believes that while classroom learning builds knowledge, it's the everyday kōrero that keeps the language alive.

"As one of my kaiako has told me, the way to develop that fluency is to kōrero."

"ReoSpace links to the university learning

**"As one of my kaiako has told me, the way to develop that fluency is to kōrero."**

– Manuhiri Huatahi, Kaiārahi, Te Tumu Herenga Libraries and Learning Services

experience by offering the opportunity to kōrero outside of the classroom. It's our contribution to revitalisation," she explains.

And the response to ReoSpace so far has been encouraging.

"There are learners and speakers like me who want to develop fluency. Some are mokemoke [lonely] for the reo because in the wider academic world, they must speak English to be understood. Others have started their journey but struggle to continue for various reasons.

"These factors are not unique to Waipapa Taumata Rau, and I bet a ReoSpace in other universities would generate as much excitement in their respective spaces as it has here.

"I absolutely see other universities joining us in the ReoSpace movement. There can never be too many spaces where te reo Māori is welcomed and celebrated."

■ Te Rina Triponele

## SEABIRD RESEARCHER FLIES AWAY WITH 3MT PRIZE

**A whirlwind wrap-up of the implications of climate change on the tīti, a New Zealand seabird, won PhD candidate Inka Pleiss this year's Three Minute Thesis (3MT) competition.**

The Faculty of Science student beat out 12 other finalists in the 2024 3MT competition, which challenges doctoral students to present their research in just 180 seconds alongside a single slide. The finals were held at the Owen Glenn Building in early August in front of a crowd of fellow students and other supporters.

Inka's research into the resilience of tīti in a changing world includes looking at ocean conditions, and the birds' behaviour and physiology. Part of this involves assessing changes over time by examining archival feather samples held in museums and dating back to 1925.

Runner-up was Isurie Akarawita (Faculty of Engineering), who shared her research into smart chewing robots. Why do we need smart robots that can chew? The mechatronics engineer outlined how developing the machines can help food producers understand and optimise food texture, as well as provide them with consistent, measurable results.

Auckland Bioengineering Institute Biomimetics Lab PhD student Logan Ritchie scored the People's Choice prize with his presentation Percolation and Stretchy Conductors – The Role of Structure, looking at materials that stretch and conduct electricity. Logan's quirky responses to the bio questions posed to all the finalists struck a particular chord with the crowd.

Inka will now represent the University at two international 3MT events later this year: the Asia-Pacific 3MT Virtual Competition, and the U21 3MT Virtual Competition.

**For more information on the 3MT, visit: [auckland.ac.nz/2024-3mt-winners](https://auckland.ac.nz/2024-3mt-winners)**

Dean of Graduate Studies  
Professor Caroline Daley with  
3MT winner Inka Pleiss.



2024 Katherine Mansfield Menton Fellowship recipient  
Professor Selina Tusitala Marsh. Photo: Chris Loufte

## MENTON BOUND

**Winning the 2024 Katherine Mansfield Menton Fellowship is a dream come true for academic, writer and poet Professor Selina Tusitala Marsh.**

Selina (Faculty of Arts) is the first female Pacific writer to receive the prestigious fellowship, marking a significant moment in recognising Pacific voices in Aotearoa New Zealand's literary landscape. Selina is of Samoan, Tuvaluan, English, Scottish and French descent.

The fellowship, managed by Te Tumu Toi, The Arts Foundation, allows her to live and write in Menton, southern France, for three months.

"I'm ecstatic and deeply honoured to be selected," says Selina, a professor of Pacific literature and creative writing.

"Being the first Pasifika woman to receive this fellowship is profoundly meaningful to me and, I hope, to the communities I serve. It's a testament to the growing recognition of Pacific voices in our literary landscape. I hope it opens doors for more voices to be heard and celebrated in the future. It's a gateway."

Selina says the fellowship, which she hopes to take up from next July, offers the chance to fully immerse herself in writing and creativity for a number of months and to bring some long-term projects to life.

**Full story: [auckland.ac.nz/marsh-mansfield](https://auckland.ac.nz/marsh-mansfield)**



Ronan Payinda

The declining mental health of our young people isn't just the responsibility of the health system. And the health system doesn't have the power to fix this problem alone.

**What messages will you share with the Mental Health Minister when you meet?**

Aotearoa's health system is underfunded and overworked. For our communities, this translates to thousands of vulnerable people who are unable to access the mental health services that they need. If they can even get through to specialist care, they're put on long waiting lists. Now is not the time to neglect and underfund mental health services.

But we are also at a time of opportunity. Digital health services have immense potential to bring healthcare access and mental health support to so many more people.

