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ALUMNI MAGAZINE

AUTUMN 2025

ACTIVE BODIES ACTIVE MINDS

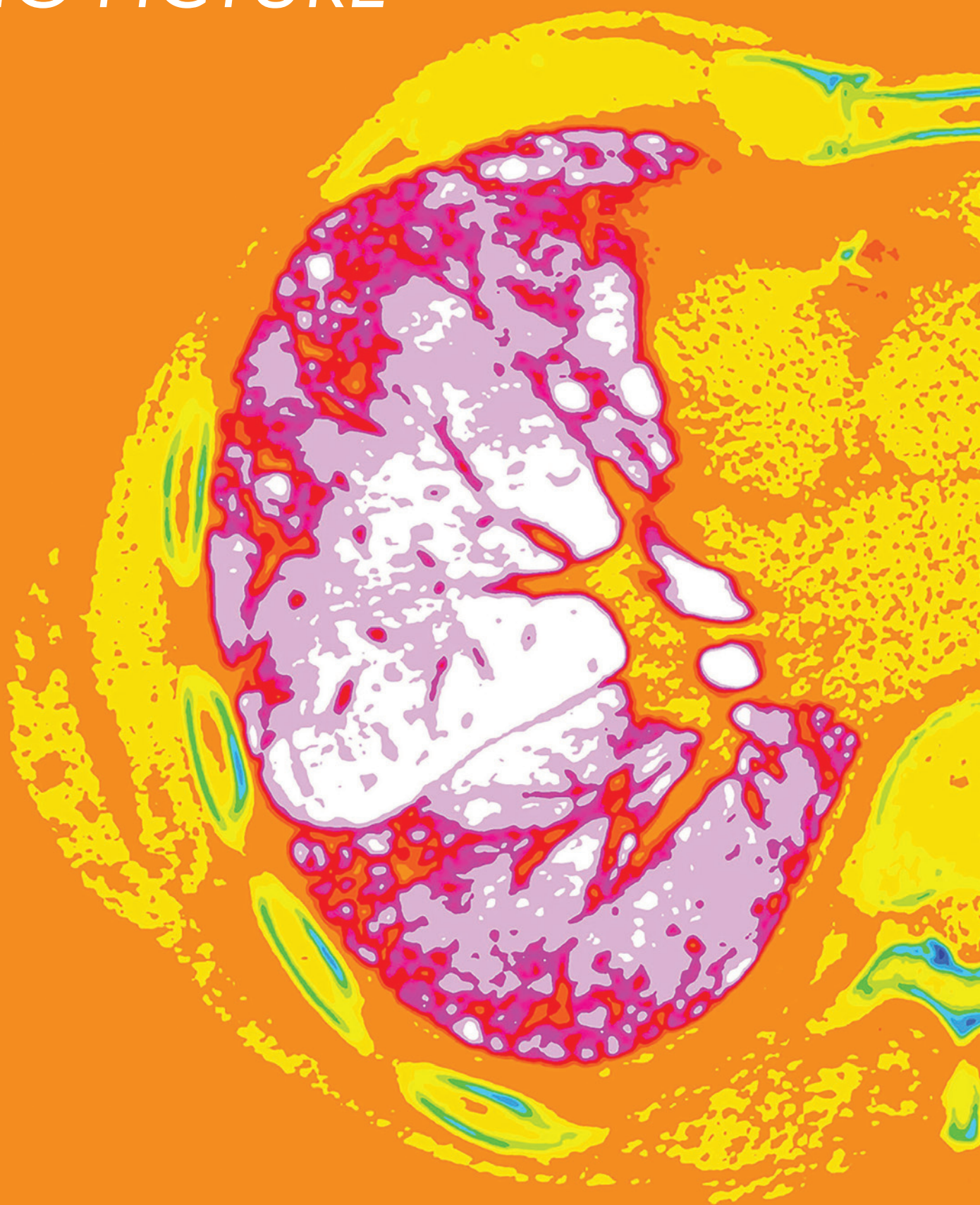
THE CONNECTIONS
BETWEEN ACTIVITY AND
ACADEMIC SUCCESS

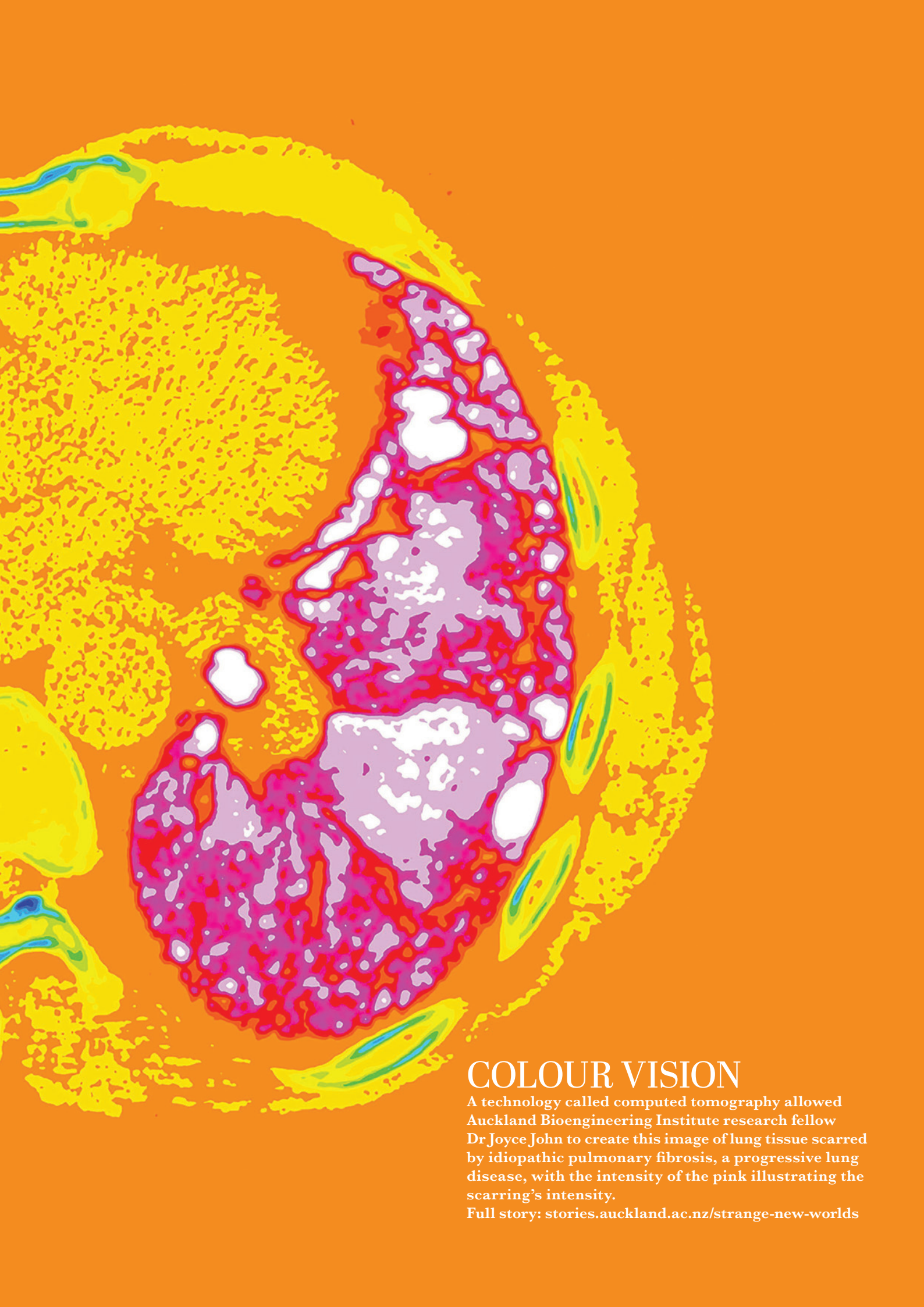
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igniting business
success stories

The researchers
unlocking insights
into animal senses

Meet the French
art world's
grande dame

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COLOUR VISION

A technology called computed tomography allowed Auckland Bioengineering Institute research fellow Dr Joyce John to create this image of lung tissue scarred by idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, a progressive lung disease, with the intensity of the pink illustrating the scarring's intensity.

Full story: stories.auckland.ac.nz/strange-new-worlds

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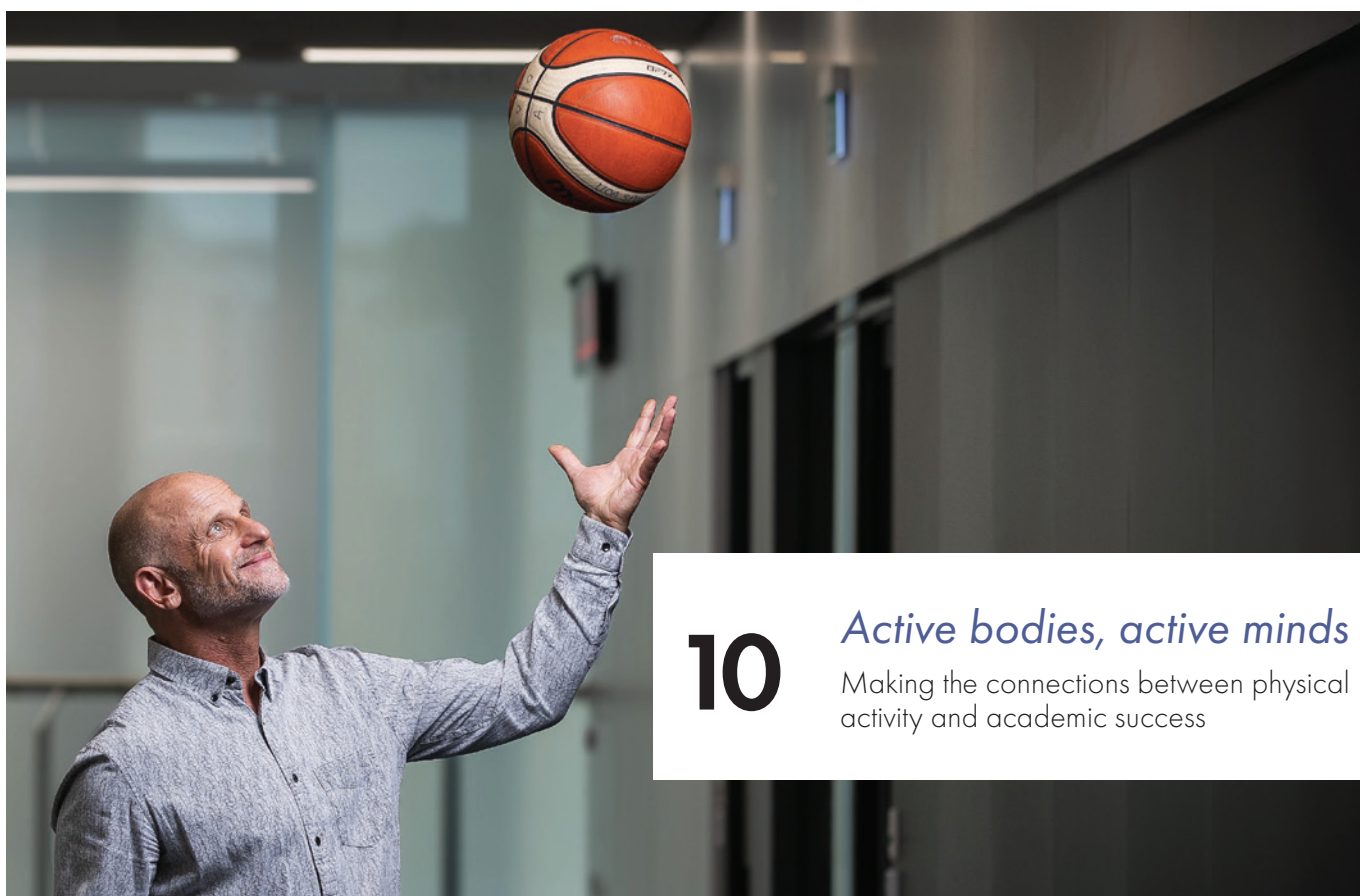
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Making the connections between physical activity and academic success

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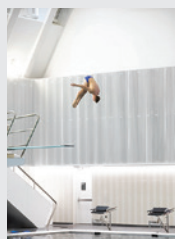
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Cover image:

Frazer Tavener

Photo: Dean Carruthers



Waipapa
Taumata Rau
**University
of Auckland**

Editorial

AN ENGAGING AND LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE



I had a great time during my years as a postgraduate student. My class sizes were small, the academics treated me almost like colleagues, and I had no issue making connections; I knew how to get involved, how to get the most out of university and how to make lifelong friends – I even met my wife.

I felt that I belonged and that I was in the right place.

That hadn't been the case, however, when I was a 'first in family' first-year student. I didn't know 'how to university' and those initial years were awful.

I remember the loneliness of being on campus and feeling I couldn't wait to get home to hang out with my high-school mates. My imposter syndrome was through the roof, and only my innate stubbornness made me stick it out and get a degree.

The University of Auckland's Campus Life team is driven to create the possibility of an engaging and life-changing experience for as many students as we can.

Some will find their place and their people in the classroom, others through student clubs. For many, sport and recreation provides that sense of belonging – the validation from peers that you're in the right place even if it's tough going from time to time.

It doesn't matter where it comes from: belonging leads to persistence and persistence leads to success.

Research has shown that university students who participate in sport and recreation make friends more easily, have better career outcomes, lower rates of physical and mental illness and even better academic outcomes.

At the University of Auckland we see all that, including higher pass rates and more

A grades, especially for those students who can't, or find it challenging, to engage in student life in other ways. (You can read more on this in the cover story, from page 10.)

Of course, a major concern for universities around the world is the youth mental health crisis. There is no simple fix, and for some people their mental health conditions are difficult, complex and stubbornly resistant to treatment. We can't simply say 'put on your running shoes and you'll be right'.

However, research has shown that for many of us, physical activity is the single best thing we can do to increase our well-being, and to prevent and even manage some mental health problems.

Knowing all this has been a driving force for myself, and many others at the University, during the 12-year process of developing our new Hiwa, Recreation Centre. Officially opened in February, Hiwa is designed to serve the needs of a 47,000-strong student community that's almost five times larger than the 10,000 who were on campus when the former recreation centre was built.

It's a world-class facility, featuring an aquatic hall, state-of-the-art sports halls and studios to accommodate everything from dance to combat sports to group fitness.

Importantly, it's a campus amenity designed to foster connection, with a large public atrium and numerous spaces where students can simply meet to throw a ball, play table tennis or hang out.

The development of Hiwa is part of an ongoing plan to improve our amenities. The aim of that plan is to optimise our students' experience so they feel, as I ultimately did, that university is a place where they belong and can excel.

BRENDAN MOSELY

Director, Campus Life

Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland

ELAM ALUMNA HONoured

Elizabeth Ellis has been named among outstanding New Zealanders in 2025.

A lifetime of advocating for Māori art and culture was recognised when artist Elizabeth Ellis CNZM was named Senior New Zealander of the Year for 2025.

"I feel astonished, overwhelmed and really grateful for receiving such recognition," says Elizabeth (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Kuta, Ngāti Porou, Ngāi Tane, Te Whānau ā Takimoana). Her win was announced in March as part of the annual Kiwibank New Zealander of the Year Awards.

Elizabeth graduated from Elam School of Fine Arts in 1964, with her artworks reflecting connections to whakapapa, wāhine Māori and tribal landscapes.

She has also played a prominent and pivotal role in New Zealand's arts sector for decades. She served seven years on the New Zealand Arts Foundation, three years on the Creative New Zealand Council, and chaired Te Waka Toi, the Māori Arts Board of Creative New Zealand, from 1994 to 2006.

In 1995, she founded Auckland Art Gallery's Haerewa Māori Advisory Board, which she led until 2021.

Her involvement with the Wairau Māori Art Gallery Charitable Trust saw the establishment of New Zealand's first public Māori art gallery and she also founded the Toi Iho Charitable Trust, which certifies authentic Māori art.

Elizabeth says all the finalists in the Senior New Zealander of the Year category were deserving of recognition.

"They are people who have achieved a lot throughout their lives and it's great that our kuia and kaumātua are getting their time to shine," she says.

"It focuses on what they've done during their lives. Now all the kuia and kaumātua in the country can feel good about themselves, too."

Elizabeth was also acknowledged for her significant contributions to international cultural advocacy. She led delegations to Berlin, Pilsen and San Francisco with the Lindauer exhibition *The Māori Portraits*, and represented New Zealand on the Council of Pacific Arts and Culture (SPC Noumea) from 1996 to 2006. She also led New Zealand delegations with Dame Te Arikinui Te Atairangikaahu, the late Māori Queen, to Pacific arts festivals in Sāmoa, New Caledonia and Palau.

