

# Uni NEWS

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July 2022



## JEMAIMA TIATIA

**New Pro Vice-Chancellor Pacific  
brings her authentic self to the  
leadership table**

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### BOOSTING THE KIDS

Kitiona Pasene is connecting with potential young students and sharing the wise words of a past teacher

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### EYES ON THE PRIZE

The University's new Vision Bus is rolling out to schools to change children's lives through eye tests and glasses

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### HARMONY IN NATURE

When Geoffrey Handsfield needs to take time out from his cerebral palsy research, he heads straight to the bush for some 'forest bathing'

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Just a few of Waipapa Taumata Rau University of Auckland staff and student achievements in the media recently. Email: [uninews@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:uninews@auckland.ac.nz)



Jennifer Curtin

## AUSSIE ELECTION IMPACTS

Director of the Public Policy Institute Professor Jennifer Curtin (Arts) commented widely in the media, including Newshub, RNZ, and the NZ Herald, about the Australian election, discussing what it might mean for trans-Tasman relations, especially issues such as the deportation of 501s, China, and the balance of power in the Pacific.

**Links:** [tinyurl.com/RNZ-Curtin](https://www.tinyurl.com/RNZ-Curtin) and [tinyurl.com/Herald-Curtin](https://www.tinyurl.com/Herald-Curtin)



Grant Covic

## WIRELESS EV THE WAY TO GO

The *Sunday Star-Times* highlighted research on wireless roadway charging for electric vehicles by Professor Grant Covic, Dr Doug Wilson and Dr Duleepa Thrimawithana (Engineering) in a story about the government's Emissions Reduction Plan. They talked about the obstacle to EV ownership of cable charging and said technology for recharging on the move will be the "enabler for making things easy ... to be free and not tethered to anything".

**Link:** [tinyurl.com/Wireless-EV-Stuff](https://www.tinyurl.com/Wireless-EV-Stuff)

## ACC DROPS THE BALL

Associate Professor Gehan Gunasekara (Law) spoke with *1 News* and *Newstalk ZB* about privacy breaches at ACC. He said ACC needs to make significant adjustments to regain public confidence. "We thought ACC had turned a corner and they were held up as an exemplar, but at some point they dropped the ball. Privacy needs to be instilled into everyone, not just a compliance officer or someone like that."

**Link:** [tinyurl.com/NewsTalk-Gehan-ACC](https://www.tinyurl.com/NewsTalk-Gehan-ACC)



Richard Easther

## GRAVITY SITUATION

Professor Richard Easther talked to *Fair Go* about marketers using the term "zero gravity" as a buzzword to sell comfy chairs and beds. He concluded they were sailing close to the edge. "If there wasn't gravity, the Earth would sail off into space and the sun would be here. It's the sun's gravity that keeps us in orbit," he said.

**Link:** [tinyurl.com/Easther-TVNZ-gravity](https://www.tinyurl.com/Easther-TVNZ-gravity)



Margaret Stanley

## WEEDING OUT THE FACTS

Associate Professor Margaret Stanley schooled *Seven Sharp* on the difference between native toitoi and the weed pampas, after co-host Jeremy Wells mistook one for the other. Despite pampas being an unwanted invader, crowding out native plants, the weed remains a common sight at weddings. "We need to give our native plants a bit more PR and a bit of appreciation," said Margaret.

**Link:** [tinyurl.com/Stanley-Pampas](https://www.tinyurl.com/Stanley-Pampas)



Anthony Hoete

## HOETE ON HOUSING

Professor Anthony Hoete (School of Architecture and Planning) was on RNZ's *Nine to Noon* talking about his research and teaching which is focused on Māori and Indigenous architecture, and affordable housing solutions.

**Link:** [tinyurl.com/Hoete-RNZ](https://www.tinyurl.com/Hoete-RNZ)

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## STAY IN THE LOOP

Your staff email newsletter *Whaimōhio The Loop* comes out every fortnight. If you have content or achievements to share, email: [ruchita.bharbhari@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:ruchita.bharbhari@auckland.ac.nz). Deadlines are on the intranet under News, Events and Notices, *The Loop*.

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## LIFTING YOUNG PEOPLE UP

Kitiona Pasene is part of a new approach to engaging with young people to boost their knowledge of university's benefits.