**How do you look after your own well-being?**

Like most pre-medical students, my first year of uni was tough. Every mid-semester break, I'd take the bus home to Whangārei, and being with family and enjoying the beautiful beaches I grew up on in Te Tai Tokerau put my mind at ease.

Ever since then, I've taken the same approach to unwind – spending time in nature.

Like a lot of students, I've also struggled with the false dichotomy that you either have to do something perfectly, or not try at all. But just because you didn't do something perfectly, doesn't mean you should give up on it. Sometimes we only have the energy to show up, and that's enough.

## MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

**Medical student and youth mental health advocate Ronan Payinda spoke at July's Parliamentary Forum for Children's Rights about barriers young people face accessing mental health care.**

This month he'll meet Mental Health Minister Matt Doocey to discuss the youth mental health crisis along with Koi Tū research fellow Dr Jessica Stubbing (the pair published a briefing on the topic in May).

Ahead of Mental Health Awareness Week (23-29 September), Ronan shares what he does to help himself and others stay mentally well.

**How did you get involved in youth mental health advocacy?**

Before starting uni, I worked as a caregiver in a special care unit in Whangārei. It made me realise that poor health outcomes don't start when people walk into a clinic or hospital; they start in the community, from the environment, lifestyle factors, and stresses people face daily.

## NEW DEANS ANNOUNCED

**Immunologist Professor Sarah Young will step into the role of dean of Science next month, replacing Professor John Hosking, who is retiring.**

Sarah (pictured above left) will join Waipapa Taumata Rau from the University of Canterbury, where she is executive dean in the Faculty of Science and a member of the senior leadership team.

Prior to this, she headed the University of Sydney's School of Medical Sciences and she has also held a range of other leadership positions, including deputy dean of the Dunedin School of Medicine at the University of Otago, where she gained her PhD in immunology in the year 2000.

Says Sarah of her new appointment: "I see it as



a privilege to be able to lead such an outstanding and comprehensive faculty. I look forward to working with the kaimahi and tauira and continuing to build a collegial and supportive academic environment focused on excellence."

Another major academic leadership announcement was made at the University in August, with Professor Nuala Gregory (pictured above right) named to head a new faculty launching next year. The new faculty will combine the faculties of Arts, Education



and Social Work and parts of Creative Arts and Industries (CAI).

The professor of fine arts has been the dean of CAI since 2022 and is also a notable artist whose work has been widely exhibited.

**Full stories:** [auckland.ac.nz/young-science-dean](https://auckland.ac.nz/young-science-dean) and [auckland.ac.nz/gregory-new-faculty-dean](https://auckland.ac.nz/gregory-new-faculty-dean)

You can read more on retiring Dean of Science Professor John Hosking from page 8.

## SWEET OLYMPIC SUCCESS

**"Surreal" is how Theresa Setefano describes being a back-to-back Olympic gold medallist.**

The Bachelor of Health Sciences student followed up a gold at the Tokyo Olympics with another in Paris as a member of the New Zealand women's rugby sevens team. The veteran of three Olympics (winning silver at Rio in 2016) says winning gold in Paris "is still sinking in" after a challenging lead up to the games.

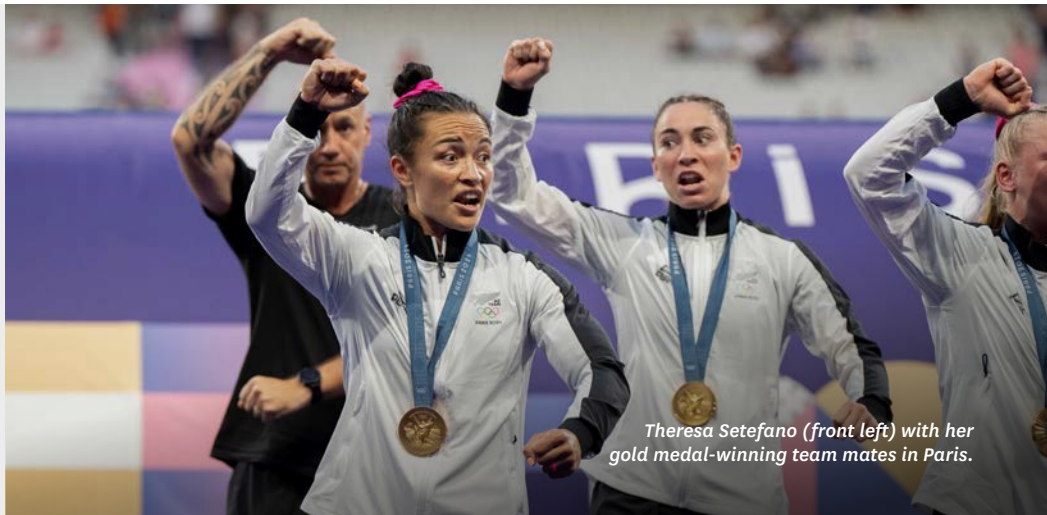
"It has been a big and tough three-year campaign, so it took a lot out of us all. Over those years came injuries, a surgery, recovering from illness and the challenges that come with [being part of] a competitive high-performance team."