Beyond her national and international arts advocacy, Elizabeth's professional background



includes art education, and education evaluation for the Education Review Office.

The Ellis family has created a notable legacy. Elizabeth is the mother of the University's Professor Ngarino Ellis, an art historian who recently co-authored *Toi Te Mana*, the first comprehensive history of Māori art. And her daughter Hana Ellis is a District Court judge.

Elizabeth is also the wife of the late Emeritus Professor Robert Ellis, a renowned artist who was a longtime lecturer at Elam and was awarded a personal chair in 1992.

"I am incredibly proud of our whānau; being best friends with my daughters is also the real reward," says Elizabeth.

When reflecting on her Senior New Zealander of the Year win, she also thinks of her tūpuna and whānau in Ngāti Kuta of Ngāpuhi, whom she describes as "exceptional artists".

"When you go into the dining room of our marae, there are six murals that are about the history of our rohe, our area. They were made at a wānanga in the mid-80s ... we had a live-in of artists who are now our top Māori artists, but at the time they were students. A win like this just validates that history."

She says the murals tell the story in visual form, "and this award adds another layer of history for our Te Rāwhiti marae and for our whānau".

Te Rina Tripone

You can read more about Professor Ngarino Ellis and *Toi Te Mana* on page 44.

Elizabeth Ellis was named Senior New Zealander of the Year for her contributions to art and art advocacy.

Photo: New Zealander of the Year Awards

"It's great that our kuia and kaumātua are getting their time to shine."

– Elizabeth Ellis

KUPE SCHOLARSHIP SUPPORT

Endowment gift aids programme's long-term future

A \$4 million donation from Canadian philanthropist John McCall MacBain has boosted a major scholarship programme for exceptional postgraduate students. It will help ensure the Kupe Leadership Scholarship programme, which supports those with potential to be leaders for New Zealand, can continue long-term, potentially forever.

The endowed donation was announced at the launch of the 2025 programme, held at the University of Auckland on 19 March.

Established in 2018 with funding from the McCall MacBain Foundation, the programme aims to shape future leaders across many disciplines and fields.

Students come from universities throughout New Zealand and are selected for their academic excellence and leadership potential. The scholarships, for postgraduate study at the University, provide \$22,000 in financial support and a comprehensive mentoring programme, matching students with prominent leaders in their fields.

So far, 111 students have participated in the programme, 35 funded by the McCall



MacBain Foundation, with a further 76 funded by various donors who have each funded one or more scholars.

Past scholars of the programme have gone on to roles across a wide cross section of careers and to further study. Three have since been awarded prestigious Rhodes Scholarships to Oxford University, with one awarded a Gates Fellowship to Cambridge University.

"The vision for the programme was to create something truly exceptional, that would emulate the finest programmes on the world stage," says John McCall MacBain.

"It was to ignite a new generation of visionary leaders, driven to shape a better future for New Zealand and the world through bold action, community impact and transformative leadership. As the seventh cohort is being celebrated, I am so proud of how the programme has grown and excited to announce the next stage in our commitment to its growth."

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/kupe-donation-2025

Chancellor Cecilia Tarrant and John McCall MacBain (centre) with the 2025 Kupe Leadership Scholars.
Photo: Richard Ng

STRONG SHOWING IN SUBJECT RANKINGS

Strongest performances seen in Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences and Management

Recently released rankings show the University of Auckland has five subjects in the global Top 50 and 27 subjects in the Top 100 in 2025. That's an increase of two subjects in the Top 100 compared with 2024, according to the 2025 Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings by Subject, released on 12 March.

The five Top 50 subjects in which the University has achieved notable success are Sports-related subjects (24th), Archaeology (27th), Education (=34th), Civil and Structural Engineering (=38th), and Marketing (46th).

The University has also improved its standing in four of the five broad subject areas, maintaining its position in the 92nd percentile and above in all areas. The strongest performances were seen in the Arts and Humanities along with Social



Sports-related subjects are among those on the rise.

Sciences and Management, where the University has outperformed its peers, including moving ahead of Monash University in Arts and Humanities.

In 2025, the University also has two new subjects in the Top 100: Mathematics; and Theology, Divinity and Religious Studies, and is newly ranked in Classics and Ancient History.

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/2025-qs-subjects

BUILDING WEALTH WITH LEGO?

Offbeat guide explores the pros and cons of investing in everything from whisky to watches

If you've ever wondered about the value of your collection of Lego, classic cars or whisky, a new book by a University of Auckland finance lecturer might be for you.

Dr Gertjan Verdickt (Business School) has produced a guide for people who want to invest in more than shares and property. *The Passion Portfolio: Investing in Style*, co-authored with Jürgen Hanssens (senior manager at KPMG Belgium and an avid Lego collector), details the mechanics behind the world of 'passion' investing.

It offers readers an understanding of how the prices of passion investments evolve, along with the factors that drive these changes.

Gertjan's own investment portfolio includes wine after a journey that began with enrolling in a wine expert course. During the course, he noticed striking similarities between wine and traditional financial assets. This prompted a shift in his research focus – from studying why stock prices move, to exploring the factors driving wine prices.



Dr Gertjan Verdickt sheds light on 'passion' investing.
Photo: William Chea

The book discusses the pros and cons of various investments: wine, Lego, whisky, watches, bags, jewellery, art, stamps, instruments, vintage cars, precious metals and baseball cards. The authors provide average historical annual returns by examining at least 20 years of data for each object.

So, what comes out on top? Of all the investment options, whisky is number one, with an average annual return of 17.52 percent. In second place is baseball cards, which posted an average annual return of nearly 13 percent compared with the stock market's 10 percent.

Research suggests, says Gertjan, that adding collectibles like whisky, baseball cards or Lego to an existing stock portfolio can reduce overall portfolio risk.

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/passion-investing

STRENGTHENED TIES IN VIETNAM AND INDIA

University delegations forge further pathways to study in New Zealand and offshore

New opportunities for study and research partnerships opened during recent trips to Vietnam and India by University of Auckland delegations.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Dawn Freshwater signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Ho Chi Minh University of Technology (HUTECH) in Hanoi in February. The MoU paves the way for HUTECH students to pursue undergraduate and postgraduate degrees across diverse fields in science, education and the arts.

The two universities also plan to collaborate on research and teaching, and to integrate sustainable development as a key focus. Prime Minister Christopher Luxon, who was leading a trade delegation to Vietnam, witnessed the signing.

The following month, during a Prime Ministerial trade mission to Delhi and Mumbai, the University further strengthened its relationships with Indian counterparts.



The Vice-Chancellor travelled with the business delegation and took the opportunity to renew a joint PhD agreement with IIT Kharagpur, sign a Letter of Intent with tech services company Tech Mahindra for internships commencing in the second half of the year, and forge an MoU with India's top-five institution Manipal Academy of Higher Education.

The Vice-Chancellor says Indian universities and research institutions are highly valued partners.

"A recent development is internships for New Zealand students in India. Supporting our students to be India-literate graduates is essential for the country's future workforce as businesses and organisations lift their engagement with the sub-continent," she says.

Full stories: auckland.ac.nz/vietnam-ties and auckland.ac.nz/india-agreements

Vice-Chancellor Professor Dawn Freshwater (left) at the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with Ho Chi Minh University of Technology, witnessed by Prime Minister Christopher Luxon (centre).

ACTIVE BODIES ACTIVE MINDS

The opening of the University of Auckland's new recreation centre signals a significant investment in students' physical and mental well-being. Owen Poland goes in search of the connections between physical activity and academic success.

*High Performance Sport Programme participant and Kupe Leadership Scholar gymnast William Fu-Allen, photographed at Hiwa.
Photo: Chris Loufte*

A once-weekly trip to the gym might not transform your physique, but if you're a uni student, it can noticeably impact your grades.

Research carried out by the University of Auckland's Campus Life team found a substantial uptick in academic success among students accessing the University's rec centre just once a week.

"You got 19 percent more A grades than all the other students who weren't using it," says Campus Life associate director Sean Smith, adding that those who averaged three times a week got 30 percent more A grades.

What surprised, though, was the impact rec centre use had on Māori students, whose A grades were bumped up by 24 percent based on one visit, says Sean, and a corresponding 44 percent for Pacific students.

"It's such a huge impact that we've rolled out some of the things that we believe contribute to that success – including social connection, working together, being part of a team, and a sense of community," says Sean.

Broader University initiatives include Ako – a Pacific-based study community in the halls of residence – and Toitū Taurua Māori, which holistically integrates academic and pastoral care for Māori.

"It's more than just the activity; it's the melting pot of social connection and collective efficacy on top of the fitness and sport," he says.

The formation of social sports clubs has been another key initiative to enable students with varying degrees of ability to compete against each other, and more than 400 students are engaged in paid or volunteer work to help facilitate various activities.

"That sense of success and achievement through sport drives and supports academic achievement because you feel the sense of place on campus," says Sean. "And that in turn gives you confidence in your study."

Research has also shown that when it comes to employment, it often pays to be involved in physical activity and sport because recruiters look for students with different skill sets in addition to their top grades.

Adds Sean: "If you were involved in sport and recreation, you got hired faster, you got paid more. If you did change jobs, you're unemployed for a much shorter time and you are actually an in-demand graduate."

MAKING A STATEMENT

The research was carried out among students attending the University's former rec centre, and the connection it showed between physical activity and academic achievement helped support the case for the \$320 million investment in Hiwa, the University's new recreation centre.

Opened in November 2024, Hiwa (a name



Sean Smith
Photo: Chris Louffe

"It's more than just the activity; it's the melting pot of social connection and collective efficacy on top of the fitness and sport."

– Sean Smith, associate director, Campus Life

gifted by Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei) means vigorous, active, robust and sound. And it reflects the University's aspirations for growth and well-being: to breathe new life into the heart of the City Campus, and stimulate and enhance the physical and academic performance of students for generations to come.

"People are expected to work harder, to strive more, and we know that the wheels may fall off for some people eventually," says Sean. "So, it's a big statement from the University to say that personal well-being, moving your body and connecting with others is valuable."

Built over eight levels, the centre includes New Zealand's biggest gym fit-out, an aquatics hall, rooftop turf and track, three squash courts, five dedicated fitness studios, sports halls, a bouldering wall and more, in a space collaboratively designed by New Zealand and Canadian consultants.

"The big strength that the Canadians have is they're a lot more advanced around equity, diversity, barrier-free access – and that really challenged our thinking with things like facilities for changing," says Sean.

Accessibility is not just about reducing physical barriers, but also mental ones. With rising isolation and anxiety amongst students

“That support means that I can continue my degree and make progress while still competing for New Zealand, which is fantastic.”

– Frazer Tavener, engineering student and competitive diver



Aspiring Olympian Frazer Tavener takes a dive during the official opening of Hiwa.
Photo: Dean Carruthers

◀ in higher education, around 30 percent of Hiwa is devoted to non-performance spaces – enhanced with low-level lighting, music and images of nature – to meet well-being needs. Mental health support for students is also available.

“There is a growing need for support, and part of it is there’s more openness, awareness, more people talking about their mental health. These things are out there in a way that they never used to be.”

Versatility has been another major factor in the design of Hiwa, so much so that the main swimming pool has an adjustable depth, and even the game line markings in the glass-floored sports hall can be managed remotely from an iPad.

“We’ve pushed the boat out; we’ve challenged ourselves with technology and innovation,” says Sean. “Not only will it work well for the students of today, but it also means we can evolve over time to meet users’ needs.”

Membership for students costs \$200 annually and is free for those living in University halls. Around 10,000 of the University’s 46,000 students signed up as members within its first week of officially opening, says Sean, who’s in no doubt about Hiwa’s success.

“There’ll be a million visits coming through the door easily this year, and that well-being impact will be huge.”

SUPPORTING SPORTS STARS

Among the early visitors to Hiwa were some of the University’s 267 high-performance student athletes who enjoyed a rooftop yoga session and ice bath, which sport development manager Albie Eaton says was a great way to build *whanaungatanga* (relationships).

“It was obviously an opportunity for them to do some health and well-being activities,” says Albie, “but also an opportunity to meet other students in the same boat, and meet our staff, and really have that sense of community and connection.”

As part of the Athlete Friendly Network, the University’s High Performance Support Programme has an MoU with High Performance Sport New Zealand in which it agrees to provide academic flexibility to help students navigate what can be a challenging study schedule. “Our role is to make sure that our students are able to do the two things that they’re really passionate about, which are sport and study,” says Albie.

Each student undergoes a needs assessment, and a tailored programme can be arranged with personal trainers and fitness staff if support is required to maintain strength and conditioning. Personal development workshops are also arranged on topics like time management, life coaching and personal relationships.

Hiwa’s central location has also provided greater visibility and face-to-face contact with students that wasn’t previously possible, not to mention the drawcard of having state-of-the-art facilities, which are expected to encourage future enrolments.

“There’s more space for them to do tailored training, and the quality of the facility feels high performance,” says Albie. “Because of Hiwa, a lot of them will choose to come here.”

Hiwa has also paved the way for new partnerships with the University’s Department of Exercise Science, which Albie says is “knocking on the door” to expand its research to optimise athletic performance and drive an innovation pipeline.

“There are huge opportunities there through physiotherapy, human performance research, movement neuroscience and exercise and sport psychology.”

Fundamentally, Albie says, it’s about supporting and creating a pathway for high-performance students – predominantly 18- to 24-year-olds – who might otherwise struggle to make ends meet. “They don’t have time to work to support themselves, so we’re trying to fill the gaps for some of that government funding that has been cut across some sports, and we’re really proud of the work we do for those students,” she says.

With his eyes firmly set on qualifying for the synchronised diving event at the 2028 Los Angeles Summer Olympics, third-year Faculty of Engineering student Frazer Tavener is making the most of the opportunities presented by the High Performance Support Programme.

“That support means that I can continue my degree and make progress while still competing for New Zealand, which is fantastic,” says Frazer.

In addition to taking the stress out of managing his time between University commitments and training 25 hours a week, he says the programme also provides valuable workshops on topics like nutrition. These, in turn, create networking opportunities with other athletes.

“We can talk about how they balance things. And it’s great to have other people doing something similar to me so that I can see how they do things – and vice versa.”

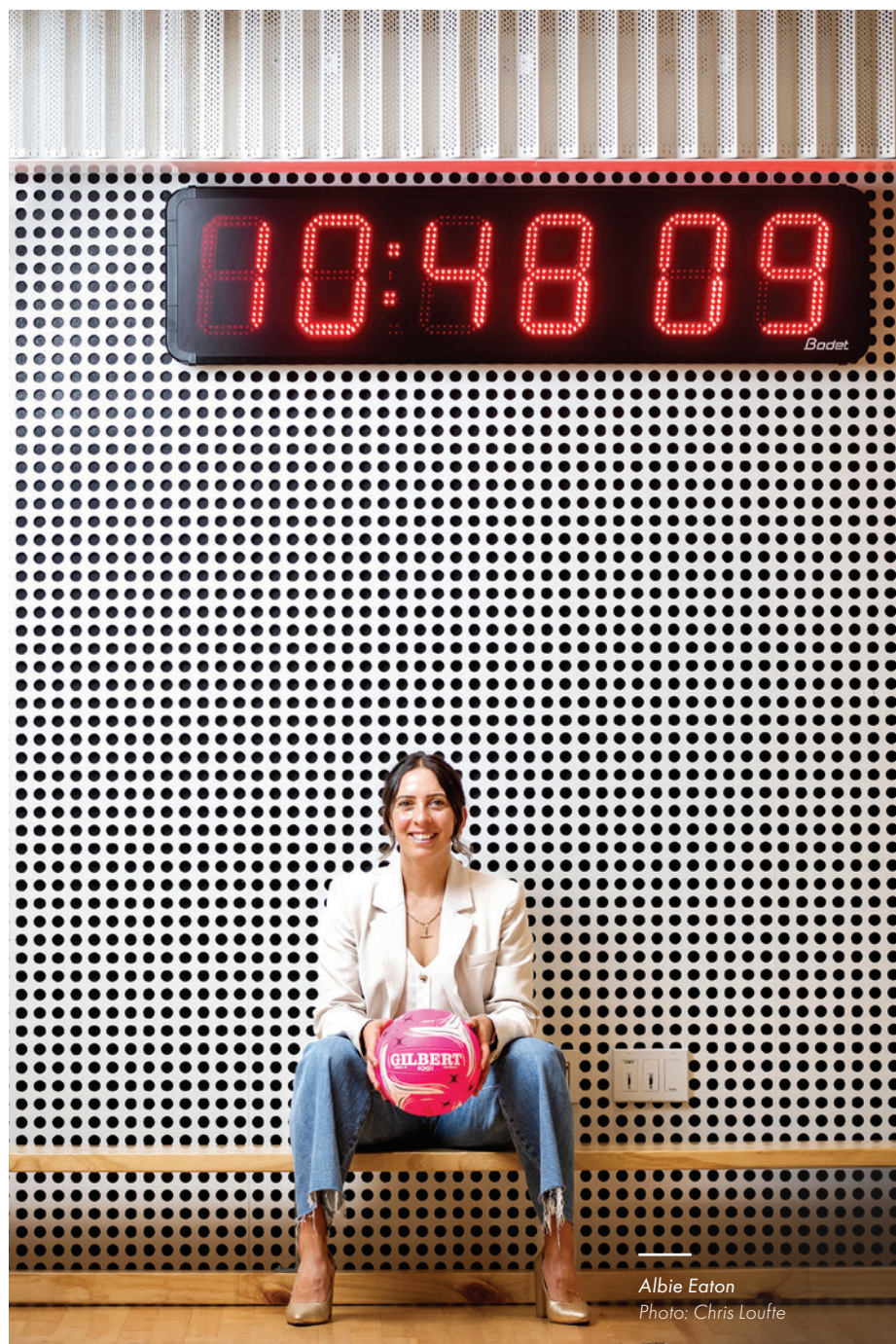
Hiwa will help to fill ‘gaps’ in Frazer’s 25-hour-a-week exercise regime when he has to skip training to attend labs or tutorials, and he says the centre’s three-metre diving board is ideal because it’s Olympic standard.