### If ever you want to get out of changing nappies, Kitiona Pasene has a tip.

All it takes is a fractured scapula, 13 screws in your shoulder, and an arm in a sling for six weeks.

Kitiona, known as Kiti, is the Te Terenga Kaitiaki, the Schools and Community Engagement manager for the University, and also dad to a three-year-old son and baby daughter. His daughter was just six weeks old when Kiti wrecked his shoulder, playing rugby league for the Point Chevalier Pirates.

Let's just say league is not really an option for him now. "I got the hard word from my wife Laina straight away. I was like 'Okay, do I go home? Do I stay in the hospital?'" he laughs.

"The timing wasn't great ... but there are only so many times I can say, 'I can't help with that nappy, I'm on ACC.'"

But Kiti isn't a shirker and was back in the office a few days after a major operation to repair his injury. "The surgeon told me it was a five-and-a-half-hour surgery."

It would be six weeks in the sling, and full recovery will take six to eight months.

Kiti leads a group of staff in the new Schools and Community Engagement Team (SCET) that has evolved from the former Schools Partnership Office (SPO). Within his team of six is a Moana Tupu (Pacific) adviser and a Māori adviser, and one team member is based in Wellington.

What differs from the SPO model is the approach. "Previously it was quite transactional. We mainly went into schools to speak to Year 13 students. Now we go in at Year 9 which is awesome because we want them to choose the correct subjects to get into the courses they may want to do."

The SCET, led by associate director Liletina Vaka, has three arms to it. Along with Kiti's team, there's another team of six, Schools and Community Recruitment managed by Cheryl Martin, which is faculty-embedded and mostly works with Year 13 students. The other arm is Schools and Community Outreach, managed by Kate Ricketts, who liaises with community groups and industries to explore how the University can work better with groups on the outside.

"There are youth groups interested in what the University can offer and we've tapped into a few already. We explain what opportunities are on



Kitiona Pasene has domestic points to earn once his sling is off. Photo: Billy Wong

**"We explain what opportunities are on offer, including support and scholarships, to get them to think about trying uni."**

– Kitiona Pasene, Schools and Community Engagement manager

offer, including support and scholarships, to get them to think about trying uni."

Kiti knows the situation, being first in his family to graduate. The former PE teacher at Onehunga High did his undergraduate degree at Otago, then his graduate diploma in secondary teaching and masters at Auckland. His thesis followed the 'I, Too, Am Auckland' campaign launched in 2015, modelled on a similar campaign at Harvard. Kiti's research explored changes that had been made, or not, in response to racial discrimination experienced by Māori and Pacific students.

After leaving teaching, Kiti became the Pacific Adviser for the old SPO team. He then spent several years as a schools liaison officer for Otago, before returning to Auckland to his current role.

Kiti says he owes part of his career path to one influential teacher – Mr Dempster at Mt Albert Grammar, who is still there. "I was part of a group of boys, just mucking round playing ball. I played rugby then, in the first XV, and sport was all we wanted to do. But Mr Dempster said 'guys, if you can apply yourself like this to sport, you can apply yourself in the classroom. You can be just as dedicated to that'. He was always lifting us up, saying 'you can do this.'"

When Kiti was teaching at Onehunga High, he tried to echo Mr Dempster's message to have an impact on some students who were 'a bit rough around the edges'.

Kiti seems to have the dream attributes to be a teacher, so why did he leave? "I was lucky to get the Onehunga High role, but budget

restraints at the time meant each year was a one-year contract. I felt it would be better to have something long-term."

While he's a loss to the teaching profession, Kiti now has the best of both worlds – he can still connect with teachers and students, building relationships. "We go into schools to promote the University but also to support kids to reach their aspirations. We give them a preview of university life – including its support services and extracurricular activities. Sometimes questions can be as simple as, 'is university nine to three?'"

Kiti has shown a sample university timetable before and been asked 'what are these gaps?'

"I say, 'They're not gaps – they're independent study periods. You're an adult learner now. This is how the university works.'"

"We also talk to parents and quite often those are difficult conversations because a parent wants their child to do a particular degree. We go back to the student and ask, 'yes, but what do you want?'"