Theresa says having her husband, parents and best friend in the crowd for support helped spur her to success, and she was able to spend some time exploring the city with them following the games.

"Paris did an amazing job," she says. "The atmosphere in the stadium and around the city was something hard to describe, with such big crowds – when there were none in Tokyo – and surrounded by historic European buildings."

Fellow Kiwi medallist William McKenzie, a mechanical engineering alumnus, was feeling similarly struck by success, after winning silver in sailing, competing in the 49er class with team mate Isaac McHardie.

"It has been such a long journey to get here and believing that we could do it, so to have achieved our dream and have it behind us still feels amazing and surreal," says William,



Theresa Setefano (front left) with her gold medal-winning team mates in Paris.

who was named Sportsman of the Year at the University's 2023 Blues Awards.

William was based in Marseille for the Olympic regatta, which involved 13 races, competing in very different conditions from those of the Waitemata.

However, the team's Olympic preparation included spending around four weeks a year in Marseille for the past three years to get comfortable with local conditions. That familiarity allowed him to enjoy the Olympics as a semi-local – something he cites as a standout experience from the games, beyond the medal win.

"The highlight would've been just getting to experience the daily life in France and settling into a routine. Being able to get fresh bread and croissants at the local bakery every morning was very special."

After taking in the sights of Paris and a holiday in Greece, Theresa is now enjoying some much-needed time off at home and hopes to get back



William McKenzie (right) with team mate Isaac McHardie.

into her Bachelor of Health Science studies next year.

William says his next challenge is to find a job in Sydney, putting what he learned during his degree to use in the corporate world.

"I plan on experiencing the working life for a bit before I make a decision on whether I go [for selection] again at the LA 2028 Olympics," he says.

A huge congratulations to all six current students and seven alumni who competed in the 2024 Paris Olympics. You did us proud!

**Full story:** [auckland.ac.nz/paris-olympians](https://auckland.ac.nz/paris-olympians)



*Pursuing a fair go for all, especially the most vulnerable, is the foundation of social work, says Professor Jay Marlowe.*

*Photo: Chris Loufte*

## A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Professor Jay Marlowe has channelled broad life experiences into his academic work focused on refugees and asylum seekers, and effecting real change for these communities.

### **We're living through a global refugee crisis that is getting ever worse.**

The latest projections from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees notes more than 120 million people have been forced to flee their homes due to persecution, conflict or human rights violations. This is the highest number on record and nearly three times as many as only 15 years ago.

The majority are from countries such as Syria, Myanmar and Ukraine, as well as from parts of Africa and, of course, Gaza.

And now Europe, currently hosting more than one in three of the world's refugees, is closing its doors and adopting restrictive policies to deter more from arriving. So the need for research that will change things for the better, and which addresses systemic injustices is vital, believes Jay Marlowe.

Jay is a professor of social work, whose research is focused on refugees and asylum seekers. He has been at the University since 2010, and early next year will become head of the School of Social Practice in the University's new amalgamated faculty (combining Education

and Social Work, Arts and some of Creative Arts and Industries). Next month he and his team will be publicly recognised among the winners at the University's 2024 Hikina kia Tutuki, Rise to Meet the Challenge, Celebrating Research Excellence awards, which celebrate impactful research.

### **A 'multi-storied' approach**

Jay has had an adventurous journey to get to this point.

Originally from North Carolina, he completed his undergraduate degrees in anthropology and biology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has since worked with Indigenous communities in the Amazon River basin of Ecuador, people bereaved through suicide in Australia, youth from gang-related backgrounds in the US, and homeless children in Guatemala, where he met his Kiwi wife, Penny.

"Penny and I met when we were guiding hikes up volcanoes raising money for a school and dorm for homeless kids who were impacted by Guatemala's 36-year civil war," says Jay. "We lived in multiple countries before deciding to do my postgrad work in Australia [at Flinders

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***"I saw the potential of education to connect people to new ways of knowing, as a pathway to relate to others and, importantly, as a tool to inspire change."***

*– Professor Jay Marlowe,  
Faculty of Education and Social Work*

University in Adelaide] where we both could remain on different passports."

This diverse work left him "struck with the possibilities" for developing relationships with people whose backgrounds differed so starkly from his own, he says, "provided we created safe and respectful environments".