“I can just go and fit in a gym session around my training, around my courses, and that is extremely helpful.”

A firm believer in the connection between physical activity and academic performance, he adds: “I think it’s going to lead a lot more students to living a healthier lifestyle and, in turn, their academic quality will improve.”

Balancing the needs of being a student athlete is central to Sulu Fitzpatrick’s role as a Team Leader with High Performance Sport New Zealand, and the self-described “forever student” has had more than a few distractions during her 14-year journey toward completing a masters degree in 2025.

In addition to being a mother of twins and captain of the Northern Mystics netball team, Sulu was a Silver Ferns and Commonwealth Games representative. Her sociology thesis, she says, will highlight the experiences of the “limited pool” of Pacific women in high-performance sport.



Albie Eaton
Photo: Chris Louffe

“Our role is to make sure that our students are able to do the two things that they’re really passionate about, which are sport and study.”

– Albie Eaton, sport development manager, Campus Life

◀ “The focus will be to understand their journeys through high-performance sport and their challenges. If you can understand people, you can understand what their needs are and the potential approaches moving forward.”

Believing in the ‘power of the collective’, based on the world view of Pacific cultures, Sulu is using what’s called Masi methodology to centre the voices of participants so that they are able to co-produce knowledge.

“You don’t take action as an individual, you take it as a collective. And my view is that it’s the best approach for having the highest impact, but also to get that buy-in. It’s probably why I gravitated towards team sports, because that’s how team sports operate.”

And she’s full of praise for the world-class Hiwa facility that will drive home the message about the importance of education and sport.

“It offers an opportunity for students to understand the value of keeping active, and also serves as a place for high-performance athletes, or aspiring high-performance athletes, to be able to work towards that balance of being a student athlete.”

ACTIVITY FOR ALL

Most students, however, are not high-performance athletes, and for some, mental or physical health conditions or disabilities can present challenges to engaging in physical activity. Breaking down those barriers is the focus of the University’s Actively Well programme.

“Everyone is on a different trajectory in terms of where they’re at from a physical movement capability.”

– Kelly Davey, programme manager, Campus Life

It draws on the te ao Māori concept of hauora (health and well-being), says programme manager Kelly Davey, taking multiple approaches – “not just from a physical point of view, but also from the social, mental and spiritual aspects, too”.

Launched in 2020, and supported in 2022 with funding through a mental health services contract, the programme has so far been accessed by more than 1,500 students. “Initially, we had a target of supporting 850 students, and we smashed that by seeing 1,200 students through the course of that initiative,” says Kelly.

Guidance and education around personalised fitness plans, nutrition, and restorative practices like diaphragmatic breathing and mindfulness are included in the offering, which is delivered in-person, online, or in groups. “Everyone is on a different trajectory in terms of where they’re at from a physical movement capability, so we’ve got options there to suit everyone, wherever they might sit on that continuum.”

According to 2024 UK research, 50 percent of undergraduates reported a decline in mental health after they started university and Kelly



Former Silver Fern Sulu Fitzpatrick, at the opening of Hiwa.
Photo: Dean Carruthers

acknowledges that “we live in a very stressful world right now”.

“There’s a lot of pressure when it comes to study, so it’s important for us to make sure we’ve got spaces where students can come and decompress and focus on other aspects of their total well-being.”

At Hiwa, these include a mind and body studio for low-impact classes such as yoga, Pilates and stretch, as well as a dance studio, quiet zone and chill-out areas where people can relax. Says Kelly: “Taking the opportunity to rest and digest is also crucial. So, it’s not just being physical and working on cardiovascular health, it’s also thinking about your parasympathetic nervous system.”

Each University year presents new needs and challenges because the students and the pressures they face differ, says Kelly, so the ability to evolve new opportunities to be active is important.

“We see more opportunity in what we can do to help push students into other pathways that might be aligned with their preferences in terms of how they like to be active, or how they like to connect with people, or what it is that they find joy in.”

The Auckland University Students’ Association is also playing its part.

In addition to promoting various events at Hiwa during Orientation Week, like a volleyball match with the neighbouring AUT, it organises themed weeks throughout the year in collaboration with different sports clubs.

“The entire purpose of that is to bring in as many students as we can, get them active, get them running around and having a good time,” says AUSA president Gabriel Boyd.

Hiwa’s central location has ‘opened up’ the City Campus and he says it’s become a one-stop shop for students. “You could conceivably spend your entire University day studying, working out, eating and socialising in that building, which I think is really unique,” says Gabriel.

On a personal note, it’s no surprise that Gabriel is also a big fan of physical exercise, given that he’s been attending gyms from an early age, and feels the benefits of being a Hiwa regular. “I’m going to be more tuned into my lectures and be less distracted. And it also just helps the mood.”

More than half of the investment in Hiwa was paid for by student levies over many years. Given that, says Gabriel, “you would hope that it contributes positively to the average student on campus”. And he says it’s important students’ voices are heard on issues relating to its use.

“I think students should be central in all the conversations and all of the recommendations around this rec centre.” ■

To learn more about Hiwa, visit:
auckland.ac.nz/hiwa-tour



A PLACE TO BELONG

As a participant in the High Performance Support Programme, national gymnastics champion William Fu-Allen is grateful for the “phenomenal” assistance that he’s received during his four-year journey toward achieving a Master of Science in Biology.

“The greatest thing about being a high-performance athlete at the University of Auckland is that they understand the commitment that I have.”

Help with extensions and having someone to talk to has been important, not to mention being allowed to sit an exam hours before he competed at the 2022 World Championships in Liverpool – “just that opportunity to help me compete the best that I could,” he says.

Self-funding his education has been a challenge when his sporting career requires up to 32 hours a week in the gym, so the \$22,000 stipend that came with his 2024 Kupe Leadership Scholarship, funded by Grant G. Biggar, was a great help. Sponsored by a range of donors, Kupe scholarships aim to develop future leaders, offering a leadership programme, personal mentor and tuition fee support.

“I don’t think I would have been able to compete, train and complete my masters at the same time without the scholarship,” says William.

Most of William’s gymnastics training takes place off-campus because of the specialist equipment required, and while the opening of Hiwa has come at the end of his studies, he’s made good use of the weights area, pools and various spaces for decompression.

“I actually wrote part of my masters thesis in the centre because I was able to use it as a place of recovery and relaxation.”

More than that, he says Hiwa has provided a valuable sense of connection. “It’s a place where a lot of athletes like myself can come together as a group and feel like we have a place where we belong.”

ADDRESSING INEQUITIES

Dr Max Ronald tells Donna Chisholm about her very personal mission to get better breast cancer results for Māori.

For breast cancer surgeon Dr Max Ronald (right), improving outcomes for Māori wāhine has long been a professional goal. In 2021, though, it became very personal with her own breast cancer diagnosis at the age of 49 – an event she describes as a “dumb irony”.

The University of Auckland alumna, who now works at Whangārei Hospital, is the inaugural recipient of a three-year Breast Cancer Fellowship, in a partnership between Hei Āhuru Mōwai Māori Cancer Leadership Aotearoa, Breast Cancer Cure and Breast Cancer Foundation New Zealand.

The fellowship includes research that aims to improve access to screening and accelerate the speed of treatment for those diagnosed outside the national screening programme. Māori and Pacific women are more likely to develop breast cancer and more likely to die from it than non-Māori.

As an example of how communities know best how to help themselves improve screening rates, Max points to Te Kaha on the East Coast. The area’s rural, predominantly Māori population more than doubled its screening coverage to 98 percent after feedback identified a raft of access issues including transport, whānau-centred care and appointment scheduling.

Her ten-year goal is to increase the coverage rate of Māori women to 80 percent, a figure she says would address the historic inequities. Only about 64 percent are currently regularly screened, compared with 69 percent of European women.

For those whose cancers are diagnosed symptomatically, like her own, the problem is more insidious; she says systemic racism results in treatment delays and poorer outcomes for Māori women, even those in the highest socio-economic groups.

Another of the fellowship’s goals is to increase the number of Māori breast cancer researchers. One of her masters students has begun a project examining the differences in experiences and outcomes for Northland women diagnosed through the screening programme compared with those outside it. The aim is to identify the ‘ideal breast cancer journey’ for Māori wāhine.

Max (Te Kapotai ki Ngā Puhī and Ngāti Wai) began studying medicine at the



University in 2000. She had previously trained in physiotherapy, which she practised for four years after a school careers adviser told her that “Māori didn’t do medicine”. She switched only after reading how Dr Hinemoa Elder, a former television personality, had enrolled under the Māori and Pacific Admission Scheme (MAPAS).

The number of Māori and Pacific medical students the faculty aims to select is now proportionate to the young adult population in the North Island; Max is concerned that a proposed government review of the programme might see the equity gains whittled away.

“I think we’re all kind of concerned, angry, confused, hurt and gobsmacked. I think we have to be very careful and very staunch about protecting these types of programmes.”

Without them, the system risks a return to a meritocracy that might not be in the best interests of the population, she says.

“If you’re only taking someone who can get the highest marks in chemistry and physics, when actually the issue in the community is that we have lower outcomes for Māori, then you need to be selecting people who will be able to address that, and valuing that as something you need in your profession.”

Max’s pivot into surgery began during her training when she attended a liver cancer resection surgery by Professor Jonathan Koea, then the only Māori general surgeon in New Zealand. It was an experience that she says “blew me away”.

“The whole experience of being in theatre was such a privilege ... seeing the inside of a living body and the strategies, expertise and instruments involved in manipulating that to help the person. I found that really amazing.”

She knows that she is more likely to have a good outcome with her own breast cancer because she, too, is privileged: importantly, she knew how to access the best care promptly.

It’s long past time, she reckons, that every woman has the same chance.

“The whole experience of being in theatre was such a privilege.”

– Dr Max Ronald

RESEARCHER HARNESSES FIRSTHAND EXPERIENCE

Alix Coysh began losing her sight as a result of a genetic condition while still in her teens. Now, she tells James Fyfe, her research could lead to potential therapies that restore the sight of those with the same condition.

At 17, Dr Alix Coysh was determined to study science at university, despite being told her inherited eye disease would make it impossible to pursue an academic career. Today, not only has she earned a PhD from the University of Auckland, but she's also a research fellow in the School of Biological Sciences, investigating the very condition that took her sight.

Alix has retinitis pigmentosa (RP), a genetic eye disorder that has gradually killed the photoreceptor cells in her retina, leaving her legally blind. RP is classified as a rod-cone dystrophy; it first affects night vision, contrast detection and peripheral sight before progressing to colour blindness and central vision loss, making it difficult to read and recognise faces.

"I have no useful vision," Alix explains. "I can detect light and vague shapes, but it's not something I rely on."

Fully sighted until her mid-teens, Alix, now 31, first noticed issues with her vision around age 11 when a teacher observed she had trouble reading faint writing on the whiteboard. By 15, after numerous visits to optometrists and ophthalmologists, she was diagnosed with RP.

"Accepting the diagnosis took a decade. I didn't understand what going blind meant or how my future would look."

To make things harder, her two younger siblings were also later diagnosed with RP.

"I knew firsthand what struggles lay ahead for them, and I felt a responsibility to lead by example," she says.

As her vision declined, Alix embraced tools and technology to navigate and access the world.

"The more vision I lost and the better I got at adapting, the easier it actually became. Now, I see those adaptations as strengths. They've built my problem-solving skills, resilience and drive – all of which fuel my research."



Research

One major hurdle Alix initially faced was being discouraged by a University staff member from pursuing a career in science. It was suggested she try her hand at something more "accessible", like being a masseuse or musician.

Alix says such misconceptions form harmful societal barriers and often stem from a lack of awareness about the role that adaptive technologies can play in enabling blind professionals to carry out their work. Now she hopes to break down those barriers for others.

Today, Alix specialises in bioinformatics – a field that harnesses computers to analyse and understand biological data, such as DNA sequencing results.

During her masters and PhD, which she completed under Professor Stefan Bohlander in the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, she concentrated on using her skill set to identify genetic mutations and chromosomal changes causing leukaemia and multiple myeloma. That experience prepared her for her current work – tackling the very mutation that led to her blindness.

Now, working with Professor Russell Snell in the School of Biological Sciences, she is using sheep models to study how genetic mutations drive RP. The goal? To develop gene therapies that could halt the disease and potentially restore lost vision.

"We're in an exciting position where, with the right collaboration, awareness and support, we could translate therapies from the lab to patients with a relatively quick turnaround," says Alix.

"Gene therapies have the potential to be long-term, one-time treatments that can transform the lives of those affected by RP. We're already seeing life-changing success stories from gene therapy trials around the world, proving that this approach is more than just a possibility, it's within reach."

Alix Coysh

Photo: Chris Loufte

"The more vision I lost and the better I got at adapting, the easier it actually became."

– Alix Coysh,
School of Biological
Sciences

SCOPING MAGIC MUSHROOMS



Sam Lasham will research the science and acceptability of a magic mushroom drug-checking service.

Photo: William Chea

Researching how best to identify mushroom species could lead to a potential drug-checking service.

Magic mushrooms are coming under the microscope, as scientists at the University of Auckland forage for evidence

to support a drug-checking service with the goal of reducing harm.

Doctoral student Sam Lasham will research the science and the acceptability of such a service. “We’d like to work out the effectiveness of a magic mushroom drug-checking service and the best way to run that, and, in the case of people who are seeking mental health benefits, reduce the risks and offer advice on safe consumption,” says Sam.

Sam’s interest grew out of his genetics and botany studies at Otago University, which focused on our indigenous mushrooms. At the same time, he became interested in illicit use of psilocybin mushrooms and the need for harm-reduction measures, founding Students for Sensible Drug Policy Aotearoa in Dunedin.

He is now based in the University of Auckland’s School of Pharmacy, using its lab to identify the constituent parts of various types of mushrooms. He works in senior lecturer Dr Rhys Ponton’s research group, which holds the only drug-checking licence specifically for research purposes in New Zealand.

Success in the lab could enable a ‘know your mushrooms’ service to run in a similar way to current drug-checking services at festivals, events and in the community.

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/mushroom-testing

BREAKTHROUGH IN CTE RESEARCH

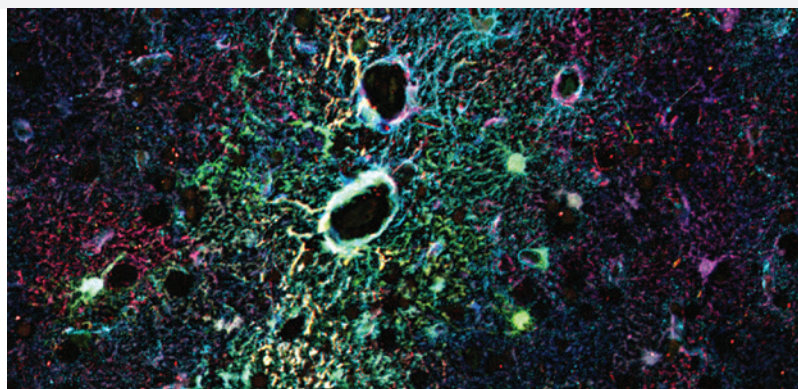
Findings may help better understand why some who suffer repeated head blows develop the disease, while others do not

University of Auckland scientists have made a breakthrough in understanding chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a neurodegenerative disease linked to repeated head blows.