The SCE team travels a lot, to careers events all over the country and school careers expos all over Auckland. The team is also working collaboratively with the office of the PVC Māori and the office of the PVC Pacific. "We need to ensure we're not going off and doing our own thing – we're working together with the respective offices. It's about collaboration and providing a seamless experience for our schools and community groups.

"The University is a big place but we're getting coordinated to all be on the same page."

■ Denise Montgomery



*Veeran Morar is happy to be driving the Vision Bus.*

*Below: Malia Talakai from Nga Iwi School tries on new glasses.*

*Photos: Billy Wong*

## VISION FOR EQUITY

**The optometrist behind the wheel of the Vision Bus Aotearoa is inspired by the memory of his own first pair of glasses.**

Run through the University’s School of Optometry and Vision Science and funded entirely by philanthropy, the Vision Bus is now delivering full eye tests and glasses to Auckland schoolchildren, and to adults through marae and other community organisations

Veeran Morar, a professional teaching fellow in Optometry and Vision Science, says he loved playing hockey as a child but, at around 12, realised he couldn’t see the ball down the end of the field. “Mum took me to the optometrist. I put on my first pair of glasses and I was really blown away. I could see the leaves on the trees.

“I knew at the time it was going to change my life and it did.”

Veeran went on to play hockey for New Zealand. “I am reminded of that experience every time I give a kid a pair of glasses.”

Vision Bus Aotearoa was officially launched at a ceremony in the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences on 10 June. Professor Steven Dakin, former head of the School of Optometry and Vision Science, has been working on the project for five years. “When we look at schoolchildren, based on the school’s own screening

programmes across greater Auckland, we know that one in ten needs glasses but doesn’t have them,” he says.

“This is concerning because they don’t have good visual correction which means they can’t see whiteboards, which impacts educationally. More worryingly, we see potentially blinding conditions, such as keratoconus, regularly going undiagnosed in children, with Māori and Pacific disproportionately affected.”

Barriers include cost, distance from services and knowledge of optometry services.

Prior to driving the Vision Bus Aotearoa, Veeran was working in Outback Australia as a flying optometrist. “I fell in love with it – doing something remote where you provide a service people wouldn’t otherwise have access to.”

Veeran and his wife decided to come back home to Auckland and, while waiting in an MIQ hotel, Veeran had a successful phone interview with Steven for the Vision Bus role, starting work in 2021.

Covid-19 provided a variety of setbacks, meaning the bus didn’t arrive until this year but it was worth the wait. “Everything a modern optometry clinic has, we have on board. It’s a New Zealand first,” Veeran says.

The Vision Bus also gives optometry students first-hand experience of the barriers people face in accessing eyecare.

“Our bus is vital for education, not only for our optometry students but for kids in the community who are being touched by optometry,” Veeran says. “That could lead to more coming to study with us. We are keen to have more Māori and Pacific students. That’s one of the big things we are trying to achieve because, to be sustainable in the equity fight, we need a diverse group of optometrists. I hope what I am doing is going to help achieve that.”

The Vision Bus is funded by Rae and Peter Fehl, a former University staff member, who heard Steven talking about his dream for the unit on RNZ. The Fehl Family Trust \$1.8m donation funds the vehicle and its service for the first five years. Peter says they want to help children to fulfil their potential. “If you can’t see the blackboard, you can’t get an education.”

Steven says there was also a need to offer children glasses and contact lenses, which is where further donors have ‘closed the loop’, notably Helen Blake and daughter Barbara, through the the George Cox Community Spectacle Fund (George was Helen’s father) and Essilor, an international optics company, who are subsidising the cost of spectacles.

The hope is that the service model being developed around the bus – delivering eye-health services in partnership with local communities – will be widely adopted and state-funded in the future.

■ Jodi Yeats

**Full story:** [auckland.ac.nz/vision-bus](http://auckland.ac.nz/vision-bus)



*Sir Collin Tukuitonga*

## HUGE HONOUR FOR COLLIN

**Associate Professor Collin Tukuitonga (Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences) was made a Knight Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit in recognition of his services to Pacific and public health in the Queen’s Birthday Honours.**

Sir Collin was born in Niue and is just the third Niuean to be knighted. Among his many contributions to health, he was one of the

founders of the first Pacific-owned healthcare clinic, in 1989, now known as The Fono. It’s one of the achievements of which he is most proud.