When Jay arrived in New Zealand to begin lecturing in social work at the University, he started teaching and creating courses based on the premise that everyone's life is 'multi-storied'.

“Simply stated, people can tell many stories about their lives, so, for example, approaching all refugees through a lens of ‘trauma’ is very limiting. What are we missing behind those labels?”

His early travels have since become the foundation of his life’s work, his academic direction and the motivation for his teaching, for which he won a National Tertiary Teaching Excellence Award in 2017.

“I saw the potential of education to connect people to new ways of knowing, as a pathway to relate to others and, importantly, as a tool to inspire change,” says Jay.

Social justice, rooted in the pursuit of a fair go for everyone, especially the most vulnerable, is the cornerstone of his practice – and of social work more generally, he says.

“It involves challenging existing power structures, focusing on possibilities and envisioning a future where things can and should be different.”

#### Settling in the social media age

Since arriving in Aotearoa, Jay has worked widely beyond the University with organisations like the Aotearoa Resettled Community Coalition, the Asylum Seeker Support Trust, the NZ Red Cross and the World Health Organisation to find out how refugees and asylum seekers here are getting on in their new home, what’s working and what needs to change.

A focus has been how refugees use social media to stay globally connected with each other, with family and friends back home, and during times of disaster.

“New Zealand accepted 1,791 refugees and asylum seekers in 2022 and almost all of them will be connecting daily via social media channels like WhatsApp, Facebook and Viber.”

As part of a recently published study in *New Zealand Sociology*, and funded by a Marsden Fund grant, Jay led a team who explored the degree to which refugees use social media in their everyday lives, and the benefits and the limitations of doing so. Their findings were drawn from a national survey of 592 people who replied in six languages.

“Our survey showed that refugees’ social and political activities on social media allow them to get involved in their communities and offer a sense of belonging; but they also face barriers which constrain this use, including cost, security concerns, and low technical and digital literacy levels.”

This generation of resettled refugees are far better connected than previous ones, he says, but our refugee policies were developed in a pre-digital age.

“What does ‘belonging’ mean, when refugees can maintain significant links and relationships

in several places and countries at once? I’m interested in how policy and practice can best support refugee resettlement, social inclusion and well-being in an age where people can live simultaneously ‘here’ in New Zealand and ‘there’ within their transnational networks.”

#### A fair start for all

Another area of concern has been the plight of asylum seekers, who are often viewed with suspicion, and receive little support as they await the outcome of New Zealand’s refugee status determination process.

“There is a perception of asylum seekers as ‘queue jumpers’, which is baseless. There is no queue, as less than one percent of the world’s forced migrants will have opportunities to settle in countries such as New Zealand,” says Jay.

“There’s nothing in the Refugee Convention that distinguishes between a quota refugee, who has been accepted by the government before

### “Our research highlights the critical importance of the first five years for refugees – the ‘golden window’.”

– Professor Jay Marlowe

arrival, and a convention refugee, who arrives and then applies for refugee or protection status as an asylum seeker. However, New Zealand has treated them very differently in terms of the rights and entitlements to certain policies.”

Jay is also a co-founder and co-director of the Centre for Asia Pacific Refugee Studies (CAPRS), alongside adjunct research fellow Rez Gardi, a Kurdish human rights lawyer from a refugee background. The centre is hosted by the University to address the looming issue of forced displacement in the Asia Pacific region due to both conflict and climate change.

In 2022, the CAPRS team collaborated with the Asylum Seeker Support Trust on a report advocating for the equal treatment of all refugees called *Safe Start. Fair Future: Refugee Equality*, which was presented to Parliament that same year.

“For those claiming asylum in New Zealand, 394 on average each year, there’s been limited access to services like mental health, social welfare and work rights, but the best way to make sure asylum seekers can settle successfully is to provide enough support, which was the key message of that report,” says Jay.

In recent decades, there’s been a global shift in the perception of asylum seekers from being ‘at risk’ to being ‘a risk’, he says.

It’s something evidenced in the recent riots in the UK, which were fuelled by misinformation on social media.

Alongside promoting active work with the NGO sector, the report has also prompted a shift in government policy, and adoption of its two key recommendations.

“In 2023, the previous government committed to providing financial support to asylum seekers for the first time and included convention refugees – and a few other groups – in a key policy document, the New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy [2022/23],” says Jay.

A key collaborator on the report was Dr Bernard Sama, an asylum seeker from Cameroon, who is among many students from refugee backgrounds that Jay has supervised during his time at Waipapa Taumata Rau.

“This University was the first in New Zealand to make refugees an equity group and currently has more than 800 students enrolled. It was my pleasure to supervise Bernard’s PhD on improving refugee well-being in our legal processes, and those of many others that have already gone on to make a significant contribution to Aotearoa.”