Neuroscientists at the University’s Centre for Brain Research examined brain tissue, primarily from former rugby players, that was donated to the Neurological Foundation New Zealand Human Brain Bank, the Australia Sports Brain Bank, and the Boston UNITE Brain Bank.

Their study, published in the journal *Acta Neuropathologica*, sheds new light on how specific cells respond to damage from repeated head knocks.

Lead author PhD researcher Chelsie Osterman says the breakthrough in understanding the mechanisms driving the



disease paves the way for new treatments that target inflammatory markers in the brains of people with CTE.

The researchers discovered a unique distribution of inflammatory markers clustered around the distinctive lesions in the brain used to diagnose CTE in people after they die. These markers suggest astrocytes – star-shaped brain cells that support brain function – could be reacting to damage to blood vessels in the brain after head injuries.

“Astrocytes may play a more pivotal role in the disease than previously thought,” says Chelsie.

The research opens possibilities to better understand why some people who suffer repeated head injuries develop CTE, while others do not, she says.

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/cte-breakthrough

An image of a CTE lesion with astrocyte inflammation.

FIRST AUTISM RESEARCH CLINIC LAUNCHED

Clinic will offer DNA diagnoses that can be transformative for families

New Zealand now has its first clinic dedicated to autism research, housed at the Centre for Brain Research (CBR).

The clinic will use the groundbreaking genome-wide sequencing capabilities at CBR and build on the Minds for Minds project – a decade-long study into the DNA variations of autism and neurodevelopmental conditions. Minds for Minds has been led by Dr Jessie Jacobsen and a multidisciplinary team of researchers, clinicians and community members, and Jessie is leading the new research clinic. It will initially work with children, and will combine genetic testing with follow-up support and clinical management, carried out in close collaboration with hospitals and clinicians.

“Autism is incredibly complex and will often overlap with other conditions, which genetic sequencing can help us to understand,” says Jessie.

“For some individuals, particularly those with high support needs, identifying a change in a specific gene can reveal increased risks for other co-occurring conditions. They can



then go into early management and have proactive screening.”

Not every family with an autistic individual wants to go down the DNA track, says Jessie.

“But for those who do, it can be really transformative.

“We just want to help give these kids the best possible start in life, and that might mean supporting their strengths, as well as the difficulties they might face.”

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/autism-clinic-launch

Dr Jessie Jacobsen will lead the new autism research clinic. Photo: Chris Louffe

Global impact recognised

The University has seven researchers among the top 1 percent of researchers worldwide

Our role in the fight against tobacco, the essentials for a good old age, and the power of teachers’ high expectations were among the areas of world-leading research showcased recently at the University.

Six leading researchers presented their work at the annual Hīkina kia Tutuki, Rise to the Challenge: Researchers with Global Impact event at the Fale Pasifika in early April.

Speaking at the event, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation Professor Frank Bloomfield said research was the University’s lifeblood.

“It is what we do, is our passion and is where we choose to put our energies, our expertise, our skills, our time and our commitment. We do this because we believe in the power of research to improve lives and solve problems, whether that’s through transmission of knowledge to our students or through impact on our community.”

The University has seven researchers in the 2024 Clarivate Highly Cited Researcher rankings, which identify the top 1 percent of researchers worldwide. There are 289 University researchers who feature in the Stanford Elsevier list of the top 2 percent of researchers, an improvement of 64 on the previous year.

University academics published nearly 400 papers in journals regarded as in the top 1 percent of their fields last year. These include *Science*, *Nature* and *The Lancet* in 2024.

The researchers who presented their work at the event are profiled at: stories.auckland.ac.nz/h-kina-kia-tutuki/



*Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation Professor Frank Bloomfield
Photo: Chris Louffe*

Breaking barriers

An art school education helped springboard Ve'a Mafile'o into the screen industry. The filmmaker tells Janet McAllister about her journey from Hamilton to Sundance – and beyond.



Ve'a Mafile'o wants to play a role in nurturing more Pacific film talent.
Photo: Chris Louffe

I'm to meet filmmaker Ve'a Mafile'o at her "studio". Knowing other independent filmmakers, I imagine a small room, where she plans documentaries like her superb *For My Father's Kingdom* (2019), and where maybe she edits her dramas, such as *Lea Tupu'anga/Mother Tongue* (a 2024 short film, written by its lead actor, Luciane Buchanan).

So, when I get to the "studio", my jaw hits the floor; more specifically, it hits an ocean of diabolical 1970s brown carpet. The space, in Auckland's Papatoetoe, is a bona-fide warehouse-sized film production studio, called the Taro Patch, complete with vintage Cabbage Patch doll, pink leis, and seven core personnel.

PLACE AND PROCESS

Upstairs, Ve'a's sister Bubzie Mafile'o has been helping people with lived experience of mental distress tell their own stories on video. The siblings have done similar work with inmates at Paremoremo prison. (Their other sister, Emily, is also a Visual Arts alumna and an artist and production designer.) Working alongside communities with "strenuous" lives is a studio specialty.

It's a concept the Taro Patch creative team have taken international. For a project for the Hawai'i Triennial 2025 (HT25) contemporary art exhibition, they spent time in Waianae and Mākaha on the west coast of O'ahu, documenting stories from these communities. With Hawaiian filmmaker and surfer Pākē Salmon as their guide, their time included visiting actual taro patches and connecting with community efforts to regain food sovereignty.

As part of the HT25 project, the team also recreated a version of the Taro Patch studio as an installation, from which the stories screen. It's about connecting place to process, says Ve'a.

"The main aim with the Taro Patch is that when people come in, they're like, 'I feel like I'm in my grandmother's house' or 'I feel comfortable here'," she says.

"We always put up these walls with institutions where people feel they have to behave in a different way. So, it's about breaking down those walls so people feel comfortable to have real conversations."

ART SCHOOL BEGINNINGS

Brought up in Hamilton, Ve'a worked as a dive master in Tonga before she undertook a Bachelor of Visual Arts at the University of Auckland, graduating in 2006. She began, she says, wanting to paint like John Constable before moving into sculpture (creating rubber canoes out of old tyres) and making the acclaimed *Digital Kava Circles* video installation series. This featured interviews she conducted in Tonga in 2006 following the death of King

Tāufa'āhau Tupou IV: "There were the riots," she recalls. "There was a lot to talk about."

Thanks to internships undertaken during her degree, she jumped into the screen industry. She worked behind the scenes at *Pacific Beat Street*, as a reporter and director for *Tagata Pasifika* and by 2021, she was directing episodes of *The Panthers* mini-series. Her art study was "super helpful" in giving her the tools to contextualise her narratives and give them symbolic complexity.

As a self-described "nosy person", however, her love is documentary. *For My Father's Kingdom* documented her dad's financial sacrifices for his church and, with a Tongan dad and a Pākehā mum, Ve'a has told her own stories to avoid people criticising her cultural understanding. "If you are just like, 'well, this is my reality', and then just hold up the mirrors, then no one can question you ... If you're standing in your authenticity, no one can say shit."

"It's about breaking down those walls so people feel comfortable to have real conversations."

– Filmmaker Ve'a Mafile'o

GLOBAL SUCCESS

Last year's release of her short film *Lea Tupu'anga/Mother Tongue* was not only another personal professional milestone, but also a global one: it was the first Tongan film written and directed by Tongan women to gain entry to the Sundance Film Festival. A superb, complex piece about language trauma, it was chosen from 17,000 applications to screen at the famed festival in 2024.

The film has since screened at festivals everywhere from New York to Edinburgh to Tahiti, with Ve'a at times juggling attending premieres with travel to Tonga, Vanuatu, Canada and India filming episodes for TV series *The Casketeers: Life and Death Around the World*. She describes working with funeral directors Francis and Kaiora Tipene on the show as "one of the best times of my life". The content of the show also caused her to again reflect on her own art practice, which often explores themes of death, afterlife and religion.

She'll be travelling again this year, including spending time in Tonga filming the documentary she's co-directing on the life of rugby legend Jonah Lomu.

With Hollywood increasingly turning its eye to Pacific stories, Ve'a wants to prevent money from just flying in and flying out. "We need enough Māori and Pasifika to crew the entire film set," says Ve'a, who sees the Taro Patch playing a role in nurturing Pacific film talent.

Given all she has achieved so far, the goal seems well within reach.



MAKING THE BUSINESS CASE

The University's Case Programme team pictured in Florida earlier this year.

For more than two decades, University of Auckland student competitors have been dominant in global competitions that solve real business problems. Anthony Doesburg finds out what makes the Case Programme successful – and how it propels participants to future success.

Alumni of a University of Auckland business competition programme have a ready response for potential employers who ask about their real-world experience: they have a tonne of it.

And the challenges that are thrown at participants in the Business School's Case Programme can get pretty real. Early this year, for example, within weeks of Donald Trump moving into the White House, four Auckland students were tasked with helping a billion-dollar company, many of whose customers were in the new US President's crosshairs.

Under the tutelage of the University's Case Programme manager, Cameron Haworth, they were in Florida competing with student groups from around the world to come up with the best way for Intermex, a migrant money-transfer business, to adapt to the US's new political reality.

“Intermex is facing challenges with both the changes coming from the Trump Administration and general technological issues,” says Cameron.

With undocumented – and typically unbanked – Mexican migrants one of the groups in President Trump’s sights, Intermex sees opportunity in availing more people of its digital services.

“Many of its existing customers don’t have access to bank accounts and are potentially undocumented citizens. So, it is looking to adapt and mitigate this risk by creating more accessible digital offerings.”

And part of that involved drawing on the combined brain power of 56 highly motivated apprentice analysts for potential solutions.

They’d come together at the Heavener International Case Competition, staged by the University of Florida’s Warrington College of Business in Gainesville. At the end of the event, Intermex’s operations chief, a competition judge, took away the students’ suggested remedies to present to the company’s board.

Auckland Case Programme competitors, who are drawn from faculties across the University, excel at answering those kinds of tough questions (and some fun ones, too). In 22 years, they’ve placed in the top three in more than half of the 277 national and international contests in which they’ve competed.

Teams can be tested with cases relating to commercial or non-profit organisations from any country and market sector, says Cameron, who competed himself a decade ago as an undergraduate; he has also coached Auckland and Victoria University teams.

Students take part because they love a contest, he says, “but alongside that you have the massive knowledge gains from seeing how businesses and business strategy work, and problem solving. People find that exciting.”

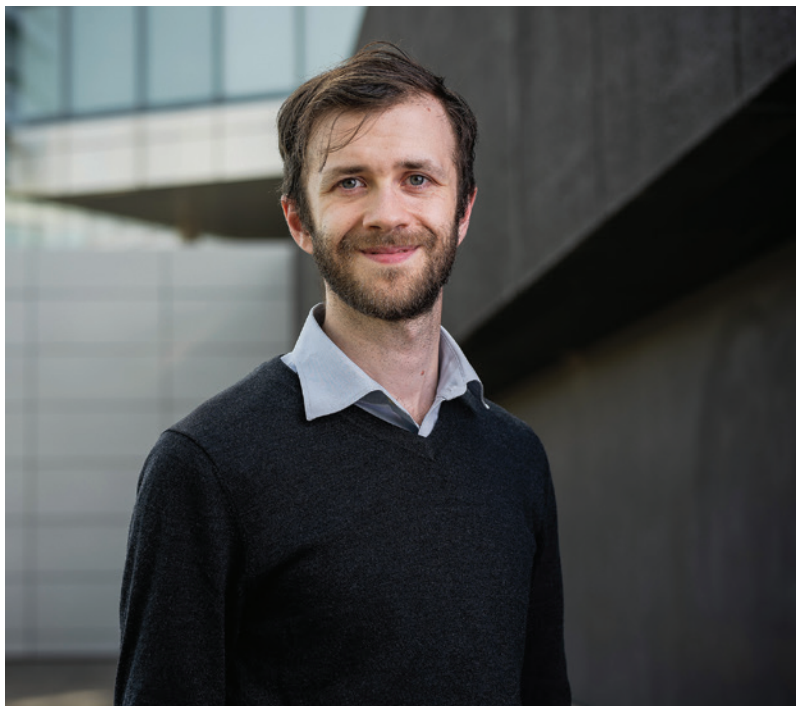
Typical cases contain a good dose of reality, which often sets students on course for jobs requiring them to solve actual problems, not unlike those they’ve cut their teeth on in competitions.

“Most of the students we’ve trained for these events end up in top consulting firms or other businesses around the world working on similar problems,” says Cameron.

He took on his current role in 2024, from Auckland’s Case Programme founder, Brendon Potter.

Under Brendon’s watch, nearly 800 students took part in the programme, which he is now personally funding to the tune of \$10,000 a year for five years. He is also coaching a team.

It’s clear he believes in the programme’s impact: “The participants have a one-on-one relationship with the programme manager that lasts more than four years, the average time



they’re involved. By the end, Cameron will be the person they know best among faculty.”

While students are initially attracted by learning about business strategy, competition and the chance of international travel, says Brendon, they soon discover the programme is about self-awareness, teamwork and challenging themselves.

“As corny as it sounds, while I was running the programme, I thought of myself as lighting rockets that travel into the future to make the world a better place.”

PROPELLING GLOBAL CAREERS

Alumni launched on notable trajectories include Chris Jenkins, who helped shape the post-Brexit Irish-British border; Nelson Lam, an assistant professor of chemistry and leader of a lab at the University of Victoria in British Columbia; fashion designer Victoria Holyoake; and Micah Hill-Smith, co-founder of Sydney and San Francisco-based AI start-up Artificial Analysis.

Alumna Meili Bunning, an economics and finance graduate who was at the University from 2009 to 2012, describes the programme as life changing.

“It helped me build a foundational set of skills and resumé experience upon which every subsequent career or academic milestone has been built,” she says.

Shanghai-born Meili’s career curve has landed her, via consultancy McKinsey, in New York at multibillion-dollar financial services firm Citadel Securities, where she is chief operating officer of retail market-making.

She took part in the Business School’s first-year students’ Case competition, after which she joined the IEL Development Programme (named after International Equity Ltd, the

Veteran competitor and coach Cameron Haworth now manages the Case Programme at the University.
Photo: Chris Louffe

“Most of the students we’ve trained for these events end up in top consulting firms or other businesses around the world working on similar problems.”

– Cameron Haworth, Case Programme manager, Business School

Now married and living in New York, Meili and Chris Bunning first met as Case competitors.



WHAT HAPPENS IN A COMPETITION?

A typical competition format sees a team of four presented with an unfamiliar business scenario – a business ‘case’ – which they must analyse to identify key issues and develop strategies to solve.

This must be done within a time limit, often five hours, after which the team presents its analysis and recommendations to a panel of judges to undergo evaluation and questioning.

In the Florida competition, teams found out which company was involved a month in advance, then had 28 hours to solve the case and present a response. Training for such international events usually starts six weeks out.

Judging can be quite subjective, says Cameron. “Imagine the range of solutions presented as being like displaying paintings by Picasso, Rembrandt and Turner. You ask the judges which one is best and three different judges will give you three different answers, which are all totally valid.

“So, we tend to measure our success by how we executed what we set out to do. That will include identifying the problem or problems, creating an original solution and thinking out relevant implementation considerations.”

“I thought of myself as lighting rockets that travel into the future to make the world a better place.”

– Brendon Potter, University of Auckland Case Programme founder

firm of long-time programme supporter Raymond Webb).

DEVO, as it’s called, is a five-week boot camp open to students of any faculty who are members of the University of Auckland Case Club (formerly the Management Consulting Club or MCC). It focuses on personal development and building practical business knowledge through team-based problem solving.

“I was closely involved with all things MCC for the rest of my time at university,” says Meili.

Partly it was the lure of new friendships and potential international travel, both of which came to pass; she recalls being taken surfing at Sentosa Island while part of an Auckland team competing at Singapore Management University.

And it was through DEVO that she met Chris, now her husband with whom she has two young children. A finance and accounting graduate who has worked at Barclays Investment Bank for 14 years, Chris was drawn to the competition to set himself apart in a tight Auckland investment-banking job market.

“I realised there were a lot of business students with good grades competing for a handful of roles,” says Chris.

Meili and Chris urge students University-wide to get involved in the Case Programme for personal development, networking and, says Chris, “to stand out from the pack when applying for jobs”.