“To see The Fono, now the largest Pacific provider in Auckland, grow to what it is now, has been wonderful.”

Sir Collin has been an important voice for the Pacific community through Covid-19 and led the Pacific response. He has had many roles on advisory, strategic and public health groups and committees in Aotearoa and the Pacific.

**See:** [auckland.ac.nz/Sir-Collin](http://auckland.ac.nz/Sir-Collin) and [auckland.ac.nz/QB-Honours](http://auckland.ac.nz/QB-Honours) for other honours.

# HIGH HOPES

**New Zealand Commonwealth Games pole vaulter Imogen Ayris would seem to have a high pain threshold.**

Landing awkwardly at the Under 20 World Athletics Championships in 2018, she fractured her heel. She pushed through the pain to continue competing and clear two qualifying heights.

The University of Auckland student told *Newsroom*: “I couldn’t walk the morning of the competition and arrived at the track still on crutches. I sat with my purple leg in a bucket of ice trying to numb the pain. But I wanted to give it my all because I’d trained so hard for it.”

She tells *UniNews*, the injury took time to heal. “A lot of injuries came from that initial fracture, because when I got back into running, my foot wasn’t quite ready. I got a stress reaction in another bone. It took a long time to come right.”

More recently she cut her hand when her pole snapped, the first time that’s happened to her.

“I ripped my hand open, split the webbing and moved some bones around a bit. Got a bit of bone bruising,” she says.

What was difficult after the hand injury was that the recovery went against the grain of everything she’d done before. “I used to be a gymnast and if you have a bad fall on a beam or whatever, they teach you to get back up and do it again, straight away. That’s how I grew up. I’d get back up and do whatever I was doing because otherwise a mental block can develop.

“The problem after the pole snap was it was actually a while before I could even pick up a pole again because of the damage to my hand.”

The hand injury also revealed something else. “The scan showed my scaphoid in my wrist is actually in half; it’s broken. It was like that before the pole snapped. We just didn’t know.”

But didn’t it hurt? “Not really.”

In the past there has been a benefit to injury.

“Gymnastics can stunt your growth as a child. I got a stress fracture in my back and had to take time off but the silver lining was it gave my body time to actually grow; I shot up and had an amazing year. I came out a lot better for it.”

She’s now 171 cm but it’s not vital for pole vaulters to be really tall. “In women’s pole vault there are so many different body shapes, types, heights and weights. Everyone uses their body to their advantage. There are so many different techniques as a result. There are women on really short and stiff poles who are fast and aggressive. Then there are taller, lean vaulters who use their height and their levers to their advantage.”

Imogen recently competed at the Oceania Athletics Champs in Mackay, Australia, where she and training teammate Olivia McTaggart took first and second place. Imogen vaulted 4.40m and Olivia 4.50m. “I get better the more I compete, and



Imogen Ayris in action.

Photo: Casey Sims @ caseysims.com

the better I get at competing, the higher I jump in competition. My personal best is 4.5m, but I’m capable of more than that. I’m in really good form. I’m moving well in the gym, running fast on the track and jumping really high in training, so I’m looking forward to the Commonwealth Games.”

Pole vaulting can be tough on the body as is evidenced by her former training partner Olympic bronze medallist Eliza McCartney having to take extended time out to heal. “We’re still in touch. Eliza is awesome.”

Imogen’s training schedule looks like this: Mondays and Wednesdays, vaulting 9am to 12pm. Tuesdays and Thursdays, gym session in the morning, and running in the afternoon. Friday it’s an hour in the gym and two hours of vaulting on a Saturday. “There are definitely times when I come home from training and I’m whacked and just want to lie in bed for a couple of hours and sometimes I do that. But sport has made me a better student and my studies have made me a better athlete.

“They both give you a purposeful distraction from the other. Most of the stuff I’m studying is related to my sport. But even when it’s not, it gives you something else to focus on and put your energy into, to prepare for that plan B.”

She reads a lot for leisure too, preferring fiction, and walks. “It’s my time. I just put my headphones in and it’s really good for my active recovery to just go for a walk, stretch the legs and clear the mind.”