Another notable and ongoing piece of work (led by Jay through CAPRS and funded by a Rutherford Discovery Fellowship), is a groundbreaking study of the economic situation of 24,894 people from refugee backgrounds who came to New Zealand between 1997 and 2020.

“We broadly wanted to know about refugee access rates to education and state housing, who remains on benefits, as opposed to in employment, and what factors contribute to income over time.

“Our research highlights the critical importance of the first five years for refugees – the ‘golden window’ – where settlement outcomes, particularly economic ones, are most significantly shaped. Beyond this window, progress tends to level off.”

In his rare downtime, and as a break from the intensity of his day job, Jay has embraced Auckland’s coastal lifestyle and endurance sports like ironman and ultramarathons. Most recently, he tackled the Coast to Coast.

“Doing challenging things outdoors is often where I do my best thinking,” he says.

He and Penny have two sons, aged 10 and 12, and he’s delighted they get to call Aotearoa home.

“Living and belonging in New Zealand means recognising the difference between being invited and truly welcomed; between mere presence and genuine participation. I’ve enjoyed calling this country home and so appreciate the many opportunities it offers for meaningful engagement and connection.”

■ Julianne Evans



*Professor John Hosking began his association with the University as a first-year student 50 years ago.  
Photos: Elise Manahan*

## EXIT PROFESSOR JOHN HOSKING, SMILING

A self-described “accidental educator”, the retiring Dean of Science says he’s derived intense satisfaction from helping others achieve their life goals – just don’t try to give him your monkey.

### **“A life of vicarious pleasure” is what Professor John Hosking says he’s leaving behind after a decade as dean of Science.**

“Seeing good people doing outstanding science, seeing students full of ambition as they cross the stage at graduation, and meeting alumni making a difference out in the world – that’s all great fun,” he says. “I can really recommend it.”

Leading nearly 10,000 students, and more than 1,000 academic and 300 professional staff across ten schools and departments, John has soaked up the pressure of the job while maintaining a winning light touch, never far from a joke, a smile, an anecdote. Few deans would pose for a profile photo with a toy monkey, but more on that later.

John is bowing out no less than 50 years after he started as a first-year student at the

University of Auckland in 1974. His final day at work is 6 September, and the new dean, Professor Sarah Young, from the University of Canterbury, starts in October.

It’s quite a run. He remembers when the first recreation centre was being built, and the different contributions individual vice-chancellors made to turning the University into a modern tertiary institution focused on excellence.

Growing up near the beach in Campbells Bay on Auckland’s North Shore in the 1960s and early 1970s, John loved the great outdoors – tramping and camping – and had a fascination for the maths and physics that explained how the world worked.

His final year at Westlake Boys High School in Takapuna was notable for the Great Staff Beer Heist, where prefects hijacked the teachers’

Friday afternoon beer supply; a motorcycle invasion of Westlake Girls; a school tramping trip to the Coromandel; and the smoke bombs let off at the final assembly.

But the hijinks failed to derail his study. Excelling at maths, physics and chemistry, and keen on computing, John was joint dux and won a scholarship to university. Completing a BSc in physics and maths, he pursued a statistics-heavy PhD in atmospheric physics, studying fine-scale variations in rainfall. His conversation killer? Explaining that his thesis was about measuring the size of raindrops.

To fund his PhD study, John worked as a contract computer programmer and became a junior lecturer in the newly established Computer Science Department in 1981. He once called himself an “accidental educator”; he expected lecturing to do little more than improve his public



speaking ability, but instead discovered “the intense personal satisfaction that comes from assisting others to achieve their life goals”.

Meteorology’s loss was education’s gain. It also followed a family pattern, as two of his three siblings went into the field. His father would have been a teacher too, had the Great Depression not closed the nation’s teachers’ colleges.

John’s career has been spent almost entirely at the University of Auckland, where his research focused on software engineering has led to more than 200 publications, often collaborations with current or former students.

His roles have included Department of Computer Science head (1999–2005), professor of applied computer science (from 2001) and director of the UniServices-run Centre for Software Innovation (2007–2011), linking academia with industry.

He spent three years as the dean of Engineering and Computer Science at the elite Australian National University (ANU) before he was lured back to become dean of Science from 2014 – “the only job I would’ve come back for”.

It’s a sprawling and diverse empire – from the chemistry labs to the boats, divers and drones of the marine scientists up at Leigh.

John saw through the completion of the Science Centre, which replaced brutalist 1960s architecture with a building designed to foster openness – both between scientists and with society. Today, its big, open ground floor, which houses students and events, is the beating heart of the faculty.