They keep in touch with the programme; Meili coached teams while back in New Zealand for a year before Covid, and they’ve met with Brendon and teams as they’ve come through New York.

The MCC was also central to law and commerce graduate Jenny Yan Li Liu’s time at the University. The now Melbourne-based Bain & Company consultant was club co-president in 2019, when she led a committee of more than 20 people running about a dozen on-campus Case competitions.

“It was a massive learning experience in leadership and event management,” says the 29-year-old.

She was also an eager competitor. One of her most memorable events, she says, was an international contest for 12 teams hosted by the University of Auckland, called the Champions Trophy.

“It was particularly special because I had been involved in organising it in previous years, so finally getting the chance to compete in it was both exciting and rewarding. I had an amazing team, some of whom I’m still close friends with today, and the competition struck the perfect balance between fun and competitiveness. I think it’s one of the best-run competitions on the circuit.

Callum Sng credits the programme with helping him land his job in Hong Kong. Photo: Chris Loufte



“Beyond that, I had the chance to take part in six other competitions in the US, Singapore, Thailand and Australia – an incredible experience as a student. Even if you don’t intend to go into consulting, the skills you gain through the Case Programme are highly transferable and valuable in any industry.”

HARD AND SOFT SKILLS

Callum Sng, who graduated last June with a BA in economics and statistics and a BCom in marketing, credits the programme with helping him land his job as a Hong Kong-based strategy and product specialist at Jane Street, a quantitative trading firm.

He describes going with a friend to an introductory night at the MCC as “probably one of the most defining decisions I made during my time at university”. It led him to do DEVO, and then to take part in a head-to-head Case competition against AUT. He later entered the National League Case circuit, which features most of the country’s universities (the Auckland team came first in both).

He was also selected for an Auckland team to compete at the 2023 Chulalongkorn International Business Case Competition in Thailand. This included a 24-hour case that grappled with the question ‘how can we get Phuket to net-zero carbon emissions by 2040?’.

“It was easily the most challenging case I had come across but it was an exciting problem to investigate that really pushed our team to its limits. I hung up the towel after that event and spent my final two semesters supporting our prospective members as a coach for our development programme,” he says.

Callum says he went into the Case Programme intent on excelling, “which

“It has been incredibly transformative.”

– Callum Sng, Case Programme alumnus

made me prone to imposter syndrome and overworking”. However, Brendon’s leadership “made it clear from the beginning that health and well-being was number one”.

Through the programme Callum says he learnt the value of not taking himself too seriously and living a balanced lifestyle.

“It has been incredibly transformative.”

Not all cases are of a knotty geopolitical or climate-related nature.

Jonathan Chisholm, another Auckland programme alumnus and an associate in the investment team at BGH Capital in Melbourne, recalls placing third in a University of Hong Kong competition looking at a case on K-pop [Korean pop music]. When the finals were done, all the competitors let off steam by sampling Hong Kong’s nightlife.

It wasn’t all just fun and games though, says Jonathan.

“Involvement in the programme was a key enabler for me to land internships and graduate roles in investment banking and management consulting, both as a recognisable experience on my CV and through the skills it developed.

“It made a huge difference to my skill set coming out of university and provided travel and experiences I otherwise would not have had.”

And he came away with many enduring friendships. “Case is an excellent group of people to be involved with.” ■

Sharing art's universal truths

Jennifer Flay
Photograph by Inès
Manai for Art Basel

Leading one of the world's most important contemporary art fairs, Jennifer Flay scaled the heights of the global art market. But art, she tells Janet McAllister, should be accessible to all.

Despite her piercing eyes and chic black attire, the acknowledged 'grande dame of the French art world', Jennifer Flay, is not intimidating or *très snob* on video call. Chatty and at ease, she kindly brushes off tech issues as she explains how, in 1999, she lost nearly everything she had worked for over the previous two decades.

At the time, the kid from West Auckland turned celebrated Parisienne art dealer had exhibited globally important artists for nearly a decade. These included her good friend and lasting inspiration Felix Gonzalez-Torres, whose 1996 death Jennifer describes as "still crushing".

But being driven home one night, Jennifer was thrown

through the car's back window, landing on her head and breaking her neck (among other serious injuries). Recovery from the 1999 accident was slow and traumatic: she suffered memory loss, fatigue and vertigo – walking was impossible. Persistent neurological issues meant, by 2003, "it was the end of my gallery", she says.

It was also the end of a dream. Wildly intelligent, Jennifer arrived in France on a French government scholarship in 1980, after receiving a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Auckland aged just 20. (She majored in French as well as art history, as her father had insisted she take a language at Auckland Girls' Grammar School and she didn't want to "waste" that hard-earned prior knowledge.)

After postgraduate study at the University of Nice, her smarts, empathy and bilingualism led to an informal apprenticeship with several leading French art dealers. “Extremely lucky”, she often travelled to New York to liaise with the likes of Jean-Michel Basquiat, before opening her own gallery in 1991.

Great art, says Jennifer, is about universal truths. “I’ve always been so fascinated by artists who delve into their inner selves and find something very personal and particular that manages to say something universal,” she says.

“It happens not so often, but we’ve got to be at least aiming for something that is going to concern and move everyone.”

She credits “amazing” University of Auckland art historian Tony Green for her realisation that “I didn’t have to put footnotes on all my comments”. She recalls Tony instructing students to ‘look at the painting – tell me what you really see’.

“It was so scary! It upturned everything we [art history students] had learned to do,” she says. “It was so giddy – exhilarating, too.

“When I decided I wanted to work with artists of my generation, the belief that my personal vision and interpretation were valid really came from Tony Green. You can’t work with contemporary artists, early in their practice, if you depend on authors to tell you what you are seeing.”

The next chapter of her life, however, was even more influential.

Jennifer was still recuperating from the car accident when she was asked to become artistic director of the Foire Internationale d’Art Contemporain, or FIAC – Paris’s contemporary international art fair. “I thought, no, I’m not well enough; I don’t have the force to do FIAC,” recalls Jennifer.

Globally, the art fair system moves billions of dollars, but FIAC had gone downhill, and friends advised her not to compromise her own hard-earned reputation by taking the job.

But she changed her mind. Why? “In the 1980s, my generation, my friends, we all got a lot out of FIAC,” explains Jennifer. Letting it go to seed, she says, “would make us irresponsible for the younger generations”.

She went to work with “the same commitment as if it was my own gallery”. She helped move FIAC from the city’s periphery back to the Grand Palais in the heart of Paris and set up an annual additional temporary art fair building, in the Louvre courtyard no less.

A collector of mid-20th century furniture herself, she pioneered the inclusion of design within the global art fair system. Taking sole charge as FIAC general director from 2010, she led the transformation of FIAC into what the arts media has lauded as “the crown princess of the European art fairs”.

But her influence reaches even further. In 2016, a year after terrorists killed 130 people in Paris in France’s worst peacetime attacks, the *Guardian* proclaimed Paris was using ‘art and activism to regain its soul’. It attributed this mostly to another brainchild of Jennifer’s – FIAC’s privately funded free programme of sculpture, held all over Paris, including in the Jardin des Tuileries.

Like rescuing FIAC itself, Jennifer sees ensuring free access to art as a responsibility: “Everybody should have the possibility of discovering art in places that are not intimidating, not expensive, in a natural way.”

She engaged art students to be guides, who could discuss the sculptures “in terms as simple or as complex as was appropriate”. Those who enjoyed the art included young families, schoolchildren, and marginalised populations such as the homeless and sex workers who did not feel comfortable entering public art galleries, but who loved seeing sculpture in the park.

“I was like, wow, perhaps we are making a difference,” says Jennifer.

La France is certainly grateful for her significant contribution to the country, bestowing on her the Chevalier rank of the Légion d’honneur in 2015, and the ultimate rank of Commandeur of the prestigious Order of Arts and Letters in 2021. In April, she was among those listed on *Forbes France*’s 50 over 50 list of game-changing women.

Yet she was just as thrilled to receive a special recognition award from the UK Friends of the University of Auckland last year.

“It’s recognition from my own country, where I began, from my source, my origin, and that’s important to me,” she says.

She comes back to New Zealand occasionally – she’s next returning in December for a nephew’s wedding. Family is important – her mother, a nurse, died when Jennifer was just 14; her “hero” father, a tailor, continued encouraging her interest in art. Her sisters both work in health: Sarah Flay is a midwife in Seattle and Briar (Elizabeth) Peat is deputy head of the medical programme in the University’s Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences.

Jennifer also carries New Zealand’s landscapes in her heart, describing them “like a secret garden ... so grandiose, so sublime”.

Having left FIAC’s successor (Swiss giant Art Basel) late last year, Jennifer, at 66, is now contributing her expertise, networks and vision to the Fiminco Foundation, which includes a vast multidisciplinary cultural venue on the outskirts of Paris. The foundation wants to expand overseas.

“It’s a new challenge, absolutely,” she says, with relish. “I love new beginnings.”

“I’ve always been so fascinated by artists who delve into their inner selves and find something very personal and particular that manages to say something universal.”

– Jennifer Flay

UNLOCKING ANIMAL SENSES

Megan Fowlie meets University of Auckland researchers tuning into how animals see and hear the world and offering new insights into the often-hidden lives of our fellow creatures.

Photographer Richard Robinson captured this image of a male titipounamu using two cameras (one capturing UV, the other red-green-blue light) to approximate how it's believed the birds see each other.



Patience and a keen eye can go a long way when spotting songbirds in the bush. One of the most challenging to spy is New Zealand's tiniest bird, the titipounamu. Also known as the rifleman, the titipounamu has plumage resembling army fatigues: green in males and streaky brown in females.

These colours form helpful camouflage against many predatory birds and mammals. But we are not seeing the whole picture. To each other, these tiny birds flash like neon signs, in purples, hot pink and bands of gold through the lush native forest.

Associate Professor Kristal Cain and a team of fellow biologists at the University of Auckland, fascinated by these tiny ancient endemic wrens, tracked titipounamu through the Mangaharuru Range in Tairāwhiti and at the Zealandia sanctuary in Wellington. They were looking to see if the old story held true that males are camouflaged for leaves and females for bark. The team, however, uncovered little difference between the whereabouts of males and females and the colour of their surroundings.

"The males are not hanging out more on green things and the females are not hanging out more on brown things," says Kristal. "Instead, they are all over the place – and to each other they are glowing. Their eye rings and wing patches flashing in ultraviolet hues. It's a clever double act."

For the most part, human and bird colour vision is not terribly different. People have three photoreceptors tuned to blue, green and red wavelengths, which allow us to see a combination of those primary colours. Some birds are equipped with violet cones, which allow them to see purples beyond the purple visible to the human eye, and some have ultraviolet receptors.

"Blue, white and iridescence, even some greens reflect ultraviolet very strongly. So, when we think about how birds find food, how birds communicate with each other, they are able to see a channel that none of us are able to see," says Kristal.

"For the little titipounamu, this bright technicolouration might really be a show of sexiness."

It turns out, many of our songbirds are flashing secret ciphers with their feathers and bills, flirting and foraging using a semaphore system hidden from humans and predators.

What's equally intriguing is that sending these signals, emanating from the blue end of the colour spectrum, is costly. Blue simply doesn't exist as a feather colour; instead, the blue appearance is achieved via clear feathers with micro angles that bounce blue light as sunlight strikes them. In addition, achieving green feathers requires birds to forage for a diet high in yellow/orange-producing carotenoids.

"Birds are, albeit often secretly from us," says Kristal, "going to a lot of trouble to show off."

A MODEL FOR COLOUR

The physics of colour and understanding of how animals see the world took a great leap forward at the end of last century when Misha Vorobyev developed a model of colour vision.

Misha is a physicist and mathematician at the School of Optometry and Vision Science at the University of Auckland. In the 1990s, he won a Humboldt Fellowship in the Free University of Berlin to follow his passion for colour and unravel the love affair between flowers and insect vision.

During this work, he developed a mathematical model to interpret experimental data on bees – a model that also held true for human vision. His code is now used by scientists around the globe to predict the colour thresholds of animals and allow them to accurately 'see' the colours that these animals experience.


"Fundamentally, we are alike: bees, birds, humans," says Misha. "The physics behind sight is absolutely the same."

"Birds are, albeit often secretly from us, going to a lot of trouble to show off."

–Associate Professor Kristal Cain, School of Biological Sciences



Associate Professor
Kristal Cain Photo: Chris Louffe

A portrait of Dr Misha Vorobyev, a man with a grey beard and short hair, wearing a blue and white checkered button-down shirt. He is standing in what appears to be a laboratory or office setting with blurred equipment in the background.

Dr Misha Vorobyev
Photo: Chris Louffe

“Fundamentally, we are alike: bees, birds, humans. The physics behind sight is absolutely the same.”

– Dr Misha Vorobyev, School of Optometry and Vision Science

◀ Misha’s intoxication with colour began during his childhood when he would visit the art-filled gilt and tiled halls of the Hermitage in St Petersburg, Russia.

The pursuit of colour ultimately carried him south to a dream project on Australia’s Great Barrier Reef. He explored the striking underwater mosaic of coral fish, how they see each other to blend in or become conspicuous against the corals as light is absorbed and scattered through the salt water.

“The same engineering can be applied to commercial fishing,” says Misha. “Under certain illumination, trawl nets are easily visible to some fish, but not to others. Equally, light can attract some fish but repel others.

“Adjusting the illumination of trawl nets could increase the catch of commercially valuable fish but, more importantly, decrease the catch of unwanted ones. Even small decreases of bycatch have a significant commercial value.”

Recently, Misha began collaborating with a New Zealand start-up, which has developed artificial intelligence that recognises fish in the vicinity of trawl nets to inform skippers on how to operate the trawls.

“We hope by putting efforts together, to have smart lights which rapidly change settings to reduce unwanted bycatch and increase catch,” says Misha. “This will also save lives of endangered New Zealand marine mammals and penguins, which are occasionally injured or killed by trawl nets.”

He is now throwing out a line to other potential partners in the fishing industry to collaborate in this research area.

A FOREST FOR THE SENSES

Biological Sciences Associate Professor Anne Gaskett has a lifelong interest in considering animals, flowers, and fungi from the perspective of others.

“When it comes to colour, it is the viewer that drives selection for colourfulness,” she notes.

New Zealand forests are packed with brightly coloured fruits and fungi. She poses the question: “Whose vision have they evolved in response to?”

“Birds have red receptors selecting for red forest fruits. But other animals like skinks, geckos and wētā also eat fruit. So, those forest fruits might be talking to a wider range of animals,” she says.

“To fully understand how forests work, we should consider the animals’ perspectives. Fruits and flowers evolved for specific animals, so we should think about what fruits and flowers are available throughout the annual cycle, and over the years into the future.”

Researchers across the University have been making close examinations of animals’ sensory organs and the behavioural responses of animals to the sights and sounds in their environments.

One is Jung Su Lee, a doctoral student working under Anne, who is observing native skinks at Auckland Zoo to understand what colours and smells are more or less attractive and how that might relate to their survival in the wild.

Meanwhile, deep in the forests of Waikato and Taupō, Kristal Cain, masters student Alisha Hart and Department of Conservation science adviser Kerry Borkin created phantom traffic highways, aiming to understand the impact of noise pollution on New Zealand’s short-tailed native bat.

Bats do have eyes, but they primarily navigate the world via echolocation, emitting high-frequency sound pulses through their nose and mouth and listening for the echo.

Kerry and Kristal lined forest environments with speakers, then funnelled pre-recorded road noise through the trees and eavesdropped for bats using high-frequency detectors along their ‘ghost road’.

“The short-tailed bat is the only species in its family in the whole world, so it is quite special. As we chop up the country by putting roads through, that segregates and fragments the bat habitat and their ability to move around,” says Kristal.

“In our study, we see a really large effect. When there is road noise, bats avoid that area. There are many ways to interpret that: they might be unable to hear their prey or unable to navigate their habitat, but at the heart, the bats are avoiding the area when there is a lot of traffic noise.”

WHAT SHARKS HEAR

Marine scientist Professor Craig Radford is working to mitigate the cacophony in the world's oceans through a better understanding of how sharks sense sound, by looking at the structural properties and sensitivities of sharks' ears.

Yes, sharks have ears. And these semi-circular canals of shamrock-like cartilage are fully encapsulated under the shark's skin. Craig's Marsden-funded project involved using MRI scans of deceased bycatch, and examining the ears from dozens of species – from carpet sharks and school sharks to makos and hammerheads caught around the Hauraki Gulf.

"One person's ears have a very similar structure to another's, but that's not so in the shark world. Fish are the most diverse group of vertebrates on Earth, and we see great diversity in their ears."