Imogen, who went to Takapuna Grammar, describes herself as “a bit of a nerd”.

“I do enjoy my studies and that came from high school. I loved the teachers I had. They helped me find my love for science, learning and studying.”

She’s now in her fourth year of studying part-time. “Even though I love learning, I need to manage training around my studies. That’s where Toby Batchelor and the University’s High Performance Programme have been so helpful. I feel sorry for Toby because I keep pestering him

with requests and things I need help with. Without Toby’s help, life would have been a lot harder.”

For the record, Toby doesn’t consider it pestering. “She’s an exceptional student with a high grade point average. She’s also a wonderful role model.”

Imogen is working towards a Bachelor of Health Science. “I started off doing a double major in physiology and exercise science. But with physiology you have to be there for the labs so I’ve had to drop that. It was the best decision for my sport. I can always come back and finish off that degree.”

Since school she has wanted to be a doctor. But the 21-year-old has a pragmatic head on her shoulders. “With the amount of training, competing and travelling I do, med school just wasn’t really possible for now. I’m keeping my options open.”

In September 2020 her beloved dad died of cancer, aged just 54. He was the one who first suggested she tried pole vaulting, which she took up in 2014. She already held club age-group records in sprinting, hurdling and high jump so the grounding was there. Her father had come to all her events but as he grew sicker he couldn’t. After he died, Imogen felt she had to do what she’d always done. “I trained the next day,” she told *Newsroom*. “I just needed to get out of the house because I knew Dad would have wanted me to continue to do what I love.”

At Birmingham, she will feel her dad’s support through his family, who live in England. They’ll be there cheering her on, as will her mum, brother, boyfriend and boyfriend’s parents.

And she’ll have plenty of Auckland student athletes there for support. At press time, the University had six other students at the Games: William Fu-Allen and Samuel Dick (gymnastics); Havana Hopman (rhythmic gymnastics); Frazer Tavener (diving); and Alice Zeimann (beach volleyball). Others were expected to be named in, at least, netball and Sevens. – **Denise Montgomery**

■ The Commonwealth Games begin on 28 July.

# JEMAIMA TIATIA: ‘THIS ROLE IS A CELEBRATION OF LIFE FOR ME’

The University’s new Pro Vice-Chancellor Pacific, Jemaima Tiatia, says she will be an effective leader by bringing her whole authentic self to the table.

**From a young age, Associate Professor Jemaima Tiatia recalls either being put into leadership roles or falling into them by default.**

“I am the eldest in my immediate family and you end up being a leader because as the firstborn you are born into it,” Jemaima says. “But also in school and in sports I’d always end up being placed in those roles. I think it was always in me; I’d just never thought about leadership that way.

“I was a little bit of a mischief-maker during my school days and I think to be a strong leader you do need to be comfortable with going against the grain, so it does come naturally to me, leadership with a little bit of mischief.”

Now she’s the new Ihonuku Te-Moana-Nui-a-Kiwa, Pro Vice-Chancellor Pacific, and she’s not so sure about the mischief side. There’s work to do.

Jemaima is the first Pacific woman to be a Pro Vice-Chancellor at Waipapa Taumata Rau and her leadership extends to communities, sports teams, research teams and university departments. She takes over from Professor Damon Salesa, now Vice-Chancellor of AUT.

Jemaima is the eldest child in her immediate ‘aiga and eldest grandchild on her mother’s side, with gafa (genealogy) belonging to the Sāmoan villages of Tāga, Sālelologa, Vaimoso and Si’umu. Her gafa connects her to the leader of the Mau movement and she comes from a prominent Sāmoan ‘aiga.

She was born in Tokoroa, went to Avondale College and lives in West Auckland. Her mum and nanny, who play pivotal roles in her life, also live in the area. They are both leaders in their own right, in their extended families and within the church.

Jemaima describes her own leadership style as ‘fearless and respectful’, a testament to her ‘aiga and their love. “My nanny and parents have all been both fearless and respectful. I like to think I am a reflection of their love as examples of strength and courage and trying to do what’s right.”

Jemaima is openly gay, and says her role in the Pasifika Rainbow community has strengthened her leadership skills and empathy.