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## “Seeing good people doing outstanding science ... I can really recommend it.”

– Professor John Hosking,  
retiring dean of science

Navigating the unexpected disruptions to teaching and research from Covid-19 and contributing to the government’s pandemic response was a feat – even if it killed John’s own research career (he had no time, couldn’t travel to Australia to collaborate, and ultimately lost motivation). He’s wrestled with the difficult problem of scientists’ sometimes enormous carbon footprints and overseen efforts to boost the Māori and Pacific presence in science.

Asked about the controversy in 2021 over mātauranga Māori caused by a group of academics who wrote a public letter ‘In defence of science’, John says: “I’m sorry it played out the way it did but happy that it led to some deeper consideration at the University of issues such as freedom of expression and academic freedom.”

The biggest single challenge now is the squeeze on funding, which makes it harder to aspire to excellence, says John. “There’s not a great appreciation of what a university does in its entirety in the public’s mind and certainly not in the minds of politicians. We’re the best university in the country, the final canary in the coalmine, so to speak, so I hate to think what’s happening in other institutions.”

An array of Chinese mementoes in his office reflects his work developing partnerships with Chinese universities, a field he learned about at ANU. These have boosted student numbers in the faculty by establishing pipelines for students to begin their studies in China then transfer to the University of Auckland.

The soft toy monkey sitting in his office, Bubbles, is explained by some sage advice for managers contained in a famous *Harvard Business Review* article, ‘Management time: who’s got the monkey?’

When someone you manage walks into your office with a problem – a monkey on their back – you need to avoid letting them delegate upwards, leaving you in possession of the monkey. Help them to deal with the problem, but don’t own the monkey.

It’s advice John has reiterated so often that an ANU colleague gave him the toy as a gift when he left the Australian university.

Exiting the University of Auckland, John and his wife Janne – a former Westlake Girls student – will spend some of their time as “grey nomads” travelling the country by campervan, taking in old tramping and camping spots. It’s likely they’ll visit Doubtless Bay and Piwhane/Spirits Bay in the Far North this summer.

There will also be more time for children Richard (a computer scientist), Emma (a teacher), a first grandchild and a second due very soon.

*This article draws with thanks from a Westlake Boys High School profile of John.*

■ Paul Panckhurst

*Bubbles, the toy monkey, references one of John’s favourite management philosophies, to help people with their problem, but to ultimately not carry the ‘monkey on their back’.*



*Ngā Tauira occupies a significant space within Building 113, behind the Old Barracks Wall.  
Photos: Dean Carruthers*

*Pro Vice-Chancellor (Māori) Associate Professor Te Kawehau Hoskins speaking at the opening.*

*Whakairo old and new have been revealed with the re-establishment of Tūtahi Tonu.*

## NGĀ TAUIRA AND THE LEGACY OF TŪTAHI TONU

The whareni Tūtahi Tonu, originally established at Epsom Campus, has now been welcomed onto the City Campus as part of a new marae – the University’s second.

**At a dawn ceremony on 10 August, Waipapa Taumata Rau marked the unveiling of the new Ngā Tauira marae and the re-establishment of the Tūtahi Tonu whareni on the City Campus.**

The event celebrated both renewal and connection, honouring the legacy of Māori education at the University and the promise of what Ngā Tauira will deliver to future generations.

The City Campus now has the rare distinction among universities of being home to two marae. It was a fact that speakers at the opening reflected on, particularly in relation to the current political climate and challenges faced by Māori.

Faculty of Education and Social Work principal lecturer Hēmi Dale, director of Māori medium education, reflected on the 40-year history of Tūtahi Tonu. Established at the former Epsom Campus in 1983, it was the University’s first marae and the second ever built on the grounds of a tertiary institution in Aotearoa.

It was opened at a time when te reo Māori was not yet recognised as an official language of Aotearoa, yet more than a decade after the Te Reo Māori Language Petition was presented to Parliament in 1972.

The establishment of Tūtahi Tonu symbolised the vision that Māori education would and should thrive, recalled Hēmi during the opening.

It would later become a hub to train teachers to become kaiako committed to the revitalisation and regeneration of te reo Māori, tikanga Māori and mātauranga Māori across the country.

The story of Tūtahi Tonu has become legendary in the Faculty of Education and Social Work. A prefab building that was originally intended as a classroom, it ‘fell off the back of a truck’ and was then repurposed by Tarutaru Rankin, a pioneering figure in Māori education. Regarded as a skilful navigator of both te ao Māori and te ao Pākehā, Taru saw the potential of the building and envisioned it as a space dedicated to Māori education.