So far, findings show that ear size correlates with hearing ability – and relates to where the sharks spend most of their time, whether that's in the sea column or hunkering down on the seabed. Carpet sharks have a very narrow audio bandwidth and don't hear too well, for example, while rig sharks, with massive ears, have great hearing. There's also a lot of variation in the size and shape of the cartilage loops that help the fish orient themselves in the deep ocean.

"Underwater is such a dynamic environment," says Craig. "When you think about animals out in the big blue, there are very few visual cues. That's where sound becomes really important. It is omni-directional, it spreads equally in all directions from the source, and it travels almost five times faster in water than it does in the air."

SUSTAINABLE IMPACT

Research Fellow Dr Ariel-Micaiah Heswall has also been working with Anne and Kristal to understand the impact of our bright, artificially lit city on seabirds' lives. A quarter of the world's seabird species, around 90 different kinds, live, eat or breed around the northern region of New Zealand. Only a handful of remote places on Earth can claim such seabird diversity.

Ariel's research involved mapping seabird crash locations to light pollution grids over the Auckland isthmus between 2018 and 2021. The results were conclusive: each square of the city that had brighter lights had more collisions.

"This is something very solvable," says Anne. "At specific times of the year, we could reduce light intensity by turning off or dimming lights that are not essential for safety, and save a lot of these special taonga seabirds."

The Cooks' petrels are a good example of animals in danger. Every March, fledglings are injured or killed as they embark on their maiden voyage with undeveloped eyes and fly

"One person's ears have a very similar structure to another's, but that's not so in the shark world."

– Professor Craig Radford, Institute of Marine Science

over central Auckland, a gauntlet of lights, to the city's West Coast. Dazzled and confused by light pollution, they collide with buildings and get serious head and internal injuries. If seabirds become grounded and unable to take off, they can get more injuries or be killed by dogs, cats or cars.

The next step for Anne and Ariel is to conduct 'dimming' trials with interested business owners.

In another study, Ariel cross-referenced five years of sea birds identified in bycatch data with physical measurements of taxidermied animals stored at the Auckland War Memorial Museum. The outcome: big-eyed birds with large nostrils were hooked into nets and lines more frequently than others. Ariel surmises that these birds with greater visual and olfactory capacity may be more attracted to bait, offal and brightly lit fishing boats.

She points to simple interventions that might act as sensory deterrents. "Dyeing bait blue to reduce the contrast with the ocean, attaching shiny streamers to fishing vessels, or more circumspect timing for releasing offal."

Kristal Cain sums up. "There's so much incredible information out there to make our world more sustainable," she says, "but it requires us to pay attention to these animals that we often think of as not having that much to teach us." ■

Associate Professor
Anne Gaskett, left, and
Dr Ariel-Micaiah Heswall.
Photo: Chris Loufie



*All animal work done at Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland was approved by the University's Animal Ethics Committee. Information on animal-based research at the University of Auckland can be found [here](https://auckland.ac.nz/en/research/about-our-research/openness-in-animal-research.html).

TURNING PACIFIC TIDES



For even the casual observer of recent Pacific affairs, it's clear the sands of influence in the region are shifting.

In 2023, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) opened an office in Suva, Fiji, and established a representative in Papua New Guinea. But with the Trump Administration now dismantling USAID, funding from the agency is predicted to fall by 80 percent, which would not only adversely affect Pacific Island economies but also undermine traditional regional alignments. Pacific Island governments will have to look elsewhere for assistance.

Signs that the tides of power are turning in the Pacific have been visible for some time.

The primary colonisers of the Pacific Islands – France, the US and the UK – have steered themselves away from the role of controller (with the exceptions of France in New Caledonia and French Polynesia; and the US in American Samoa) and towards the role of supporter. And these Western allies – which now include New Zealand and Australia – have generally had the same goals: to improve the economic, trade, climate and social position of their Pacific partners and to strengthen defence in the region from any aggressors.

This Western hegemony, however, has been challenged in recent years by China and Russia.

China is now the second-largest aid donor and investor in the Pacific region, behind only Australia, and is poised to challenge traditional donors for influence.

Pursuing its global infrastructure development strategy, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has signed political agreements with several Pacific nations over the past decade, and has funded, chiefly through loans, several airports, ports and roads. The BRI aims to boost trade and economic growth; however, smaller states can find themselves in a debt trap, unable to pay back China's loans.

And while China has been unable to set up its own military bases in the region, this infrastructure development has concerned Western allies, wary of China's potential to use it to increase its military presence. China

is expanding its maritime footprint in the region, through illegal fishing and armed forces activity; many Chinese fishing boats are a part of China's armed forces.

China has also hastened its encouragement of Pacific Island nations to switch recognition from Taipei to Beijing – a move usually accompanied by some sort of bilateral agreement.

In the case of the Solomon Islands and Kiribati, those agreements have not been made public, but Kiribati severed diplomatic ties with Taiwan in 2019 and has since grown closer to China. Diplomatic relations between China and the Solomon Islands were established in 2019 after the Solomon Islands cut ties with Taiwan. In April 2022, the Solomon Islands signed a strategic pact with China, despite fierce objection from New Zealand, Australia and the US, which feared the possibility of a Chinese military base being constructed there.

Since Trump came to power, the Cook Islands has signed a seabed minerals deal with China, without consulting New Zealand, with which it has a realm partnership. This move has been particularly concerning to Western allies because of the Cook Islands' large exclusive economic zone and the presence of Russian ships in the region. China could also, under the auspices of disaster recovery, bring in its military to the Cook Islands. It has a similar disaster recovery programme with the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

In New Caledonia, China has courted the nation's independence leaders for many years. France's moves to derail the independence process by changing the electoral roll would have deeply concerned China because of the risk that independence will be delayed for another generation. China has become the second biggest importer of New Caledonia's nickel and has recently started investing in the nickel industry there.

So, as the potential withdrawal of the majority of US aid from the Pacific's developing states looms, China is likely to increase the pace of its bilateral interventions. The recent Cook Islands agreement further signals a shift in the region's geopolitical power balance in China's favour.

The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of her doctoral degree mentors Dr Geoff Kemp and Associate Professor (ret) Stephen Hoadley for constructive suggestions.

This article reflects the opinion of the author and not necessarily that of Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland.

Dr Sarah Bradley has been a journalist for 35 years and has worked for CNN and ABC in New York, and TV3, TVNZ, Radiolive and RNZ in New Zealand. In 2024, she gained a PhD in Politics and International Relations, focused on the politics of New Caledonia, from the University of Auckland.

TIPS ... TO DEFUSE WORKPLACE DISAGREEMENTS

1

Focus on the problem, not the person

When tensions rise, it's easy to see your colleague as the obstacle. Resist this urge. Instead of saying "you're making this difficult", try "it seems like we have different priorities here. Let's work this out". This simple reframe shifts the conversation from confrontation to collaborative problem solving. Remember: your shared goal is to resolve the disagreement and move forward, not to win an argument against the other.

2

Listen to understand, not to respond

We've all nodded while actually preparing our rebuttal. Active listening means temporarily setting aside your perspective to grasp someone else's. Try demonstrating that you understand their perspective: "I agree this situation is frustrating. Am I right in saying that your main concern is the timeline, not the budget?"

And, do your best to keep an open mind while challenging any assumptions you have going into the conversation. Ask questions from a place of genuine curiosity: "Tell me more about why that approach matters to you." This validation doesn't mean you agree, but it shows respect and often reveals possibilities neither of you initially saw.

3

Uncover interests, don't battle over positions

Two people fighting over an orange might each demand the whole fruit. The compromise seems obvious – cut it in half. But what if one person needs only the peel for a cake, while the other wants the juice? By exploring why each person wants the orange, both can get 100 percent of what they need. When colleagues stake out opposing positions, enquire into their interests: "Tell me more about why you're seeking this." It's more effective than "Do you seriously think they can agree to that?" You'll be surprised how this insight reveals the compatible interests behind competing demands.

4

Acknowledge emotions, but don't let them take over

Workplace disagreements trigger real feelings – frustration, defensiveness, even anger. Acknowledge these emotions, but don't let them hijack the conversation. If tensions escalate, suggest a pause: "I want to give this the attention it deserves. Can we take five and come back to it?" Pro tip: if you feel anxious before a difficult conversation, tell yourself you're excited instead. The physiological responses are similar, and this reframe can transform nervous energy into productive engagement.

5

Choose the right channel for the conversation

That heated reply-all email thread? It's making things worse. Complex disagreements need the nuance of face-to-face or video conversation, where tone and body language provide crucial context. Timing matters too – nobody makes good decisions when rushing to meet a deadline or heading out the door on a Friday afternoon. Schedule a dedicated time and place where both parties can focus without pressure.

6

Prepare, but stay flexible

Before addressing a workplace disagreement, take the time to clarify your thoughts. What's the core issue? What outcome are you hoping for? What might the other person be concerned about? This isn't about scripting the conversation; it's about understanding key facts and perspectives, and anticipating potential roadblocks. Walking in prepared boosts your confidence and increases the chances of finding common ground, especially when the conversation takes unexpected turns.

7

Invest in relationships before problems arise

The best time to prevent a disagreement from becoming toxic? Long before it happens. Strong workplace relationships create a buffer of goodwill that helps colleagues navigate conflicts constructively. Small actions – acknowledging contributions, offering help before it's asked for – create a foundation of mutual respect. If disagreement arises, trust shifts the focus from blame to problem solving. People are more likely to work with you, not against you, when they feel valued.

When handled well, disagreements at work can spark innovation and lead to better decisions. The challenge, says Andrew Patterson, is navigating conflict without damaging relationships or derailing projects. Here are seven strategies to transform conflicts into productive conversations.



Andrew Patterson

Andrew Patterson is a deputy dean and professional teaching fellow at the Auckland Business School, where he teaches conflict resolution and negotiation as part of the MBA and Master of Information Governance programmes.

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARDS

The 2025 Distinguished Alumni in conversation with Taumata host Jack Tame. Photos: Richard Ng

From training cows to negotiating in French with Tunisian police, the variety of conversations at Taumata – the event recognising the University of Auckland’s Distinguished Alumni of 2025 – reflected the diversity of those honoured.

What does it take to reach for the stars and achieve great things? For some, like Craig Piggott, it’s about fighting “the fire right in front of you”. The Young Alumnus of the Year and co-founder and CEO of agritech company Halter, says focusing on solving the immediate problems each day, rather than the overwhelming big picture, has helped him create one of New Zealand’s most successful tech start-ups.

For others, like Helen Robinson, it’s about courage and connection. The Auckland City Missioner and Master of Social and Community Leadership alumna says being able to sit and connect with individuals helps her support our most vulnerable communities.

“If I can just be with you and what’s going on with you,

then somehow together we can unlock what is possible and the healing and resources that are needed – and that the people who are excluded deserve.”

They are welcome messages in a time of uncertainty, Vice-Chancellor Professor Dawn Freshwater reminded the Taumata audience at Auckland’s ASB Waterfront Theatre in early April. She urged those gathered to reflect on the importance of hope and good faith.

“All of this requires moral courage, something that we all need to inhabit in our current times,” she said.

“And that moral courage will drive the dreams, not only of our new students recently arrived, but our returning students, our alumni, our donors, our community. And it will, of course, bring that hope for our own country and more broadly, for the globe.”



Watch the video:
tinyurl.com/DAA-linzey

Amelia Linzey BSc 1994, MSc (Hons) 1996 (SCIENCE)

Infrastructure might not be the sexiest of subjects, and Amelia Linzey admits that, even when it’s at its best, infrastructure is an “invisible thing”. And yet projects like Auckland’s Waterview Connection – which occupied a decade of Amelia’s professional life at engineering and design firm Beca – have huge impacts on our communities.

“Infrastructure is the thing that makes places tick, that makes and gives communities the tools, the base, to deliver the aspirations that they have,” she says.

Amelia has held a range of roles at Beca, which she now leads as its group CEO, overseeing a team of 4,300 people in 25 offices, with projects in 70 countries.

She says her thirst to keep learning comes, in part, from being from a family of educators (she describes herself as a “black sheep” working in the corporate world) and from her time at the University of Auckland.

“University really was something that shaped me because of the choices that you could make. I’ve always been a highly curious person,” she says. “The opportunity of university is to find the things that you’re passionate about.”

Infrastructure is undoubtedly a sector facing challenges; New Zealand has an infrastructure deficit of more than \$200 billion and climate change presents substantial risks. But Amelia says New Zealand’s biculturalism offers an advantage in meeting those challenges.

“Bringing those different knowledge systems and perspectives into the room are the things we need so we can find different ways to solve these problems. It’s exciting for New Zealand, and as a New Zealand business, to think about what that looks like on the international stage because it means we have different ways of seeing the world – and those are going to be needed.”

Helen Robinson

MSCL 2020
(EDUCATION & SOCIAL WORK)

Auckland City Missioner Helen Robinson has this take on what her role involves: “My job is to come to know the contours of the shape of the human heart,” she says, “and then what that means for us as a collective.”

The role has clearly given her insights into the highs and lows of those contours.

“Imagine for a moment a New Zealand where every child had what they needed. Imagine for a moment that we had enough homes for everybody. It feels incredibly simple, and I know that to be possible,” she told the audience at Taumata 2025.

“So much of my job is to be able to look people in the eye and just remind us of our own goodness and just how extraordinary we are as people and what good we can do. And, at that same time, to acknowledge that we are often not good to each other.”

Helen has worked for more than 30 years in vulnerable communities as a youth worker, social worker, advocate and leader. She



undertook a Master of Social and Community Leadership before taking the helm at the Auckland City Mission – Te Tāpui Atawhai in 2021. With a team of 300 staff and thousands of volunteers, the mission provides food, health and housing support to our most vulnerable.

Helen eschews the idea she’s immune from feeling overwhelmed at times by the scale of need in communities, acknowledging she feels “an extraordinarily ordinary person, because I’m going home most days angry and exhausted”.

“I think it’s less a question of ‘how do I avoid being overwhelmed?’, but ‘how can I be brave enough to be there and to be in that relationship and in that moment?’ Because if I can just be with you and what’s going on with you, then somehow together we can unlock what is possible and the healing and resources that are needed – and that the people who are excluded deserve.”

Watch the video:
tinyurl.com/DAA-robinson

Young Alumnus of the Year

Craig Piggott

BE (Hons) 2017
(ENGINEERING)

Growing up, Craig Piggott saw how cows on his family farm were attuned to the sound of a gate being unlatched or an electric fence being wound out.

And it spawned a question: could you train a cow? Yes, it turns out, and the engineering alumnus now leads one of New Zealand’s most successful tech start-ups, which is capitalising on that answer.

Craig is the co-founder and CEO of Halter, an agritech company that helps dairy farmers manage their farms more efficiently, productively and sustainably. Halter’s tech combines hardware – smart collars that deliver sound cues to cows – with software in the form of an app used by farmers. The tech allows them to run fence-free farms, and virtually herd and monitor their animals.

Craig started Halter during the final year of his degree, while also working part time for Rocket Lab. Answering the ‘can you train a cow?’ question consumed the founding team for the better part of Halter’s first year.



He landed his Rocket Lab job after approaching the company’s founder, Sir Peter Beck, at an event for the University’s Velocity entrepreneurship programme. Experiencing the excitement of the start-up world at Rocket Lab, says Craig, lit a fire under his own start-up dreams. And Sir Peter was crucial to fanning the flames, backing Halter as both a board member and investor from its earliest days.

Halter was New Zealand’s fastest-growing company in 2024, and it has raised more than \$100 million in capital to fund its development.

But despite that big-picture success, Craig says addressing the immediate problem at hand is what’s helped him deliver on the vision.

“I just try not to look too far ahead. You focus on all things that are on fire right in front of you. Otherwise, it’s too daunting,” he says.

“You just wake up every morning and move the ball forward.”

Watch the video:
tinyurl.com/DAA-piggott

Peter Cooper CNZM

LLB (Hons) 1978
(LAW)

Contrary to some people's perceptions, property development is a creative endeavour, according to Peter Cooper.

The executive chairman of Cooper and Company, which has undertaken multiple large-scale developments in New Zealand and the US, describes development as "a very organic subject".

"Most people, if they had to build a building, would find it a very laboriously boring thing to do," says Peter. "Whereas if you allow your mind to think about trying to do something different – maybe that's creativity – I inspire myself by trying to push my own boundaries."

Raised in Kaitia, Peter (Ngāti Kahu, Ngāti Kuri, Te Aupōuri) undertook a Bachelor of Laws (Honours) at the University of Auckland before joining Russell McVeagh. While there, he was tasked with helping develop a new office block for the law firm, sparking a passion for the bricks and mortar side of the property development business.



He moved to California in 1989, when he founded Cooper and Company. One of his most high-profile New Zealand projects has been the Britomart Urban Restoration Project, which he led from 2004 and has regenerated downtown Auckland through its blending of heritage buildings and new builds.

That theme of kaitiaki (guardianship) of our heritage has continued with a more recent project: developing a 400-hectare Bay of Islands property called The Landing, which includes a vineyard, accommodation and ecological reserves. It sits on a site of early interaction between Māori and European settlers, and work has also included registering 43 heritage sites on the property.

"What you inherit [with the property] is a massive responsibility. It is an incredible privilege and an honour, which you have to treat respectfully and learn from," he says.

Watch the video:
tinyurl.com/DAA-cooper

Stephen Stehlin MNZM

BA 1984
(ARTS)

Another remarkable milestone in Pacific broadcasting had just ticked over when producer Stephen Stehlin was honoured on the Taumata 2025 stage; *Tagata Pasifika*, the Pacific current affairs television show he worked on from its earliest days, had just celebrated its 38th birthday.

Stephen, who carries the Sāmoan title Taualeo'o, started working on the landmark show six months after its debut in 1987 and began producing it in 1992.

It wasn't the first TV show to feature Pacific voices, he says, acknowledging predecessor series such as *See Here*, which screened five-minute episodes in the early 80s. However, *Tagata Pasifika* was groundbreaking in its longer form and by "telling our stories, often as our communities do in our performances and our arts, for ourselves".

In the show's early days, it provided "the novelty of recognition" for Pacific communities. He recounts how community members would, at times, prefer to tell some stories on mainstream TV news; "they wouldn't talk to us because they knew all the Pacific people would be watching".



Stephen majored in French at the University of Auckland, which might not seem a natural subject for a future television producer to study. However, he has had occasion to use it.

Like the time early in his career when he was in Tunisia filming a documentary on veterans of the Māori Battalion. When the police arrested the documentary crew because they lacked a filming permit (the person delivering it was late), Stephen was able to undertake subsequent negotiations in French.

And given the extensive influence of the French in the Pacific, the language skills he developed at University have proved helpful while telling Pacific stories over the many decades since.

"And, of course, it was something I could do," he says. "I was terrible at maths."

Watch the video:
tinyurl.com/DAA-stehlin

Make a nomination for the 2026 Distinguished Alumni Awards at auckland.ac.nz/daa



Watch the full ceremony:

tinyurl.com/DAAAS-2025

Caitlin Sykes

FROM FIRM TO FOOD TRUCK

Brothers Tim and Luke Burrows ditched their corporate careers to begin slingin' vegan burgers in 2016. They chat to Nikki Addison about the journey from plant-based food pop-up to nationwide success.

You might not expect a corporate lawyer and a mechanical engineer to do a complete career pivot and start a plant-based food business – with no previous food industry experience – but that's exactly what Tim and Luke Burrows did.

The Wellington-born, UK-raised brothers moved to Auckland for high school and later studied at the University of Auckland. A passion for audio engineering led Tim to enrol in a Bachelor of Engineering (Hons), while an interest in understanding the systems that shape society saw Luke enrol in a Bachelor of Commerce and Laws conjoint.

After graduating in 2011 and 2015 respectively and gaining a couple of years' industry experience, they decided to take the plunge and open a plant-based food truck.

What compelled such a shift? A desire to make a difference to the planet's health, says Luke, which stemmed from the personal decision to ditch meat and dairy after watching the documentary *Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret*.

"The driving factor behind going vegan was about environmental concerns and those real, existential threats," he says. "Part of the allure was, can we do something meaningful that contributes positively?"

At the same time, says Luke, the brothers quickly discovered there was a lack of tasty vegan options around.

"There were salads and smoothie bowls. What if there was something actually delicious, greasy and vegan? Can't be that hard, can it?"

They chose to reframe the potential risk of starting a venture as a positive – "if it all goes wrong, it's just learning", says Tim – and settled on burgers because "anyone can make burgers. We weren't chefs; it was something that we could do."

Tim put his entrepreneurial experience to use (he had previously founded an audio engineering company) and began building a food truck from recycled materials, with Luke helping outside of his day job as a lawyer. They devised a menu centred on handcrafted patties made from wholefood ingredients. The idea was



Alumni Profile

to create a delicious, satisfying burger anyone could enjoy, which didn't replicate meat in taste or appearance but recreated the umami component, juiciness and bite of a patty.

The Wise Boys food truck opened at the former No.1 Queen Street food truck zone to immediate interest. However, it was attending their first Vegan Food Fair in 2016 that highlighted the business's potential.

"It was six hours of queues," Tim reflects. "Hundreds and hundreds of burgers. We were like, 'Holy shit. We're onto something here.'"

In 2019 they opened a permanent store in Grey Lynn, which they spent three gruelling weeks building themselves, with some help from friends. Fast forward to 2025 and Wise Boys now has a second eatery in Commercial Bay, a range of sauces and patties stocked at just over 300 stores nationwide and numerous accolades to its name – including five medals at the Outstanding NZ Food Producer Awards. It has even been lauded by celebrity couple Kourtney Kardashian and Travis Barker, who visited the restaurant in 2024 and shared their experience on Instagram.

Luke sums up what's propelled their journey so far as "a healthy degree of naivety, passion and not taking ourselves too seriously". He remains managing director at Wise Boys and hopes to continue growing the business and focusing on its culture, creativity and strategy – the elements he enjoys most.

Tim has partially stepped back and returned to his engineering roots at Auckland-based consultancy firm Dobbie. It's been a wild ride, he says.

"We got to live that dream of running a business we really believe in, that's doing something good. People were excited by it. There was momentum. There's a good energy to that."

Wise guys: Brothers Luke, left, and Tim Burrows.

"Part of the allure was, can we do something meaningful that contributes positively?"

– Luke Burrows

SHOULD WE TIP?

While New Zealand doesn't have a pervasive tipping culture, as in the US, we asked members of the University community if there's a case for leaving something extra on top of the bill.



The writers' views reflect personal opinions that may not be those of Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland. What do you think?

Have your say.

Facebook: UoAAlumni | X: @AucklandAlumni



Michael Lee

EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE REWARD MODELS

The practice of tipping is deeply embedded in American hospitality culture, where service staff rely on gratuities to supplement their wages.

However, I would argue that New Zealand should resist adopting this model, as our existing wage structures and cultural expectations make mandatory tipping both unnecessary and potentially harmful to the service industry.

One of the fundamental differences between New Zealand and the US is the existence of a robust minimum wage. In the US, tipped workers can legally be paid as little as US\$2.13 per hour before gratuities, making tips an essential part of their income.

In contrast, New Zealand's minimum wage ensures hospitality staff receive fair pay regardless of customer generosity. Adopting a tipping culture here could create a perception that service staff require additional financial support when, in reality, they are already compensated at a fair rate.

Beyond economic considerations, the expectation of tipping could also alter the culture of service in New Zealand. While rewarding exceptional service is reasonable, research on motivation suggests that an overemphasis on extrinsic rewards – such as tips – can undermine intrinsic motivation.

Studies in behavioural psychology indicate that when individuals become accustomed to external incentives, their internal drive to perform well for its own sake can diminish. A service culture driven by expectation rather than genuine commitment to hospitality could erode the authenticity and warmth that currently define New Zealand's approach to customer service.

That said, there are innovative ways to acknowledge excellent service without shifting financial responsibility onto the consumer. One compelling example is the model used by StarSocial, a hospitality company that rewards staff with a \$10 bonus when a customer leaves a five-star review. This approach benefits all stakeholders: employees are recognised for outstanding work, customers participate at no extra cost beyond their time and feedback, and businesses reinforce service excellence without distorting wages.

Ultimately, New Zealand should focus on fostering a service culture that values professionalism and fair wages over customer-funded incentives. By exploring alternative reward models, we can celebrate great service without importing the complexities and inequities of the US tipping system.

Michael Lee is a professor of marketing at the Business School.

Authentic gestures speak louder than obligations.



Marisa Bidois

A WELCOME GESTURE, NOT AN OBLIGATION

Should we tip in New Zealand? Absolutely – but only when it genuinely feels right.

There's something uniquely heartwarming about tipping. It's a spontaneous gesture from diners who want to say, 'You made our experience special.'

While tipping isn't obligatory in New Zealand, as it is in some other countries, it's genuinely appreciated by hospitality staff who work tirelessly to create memorable dining moments.

Kiwi hospitality workers don't depend on tips as their primary income, thanks to our robust minimum wage standards and steady wage growth. Unlike in many other places, tipping in New Zealand is a gesture of sincere gratitude rather than an economic necessity.

Yet tipping remains meaningful. It reinforces the human connection between diners and staff, acknowledging dedication, care and skill.

When diners leave a tip, they're celebrating hospitality at its best. Tipping should remain part of our culture, but it needs to be done authentically.

Transparency around tipping is crucial. The Restaurant Association encourages our members to clearly communicate to their teams how tips are shared. Fairness and clarity should guide these practices, ensuring staff directly benefit from diners' generosity.

Our Restaurant Association Rangatahi Advisory Group, made up of future leaders in New Zealand's hospitality sector, recently highlighted concerns about automatic tipping prompts, which appear on payment terminals. In particular, they noted such prompts may unintentionally pressure diners to tip. Their feedback underscores the need to preserve tipping as a spontaneous and sincere gesture.

Great service should not hinge on the expectation of tips. Our hospitality industry thrives when staff feel valued and respected. Let's celebrate tipping as a genuine expression of appreciation and never a pressured expectation.

After all, authentic gestures speak louder than obligations.

Marisa Bidois is CEO of the Restaurant Association of New Zealand, Te Tao Roa, and a University of Auckland Arts alumna.



Gabriel Boyd

AN UNCOMFORTABLE POWER DYNAMIC

I've lived in the US, where tipping is the norm, and here in New Zealand, where it's not. In my experience, tipping creates an uncomfortable power dynamic, allows hospitality operators to underpay staff, and makes working in hospitality even more stressful.

When I was in New York City on New Year's Eve, my Kiwi friend inadvertently neglected to tip a bartender who poured him a tap beer.

It was a 15-second exercise, and the bartender had done nothing unusual. But after the non-tip, we were blacklisted from the bar. The staff wouldn't take our orders and even refused to give water to anyone we were associated with.

This dynamic is what tipping culture creates: a social contract where giving anything under 20 percent (a figure that has grown over time) is seen as 'cheap' and can lead to outbursts from waitstaff.

Now, customers are pressured to pay an extra 20 percent on top of their meal price, which is no longer seen as a gesture of goodwill or an appreciation of good service, but the standard.

Restaurants in the US must pay their staff only a small 'cash wage'. If hourly tips don't push earnings above the minimum wage, their employer must make up the difference.

This means that the first five to ten dollars wait staff make is just to hit the minimum wage, and it covers their employer's end of the bargain. In this sense, tips are how restaurant owners shift their wage bill on to their customers.

Tips also build resentment around restaurants. Where I worked in America, tips would be divided equally amongst front-of-house and kitchen staff, disincentivising servers from working their hardest.

On the other hand, if tips aren't divided equally, then the best-looking and peppiest servers make the most money – it's emotionally exhausting.

Either way, tipping builds resentment amongst staff.

Gabriel Boyd is a University of Auckland student who was raised in the US. He is president of the AUSA, but these views are his own.

For other opinions on the subject see auckland.ac.nz/taking-issue-tipping.

Alumni in Japan, Ireland and Malaysia share their stories with James Fyfe.



Jessica Gerrity is a proponent of the Japanese martial art kyūdō.

JESSICA GERRITY

Saitama, Japan

More than 20 years after moving to Japan, Jessica Gerrity is something of a minor celebrity in her adopted country.

As a regular on TV and an expert in Japanese archery, she's amassed more than 300,000 followers on social media with her @jessintokyo handle. She also works as a tourism and PR ambassador for her home prefecture of Saitama.

Jessica's connection with Japan began by chance while studying at the University of Auckland. After befriending a half-Japanese classmate, she ended up visiting Japan with her new friend. That led to a deep fascination with the country and in 2003, Jessica, who graduated with a Bachelor and Master of Planning, moved to Tokyo to teach English.

"I soon realised Japanese skills were necessary to work in any other field apart from English language, so I gave up pursuing planning work," she says.

However, as her Japanese improved, other opportunities arose and she soon found herself appearing regularly on TV, building up a solid social media presence in the process.

Years later, another serendipitous encounter – this time with kyūdō, or the martial art of Japanese archery – also influenced the direction of her life.

"I saw it by chance about 14 years ago and it really made an impact on me," she says.

Now, kyūdō is firmly at the centre of Jessica's life. Not only does she hold a third-degree black belt, but she also writes kyūdō-related articles in both Japanese and English and is the editor of *Kyudo World Magazine*. And with a plethora of followers online, she's helping educate thousands around the world about the martial art and inspire them to give it a go.

She also balances her kyūdō practice and TV work with promoting Saitama, a region that neighbours Tokyo and is located on Honshu – Japan's largest island.

Jessica says one of the more difficult parts of her life in Japan is balancing her work and kyūdō commitments with raising her three children – one of whom was born with mental and physical disabilities (microcephaly and epilepsy).

"Navigating childbirth, childrearing and having a child with special needs in a foreign country has been very challenging," she says.

"But kyūdō has given me a really resilient sort of a mindset and taught me to take things as they come and just go with the flow."

"I saw it by chance about 14 years ago and it really made an impact on me."

MULENGA CHILUMBA

Dublin, Ireland

It might have taken him a while to tune in to the local accent, but University of Auckland alumnus Mulenga Chilumba is now thriving in Ireland as an engineer helping the country reach its renewable energy goals.

Zambian-born Mulenga is based in Dublin, where he works as a senior engineer for the state-owned electricity transmission system operator, EirGrid.

He's part of the team building offshore wind farms, which are critical to Ireland reaching its goal of obtaining 80 percent of its energy through renewable means by 2030.

"The concept of offshore wind energy is new to Ireland, so there's a lot of learning and you really have to get your hands into it with the details," says Mulenga.

He describes the role as challenging but highly rewarding, forcing him to "apply all the principles" he learnt during his Master of Energy, which he completed at the University in 2016.

Mulenga moved to New Zealand after working for Zambia's Rural Electrification Authority, where he was tasked with installing solar systems in rural areas and expanding

the country's electricity grid. He was drawn to study in New Zealand by its high use of renewable energy as well as the University's international reputation.

"The approach to education was a bit different from what I'm used to, but in a good sense," he says.

He credits his masters from the University with opening doors around the world.

He was impressed by the structure of the degree, which focused not just on the technical aspects of energy engineering but also covered topics such as project management and energy economics.

"It really shaped me and helped me to be where I am today. It made me a complete engineer."

Aside from his studies, he enjoyed taking part in extracurricular activities, such as the University's Christian Club and visiting Auckland's beaches.

In his time off in Ireland, where he has lived for the past two years with his wife and three young boys, he also likes to see the local sights, and indulge his love of music.

"I sing and play guitar; it helps to unwind and just do something different," he says.



Mulenga Chilumba is helping build offshore wind farms in Ireland.

AGKILLAH MANIAM

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Kuala Lumpur-based Dr Agkillah Maniam is on a mission to make forestry more sustainable.

After completing a PhD in Politics and International Relations at the University of Auckland in 2019, Agkillah is now director of forest management at the Malaysian Timber Certification Council. She's also the co-founder of the Green Spine Network, a company dedicated to biodiversity, and forest and wildlife conservation in her home country.

Born and raised in Penang, Agkillah first moved to Kuala Lumpur for tertiary study. She remembers with fondness her later time at the University of Auckland, which introduced her to a new, more sustainable, way of thinking.

"New Zealand really taught me to focus on processes rather than what most Asian countries do, which is to focus on results," she says. "All my life I've been pushed to produce results. You go to school, you get the As, but nobody talks about your well-being that much."

Now, she tries to implement that same philosophy back home.

"When I work with my teams and the people I mentor, I tell them, if you understand the process right and you do things with integrity and intention, then don't worry about the results – they will come through."

Agkillah originally planned to go into academia after graduating, but circumstances changed when she returned to Malaysia.

"When I started doing more hands-on, practical work on the ground, I realised, 'hey, this is where I want to be.'"

In her Malaysian Timber Certification Council role, Agkillah focuses on ensuring timber is grown and harvested sustainably.

"I think the way forward is to remove logging from natural forests and just focus on forest plantations in other agricultural areas. That way the natural forest is allowed to remain as it is, recuperate and be restored," she says.