Over the decades, it became a second home for many students and alumni, particularly those who travelled from rural areas to study at the University. And not just Māori; it became a significant place for students from the Pacific diaspora, offering a safe space during a time of heightened discrimination.

Tūtahi Tonu is adorned with artworks, taonga and whakairo representing te ao Māori and a variety of other cultures and kaupapa.

Its original whakairo was carved and designed by Mark Klaricich; for the reopening, new whakairo was carved and designed by Katz Maihi. Both old and new now come together at Ngā Tauira marae, cementing it as a place where people from different backgrounds can learn and grow.

At the dawn ceremony, speakers reflected on the political climate of the 1980s, noting parallels with today. Hēmi said Tūtahi Tonu was established at a time when te ao Māori was vastly different. However, today’s political climate suggests history may be repeating itself, with the hard-won gains of the past 40 years under threat.

“That’s the history that has shaped Tūtahi Tonu, and it is our hope that students who walk through these doors will find a space that enables them to be Māori,” he said.

The name Ngā Tauira, gifted by Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei, reflects the unique identity of the marae, distinct from its sibling Waipapa Marae, yet recognises that both spaces nurture Māori leaders and scholars.

Faculty of Education and Social Work alumni who attended the opening expressed that the move of Tūtahi Tonu to the City Campus was not just a physical relocation; it was about bringing the legacy of the whareni into a space that honours its past while embracing the future. They expressed a hope that its legacy will endure and inspire future generations of students who enter its doors to grow the next generation of Māori leaders.

*Mate atu he tētēkura, ara mai he tētēkura;  
When one plant frond dies, another plant frond rises to take its place.*

■ Te Rina Tripone

## Sir Colin James Maiden 5 May 1933 – 31 July 2024

**Sir Colin Maiden drove major positive changes at the University of Auckland throughout his exemplary tenure.**

He was only the second to serve in the new role of vice-chancellor of the University when he was appointed in 1971, becoming the youngest VC in the Commonwealth. By the time he retired in 1994, he was the longest serving.

During that time, and beyond, he had a significant impact on the University, spearheading the transformation of campus facilities, driving administrative reform, and supporting cultural, sporting and engineering success.

He attended Auckland Grammar from 1947 to 1950 and went on to gain a Master of Engineering in 1955 from the-then Auckland University College.

A Rhodes Scholarship took him to the University of Oxford, where he completed his doctorate in 1957. He then took up research posts, first in Canada and then in California, at General Motors, broken by a brief period lecturing at the Engineering School. His area of research was hyper-velocity in flight.

After he had returned to the University of Auckland, he saw a need for improved campus facilities.

“One of my first emotions on returning to the University was of disappointment in seeing how poorly off it was for student amenities. The Student Union complex ... was nearly complete and provided adequate catering and bar facilities, a bookshop and Students Association offices. Also, there were student health, counselling and accommodation services, but no theatres or recreational facilities.”

Over more than 20 years, he drove major changes at the University and instigated a building programme that transformed the campus and its facilities. He strongly believed that good sporting and recreational amenities are integral to a complete education. (He had played in the first XV at Auckland Grammar and was awarded a tennis Blue at Oxford.)

The old Maidment Theatre, the original recreation centre and the sports fields at Tāmaki that carry his name, Colin Maiden Park, all owe their existence to his desire for better facilities for an increasing student roll and the city in general.

On his watch, the entire University’s administrative organisation – from faculties and committees to deputy vice-chancellors – was reformed. New buildings, such as Human Sciences, were constructed, student accommodation substantially increased, and subjects such as management studies and computer science were introduced.



*Clockwise from top: Sir Colin pictured in 2013 at the University’s first sports awards with the sport and recreation team; Judy Cassab’s Portrait of VC Colin Maiden; and speaking at the openings of Waipapa Marae in 1988 and the recreation centre in 1978.*

In 1976, Sir Colin expressed his concern to the University Senate about the low proportion of Māori and Pacific students at the University. This led to the formation of a committee to improve the educational opportunities for Māori and Pacific students and the introduction of grants, scholarships and new-start programmes.

The committee also recommended a marae and, after frustrating funding holdups, Waipapa Marae opened in 1988. During the delay to its construction, Sir Colin says in part one of his autobiography *An Energetic Life*, he was grateful for the support of the late Professor Sir Hugh Kawharu, Distinguished Professor Dame Anne Salmond and the late Merimeri Penfold CNZM.

Just before the opening of the marae, Sir Hugh invited Sir Colin and his wife Lady Jenefor to a ceremony with Māori Studies staff, where he was presented with a korowai.

“I was overwhelmed by this gesture,” Sir Colin wrote. “And the cloak remains one of my treasured possessions.”