"But that doesn't mean we don't have to find other ways to get timber, because we know wood is so essential to many communities around the world. We just have to find another way to do it."



Agkillah Maniam enjoys the 'hands-on' nature of her work.

MARIS O'ROURKE

WRITER AND WALKER

Life has held ever-more exciting chapters following the Arts and Education alumna's glittering education career. By Janet McAllister



Real talk: I now walk more because I've met Dr Maris O'Rourke. Charming and lively, she's had a glittering career in educational reform (University lecturer in Education 1974–1989, New Zealand Secretary of Education 1989–1995, first World Bank Director of Education for six years, focused on reducing poverty), but she is not resting on her laurels – nor on anything else.

In her current life as “poet and peregrina”/ writer and walker, she walks seven to ten kilometres a day from her avocado-coloured Balmoral villa – to Onehunga if the wind blows her east, and to Waterview if the wind blows her west (she gets the bus back). She walks up several local maunga. By the time you read this, she will have walked from Lucca (near Pisa) to Rome with her partner Greg, completing up to 20 kilometres a day.

“I especially like walking across a country,” she says with relish. For Maris, walking is about dropping into life, not dropping out. “You smell the chamomile under your feet and feel as if you're walking during the Middle Ages. I find it totally rewarding.”

Maris is 84.

She participated in two significant hīkoi last year: over the Auckland Harbour Bridge all the way to Okahu Bay in support of te Tiriti o Waitangi (“Oh my God it was amazing!” she says. “So positive, so full of energy and everybody was smiling and laughing and all the cars are going past, tooting.”) The other hīkoi carried taonga of Tūtahi Tonu, the University's first marae, from Epsom to the new City Campus whareniui. Maris was surprised and honoured to be asked to carry the photograph of her revered and departed colleague Tarutaru Rankin (Ngāpuhi, head of Māori Studies).

Maris is also planning a walk in Japan next year with her grandson, who has suggested they write haiku along the way, in homage to 17th-century wandering poet Bashō. “I thought, ‘oh crikey, I'd better get into that then’. Haiku is probably the most difficult thing in poetry ...

But anyway, I like difficult things.”

Indeed, for the last quarter of a century, she's been tirelessly pursuing creative challenges. “Since 2001, when I left the World Bank, it's just been the most amazing time of my life ever. I'm the happiest I've ever been,” she says.

Taking a University Continuing Education course with poet Siobhan Harvey was an ‘a-ha’ moment. Since 2012, Maris has written 12 books including award-winning poetry, and a trilogy about Lillibutt the Kunekune pig, whose adventures closely follow Maris's own walks.

A reo Māori edition of Lillibutt's story of Te Araroa (translated by Ani Wainui) was a finalist in New Zealand's children's book awards. Maris and her friend and illustrator Claudia Pond-Eyley sent thousands of copies to Kōhanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Māori as a koha.

Maris and Greg are publishers, too, via GTM Press. She encourages writers younger than herself: “You need to publish before you die!”

On the day we meet, she's brightly resplendent in a bougainvillea-crimson shirt – a person clearly living life to the full. She's a long way from her difficult upbringing in the UK, and even from her years as a housewife in isolated Māhoenui (her fascinating memoir, *Zigzags and Leapfrogs*, outlines at least nine lives). As she writes:

*I left school at 16 and went to work
(it was what you did then). Years later
in Grafton I found a university
at the bottom of the garden.
I entered the labyrinth [...] I came out a Warlock.*

Being a ‘Warlock’ means “I found my own power”, explains Maris. “University changed my life, it really did. I understood I was able to do stuff myself. I didn't have to listen to other people if I didn't want to. I could assess what they said, I could fact-check it, and I was given power.”

And her wielding of that intellectual power – taking things in her (literal) stride – continues, graceful and extraordinary.

“University changed my life, it really did.”

– Maris O'Rourke

Release the light

From the Collection



Fiona Pardington.
Little River Hei Tiki (2003).
The University of Auckland
Art Collection

Described as ‘pregnant with mystery’, this photographic work by artist and alumna Fiona Pardington MNZM, *Little River Hei Tiki*, glows from within its frame.

In an essay on the work, art historian Associate Professor Linda Tyler described how Pardington (Kāi Tahu, Kāti Mamoe, Ngāti Kahungunu, Clan Cameron of Erracht) trawled through museum collections of the taonga of her iwi while undertaking an MFA at Elam School of Fine Arts during 2002 and 2003. Her project involved bringing to light and photographing ‘Cinderella’ objects – deemed too imperfect to exhibit – taking up to 18 months to secure permissions from hapū to capture imagery of their taonga.

Another feature of this work (and Pardington’s wider practice) is its ‘Goldie’ frame, styled on those used by Charles F. Goldie to frame his portraits of rangatira. Through this, she elevates Māori taonga to a level of esteem enjoyed by Goldie’s portraits – but through a Māori, not Pākehā, lens.

Little River Hei Tiki is one of five works in the University of Auckland Art Collection by Pardington who, as one of our most esteemed artists, will represent New Zealand at the Venice Biennale next year.

Those wanting to view *Little River Hei Tiki* can find it on Level 4 of building B201 on Symonds Street.

Full story: artcollection.auckland.ac.nz/essay/68970



Professors Ngarino Ellis, left, and Deidre Brown have created *Toi Te Mana: An Indigenous History of Māori Art*.
Photo: Chris Loufie

FRIENDSHIP, ART AND LEGACY

Professors' landmark history of Māori art has scooped one of New Zealand's top literary prizes.

A 12-year journey to produce a comprehensive, 600-page survey of Māori art was recognised in May with an Ockham New Zealand Book Award.

Professors Deidre Brown (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Kahu) and Ngarino Ellis (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Porou) won the awards' illustrated non-fiction category for *Toi Te Mana: An Indigenous History of Māori Art*. The pair produced the book with the late Professor Jonathan Mane-Wheoki (Ngāpuhi, Te Aupōuri, Ngāti Kuri) and it is published by Auckland University Press.

Deidre and Ngarino first met while pursuing undergraduate degrees at the University of Auckland around the same time, with Deidre focusing on architecture and Ngarino on law and art history. The pair have since become colleagues and collaborators at the University, where Deidre is a professor of architecture and Ngarino a professor of art history.

The project to produce *Toi Te Mana* began 12 years ago when Deidre, Ngarino and Jonathan (who was head of Elam from 2009 to 2012) began sketching out a plan to create a comprehensive history of Māori art.

The authors delve into a wide range of artistic work, including raranga (plaiting), whatu (weaving), moko (tattoo), whakairo (carving), rākau (jewellery), kākahu (textiles), whare (architecture), toi whenua (rock art), painting, photography, sculpture, ceramics and film.

Their exploration spans from the arrival of Pacific voyagers 800 years ago to the work of contemporary Māori artists, fittingly ending on the 2024 Venice Biennale, with Mataaho Collective receiving the prestigious Golden Lion Award for their installation, entitled *Takapau*.

"Our definitions of Māori art aren't just restricted to what we have on ngā motu, the islands that we live on. Māori art occurs wherever Māori artists live, and they live and practise all around the world," says Deidre.

In the preface of the book, the authors make clear their definition of Māori art, with Ngarino highlighting the need to address common misconceptions about who can create it.

"There are lots of people who believe that Māori art can be made by anyone. We believe, and our assertion is, that Māori art can only be made by Māori, by people who have whakapapa. That is non-negotiable," she says.

Having now collaborated on three books, the pair's longstanding friendship has left a lasting mark on *Toi Te Mana*.

"The best part of creating this book has been our team approach and being able to run ideas by each other. Having this beautiful book at the end is just the cherry on top," says Ngarino.

Hussein Moses

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/toi-te-mana

PODCAST PICKS



Dr Rebecca Sharp, senior lecturer in the School of Psychology, Faculty of Science, and a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (Doctoral level) and Registered Psychologist, shares her listening habits with Nikki Addison.

What have you been listening to recently?

Why We Do What We Do. It's a psychology podcast by behaviour analysts that looks at a large range of concepts, the underpinning scientific literature, and breaks it down to make it more accessible and understandable. I love that it's grounded in science, but they do a great job of making learning about these ideas fun and showing how to do a great critical analysis. Topics range from conspiracy theories to freedom and what happens when we die.

What's next on your episode list?

An episode about imposter syndrome. This is something that I've found to be common in academia, and I've certainly experienced it. I'm excited to hear what the science is behind this concept.

How often do you listen to podcasts?

I have a relatively long commute into the City Campus, which makes for perfect listening time. This means I listen to podcasts almost every day and am always on the lookout for new ones.

What's your favourite podcast, and why?

My current favourite, for a bit of fun, is *How to Survive a Horror Movie* by Ryan Stacy. It dives deep into horror films to create a master list of how to survive. I love horror films, but what I also love about this podcast is the humour, and that the rules they come up with apply to everyday life – such as #50 'don't assume you're the protagonist' and #17 'don't give up; the next thing you try might work'.

Do you have a comfort listen?

I enjoy true crime and one I've really enjoyed is *I'm Not a Monster* by Josh Baker. I found it thoughtful and considered.

Are there any podcasts in your area of expertise that you would recommend?

There are a few great ones in behaviour analysis. I'd recommend *Behavioral Observations*. I was delighted to do a podcast episode on *Behaviour Speaks* with Ben Reiman about behavioural gerontology [related to ageing]. His podcast celebrates diversity in our field, which is great.

Links to the above podcasts can be found in the story online: auckland.ac.nz/ingenio-podcasts



Beginnings: In Aotearoa and Abroad

A memoir from the anthropologist, writer and Arts alumnus Michael Jackson. Now an emeritus professor at Harvard University and a senior research fellow in world religions, Michael traverses his 1950s childhood in Taranaki, life with a growing family in Sierra Leone, and memories of literary friends.

Michael Jackson, Ugly Hill Press, \$40



By Degrees

This book captures the history of alumni relations at the University of Auckland, including the work of both the Alumni Association and the University of Auckland Society. All proceeds from the book's sales go to the University's Student Support Fund.

Christine Keller Smith, Campus Store, \$30. Use the code 'ALUMNI' to save \$5



The Ethics of Advising

Associate Professor of Ethics Monique Jonas (School of Population Health) explores our ethical expectations of advice and common concerns about advising, and offers guidance across the many contexts in which advice is given and received.

Monique Jonas, Oxford University Press, \$118 (hard copy/Kindle)



Groundwork: The Art and Writing of Emily Cumming Harris

Emeritus Professor of English and Drama Michele Leggott and researcher Catherine Field-Dodgson bring to light the work of little-known early New Zealand botanical artist Emily Harris.

Michele Leggott, Catherine Field-Dodgson, Te Papa Press, \$60



Mrs Forsythe

Master of Creative Writing alumna Vivienne Lingard's second novel tells the story of Marjorie Forsythe. A reluctant wife and mother, she has yearned for the time she can be on her own, and finally, the day has come. Set in 1970s Wellington, the novel explores the life of women of an earlier generation.

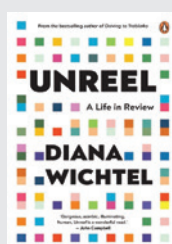
Vivienne Lingard, Artistry Publishing, \$38



The Poetical Lobe

Junior doctor Loredana Podolska-Kint curated and edited this anthology of poems written by people impacted by neurological conditions. Alongside first-time poets, contributors include writers Glenn Colquhoun, Dr Renee Liang and Sarah Quigley. Book sale proceeds go to brain injury and disease research.

Loredana Podolska-Kint, Copy Press, \$30



Unreel: A Life in Review

This memoir from Arts alumna and former *Listener* TV critic Diana Wichtel details her life growing up in the golden age of television, and later a career spent writing about it. *Unreel* traverses Diana's childhood move from Canada to New Zealand, becoming a writer, and her journey to become the nation's foremost TV critic.

Diana Wichtel, Penguin, \$40

CONNECTION POINTS



Facebook: UoAAlumni

LinkedIn: Auckland University Alumni and Friends

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Email: alumni@auckland.ac.nz



VOLUNTEER

TO SUPPORT STUDENTS

With a commitment of just ten hours over six weeks, you can have a meaningful impact on our international students. The University's Workplace Insights Programme is a mentoring opportunity for alumni based in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. By sharing your career journey, you provide a deeper understanding of the New Zealand work environment, easing the transition from university into the workplace. Fill in the form at auckland.ac.nz/WIP and we'll be in touch with details of the Semester Two programme.



TAKE

A UNIVERSITY COURSE – WITHOUT THE EXAMS

Our University Lecture Course Programme gives you the opportunity to attend regular lectures in a selection of courses alongside enrolled students. Delve into interesting topics, without any assessments or exams, in this no-stress learning opportunity. Register now for Semester Two courses, which run from Monday 21 July to Friday 24 October 2025.

[publicprogrammes.ac.nz/courses-and-seminars/
university-lecture-courses-2/](https://publicprogrammes.ac.nz/courses-and-seminars/university-lecture-courses-2/)



RESEARCH AND PERSPECTIVES

Follow *Research and Reason*, the Faculty of Arts and Education podcast, featuring academics from a range of disciplines discussing their findings on topics including medieval mermaids and modern beauty; the journey of becoming Tangata Tiriti; and the power of logic. Gain a deeper understanding of the past and present, and learn how we can build better, more-informed futures through this ongoing series. Tune in on your favourite podcast platforms or watch the latest episodes on YouTube.

[auckland.ac.nz/en/arts/our-research/
research-and-reason-podcast.html](https://auckland.ac.nz/en/arts/our-research/research-and-reason-podcast.html)



LISTEN

TO OUR WINTER LECTURE SERIES

In June 1958, Dr Keith Sinclair proposed the University of Auckland establish a series of lunch-hour lectures to introduce students to new points of view from other academic disciplines. Now available online, the Winter Lecture Series is the perfect place to find something interesting to listen to over lunch.

[archives.library.auckland.ac.nz/
repositories/5/resources/1127](https://archives.library.auckland.ac.nz/repositories/5/resources/1127)



TUNE IN

TO AN INGENIOUS NEW PODCAST

Did you know that 65 percent of the world's population are lactose intolerant? Or that dancing with others fires up eight different neural pathways? Or that we're developing human digital twins to act as the future crash test dummies of healthcare? Find out more by listening to *Ingenious*, the new podcast focusing on the University of Auckland's world-leading research. Launched in March, there are five episodes in the series, which is available on Apple or Spotify: sptfy.com/Qiq1



WIN

UPDATE YOUR DETAILS FOR THE CHANCE TO WIN!

Make sure you stay in the loop and get invited to events in your hometown – no matter where that may be – by keeping your address and email updated. If you update before 31 August 2025, you'll automatically go in the draw to win one of five \$500 travel vouchers from House of Travel. To update, head to:

alumni.auckland.ac.nz/update



WATCH

CONNECT & DEVELOP WEBINARS

Get inspired and learn from our 40 Under 40 alumni leaders through Connect & Develop. This series of online talks shares tips and advice on how to grow in the new world of work. Topics range from career pivoting to networking and more. You can view recordings of past talks and sign up for the next live webinar here: auckland.ac.nz/connect-and-develop



SAVE

WHEN YOU JOIN HIWA, RECREATION CENTRE

The new state-of-the-art City Campus recreation centre, Hiwa, is open to the community and offers facilities including sports halls, fitness studios, pools, a rooftop turf and more. As one of our University of Auckland alumni, you get discounted rates on all pass options, from single visit to annual passes. Find this offer and more on our alumni benefits page: auckland.ac.nz/en/alumni/what-we-offer-you/alumni-benefits.html



GET READY

FOR RAISING THE BAR

Crowd favourite Raising the Bar returns to the CBD on Tuesday 26 August with 20 inspiring and educational talks by some of the University's top academics. Look out for the ticket release announcement next month and catch up on previous talks here: auckland.ac.nz/rtb

What career advice would you give your younger self?

We're looking for alumni to help students take the next step in their career through our Alumni Connect informal mentoring programme.



**SIGN UP
ONLINE**

connect.auckland.ac.nz

15 MINUTES IS ALL IT TAKES.

As a mentor, you'll get to choose how much time you put in.

IT'S EASY.

Find out more and sign up.

More than 3,000 alumni and students are already using Alumni Connect. Will you join them?



"As an alumnus, it's a great feeling to give back and engage with talented students and new graduates seeking practical advice and feedback on career opportunities."

AARON ROSS
MBA 2017



By 30 April 2025 we had a total of
3,177 Alumni Connect participants, including
1,561 alumni and 1,616 students



Waipapa
Taumata Rau
**University
of Auckland**