Sir Colin maintained contact with the University even after his retirement, and he had a long association with the Auckland University

Rugby Football Club and university sports in general. As recently as 2022, Sir Colin presented the Interfaculty Sports Championship award, the Sir Colin Maiden Shield, at an event he had attended since its inception in 2013.

He also became a generous donor to the University, and many hundreds of engineering students have benefited from the Dean’s Leadership Programme, which he helped found.

Former Dean of Engineering Nic Smith, now Vice-Chancellor at Victoria University of Wellington, said Sir Colin had a big impact on him and University of Auckland engineering students over many years.

“Sir Colin had an extraordinary life and he will be missed by so many of us,” said Nic.

“He was wonderfully wise and enormously energetic. He was a mentor and friend to me and many generations of students who participated in the leadership programme for which he was both the formal patron and, more importantly, the informal inspiration.”

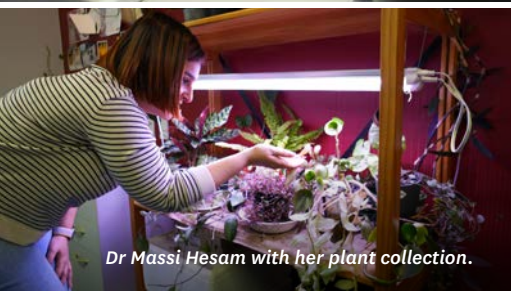
The University extends heartfelt condolences to the Maiden family.

**Full story:** [auckland.ac.nz/sir-colin-maiden](https://auckland.ac.nz/sir-colin-maiden)

## MY SPACE



Diving gear forms the backdrop as (left to right) Jimmy Pen, Wei Ting Teo and Yangzhe Li work in the lab. Photos: William Chea



Dr Massi Hesam with her plant collection.



One of the lab's many fish tanks.



The prizewinning Taniwha.

## THE LIFE AQUATIC

All things underwater inspire the team of engineers at the Biomimetics Lab.

**A submarine shaped like a fish, a clothes rack stacked with wetsuits, fish tanks filled with creatures – it's not hard to pick a theme at the Biomimetics Lab at the Auckland Bioengineering Institute (ABI).**

The world of biomimetics is all about creating technology inspired by nature, and the lab's engineers especially look to the underwater world in their work engineering soft sensors and robots. Unlike conventional rigid robots, these are machines that are soft and flexible – “things that can do all sorts of weird things like an octopus”, says leader of the Biomimetics Lab, Professor Iain Anderson.

It's no surprise then, that a large tank teeming with all kinds of fish occupies a central position in the lab's shared space. Each new PhD student gets to add a fish (or two) to the community, explains Dr Massi Hesam, a research fellow who's working on giving robots a sense of touch.

It not only creates a kind of parallel fish world inside the lab, but it means that as people move on, they also leave something of themselves behind. Some students, like PhD candidate Cheng-Huan Lu, also breed fish to add to the tank; he's bred a healthy population of angel fish and is currently cultivating a community of East African cichlids.

The sea not only provides inspiration, but a destination for some of the technology the lab is developing. Postdoctoral fellow Dr Derek Orbaugh is leading work on underwater wearables – smart wetsuits that can monitor divers' movements and physiological states, and gloves with sensors that allow divers to communicate in murky underwater conditions.

Which helps explain that rack of wetsuits. “One of the nice things about working on this technology is you get to go diving every now and then,” says Derek.

“Most people in this lab have a diving licence,” explains PhD student Antony Tang, “either by requirement – or by peer pressure.” Some have trained as advanced or rescue divers in the name of testing the technology and others specialise in underwater photography to capture the results.

And in times past, members of the lab have literally crawled beneath the skin of a fish

in the name of science – which brings us to the submarine.

Called *The Taniwha*, the submarine now sits on the ground floor of the ABI building on Symonds Street, a reminder of the glory days when it took out top prize in the European international human-propelled submarine races of 2016. Submarine pilot Dr Chris Walker, a Biomimetics Lab PhD student at the time, piloted the vessel, peddling the fish-shaped vessel while submerged inside.

One of the sub's competitive advantages, says Iain, was its rear section that could bend like a fish, allowing it to be steered without a rudder.

Like a school of fish, members of the lab also like to stick together.

Alongside the fish tank, central features of their shared space are a couple of couches and a big communal table. They gather here every day to prepare and eat lunch together, pooling their resources to create a meal, and play chess.

“We feel like we're part of a family here,” says Massi. “We really enjoy ourselves and enjoy each other's company.”

■ Caitlin Sykes

**To learn more, visit: [biomimeticslab.com](http://biomimeticslab.com)  
View the story online to see a video of the Biomimetics Lab team and their space.**