“As much as I am Sāmoan and a Pacific woman,

I am also gay. I am also someone’s partner, granddaughter, daughter, niece, sister, cousin, lecturer, aunty and colleague. While I may not be considered to be ‘flying the Rainbow flag’ as high as many would like, it’s a huge part of who I am.”

She says as a young Pacific person, she hadn’t understood what she was feeling with regards to her sexuality. “I didn’t have people around me at the time who could help me navigate my way through that, so I would censor myself, or at least part of myself, to fit in. To fit into my family and to fit into the communities I was a part of and serving. But censoring myself wasn’t helping me, nor was it helping those around me.”

**“To be a strong leader you do need to be comfortable with going against the grain. That does come naturally to me; leadership with a little bit of mischief.”**

– Associate Professor Jemaima Tiatia, Pro Vice-Chancellor Pacific

She came to the realisation that she had set so many boundaries in place that they were stopping her from being her authentic self.

“When you’re confined like that, the pot eventually begins to bubble then boil. Where I found myself too confined or censored there would be some other part of my life that would boil over.

“It’s painful not being able to feel, act, think and function wholly, to truly be who you are. You learn that if not addressed, it can turn into unresolved trauma in your later years.”

She says the attitudes, behaviours and words of others also began to affect her well-being. “Being a ‘good Pacific girl’, I internalised that because I didn’t want to ‘hurt’ others. You harbour the pain because those are the people you love and care for. You don’t want them to feel disappointed or angry or sad, because those are your people.”

She says all the internalising took her to breaking point.

“I was starting to feel unworthy and it crushed me. Imagine trying to effect change for Pacific peoples while feeling completely unworthy; it absolutely took its toll.”

**“While I may not be ‘flying the Rainbow flag’ as high as many would like, it’s a huge part of who I am.”**

– Associate Professor Jemaima Tiatia

She says she was torn between trying to be a leader and concealing a part of herself in many situations to appease people.

“I mean, you wouldn’t walk into a club with one shoe on, would you? It doesn’t make sense.

“There came a point in my life where I realised I have to take care of my own mental health and well-being and people will either love me unconditionally or will choose not to be in my life, or work with me, or sit in my lectures. That is their choice to make. How people respond to my sexuality is not a ‘me problem’. I can’t be an effective leader if I am not bringing my whole being to the table.

“Pacific peoples are born to be leaders and shine, however, at times, there is always a ‘but’. My ‘but’ was my sexuality and removing the ‘but’ has been life changing. I’m more fearless and really trust who I am, who my ancestors are and who my descendants will be.”

Jemaima is a big-picture thinker who knows what we do today will have an effect 20, 50, 100 years from now. It’s an insight that has informed her research, including the impact of climate change on the mental well-being of Pacific peoples.

At the University, her academic career began with a BA, majoring in education and then an MA honours. Her masters thesis was published as a book, *Caught between Cultures* (1998), a controversial insight into the tension between the traditional role of the church and its impact on young Pacific people’s mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. The book discussed uncomfortable and ongoing truths within Pacific communities and wider systemic inequities.

Her thesis had made her want to explore the subject further, but there wasn’t a suicide expert in Arts at the time. “I found one in the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences (FMHS), so I had to make the transition from Arts to FMHS, and that meant undertaking a Diploma in Public Health.

“My PhD in Community Health was funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand and focused on suicide prevention among youth.”

It might not have been this way if she hadn’t been strong. “I was in a top-stream class at school and I clearly remember our seventh-form [Year 13] dean handing out tertiary information to students.

“He looked at me and walked straight past me. He never saw me as a possibility.”

She says from that moment she knew what she needed to do to ensure that sort of behaviour

*“I know I can make a difference and that my ancestors opened this door and probably pushed me in. We are only here for a short time; every second counts.”*

*– Jemaima Tiatia*



Jemaima Tiatia is the new Pro Vice-Chancellor Pacific but will continue with research too. Photos: Elise Manahan

would never happen to her again. Now she is a leading Pacific expert on Pacific peoples’ mental health and well-being and suicide prevention, and a board member on the inaugural Mental Health and Well-being Commission.

Before she took up the Pro VC Pacific role, she was teaching six courses including a postgraduate course on Intervention, Prevention and Promotion of Pacific Well-being. She has had to drop the teaching but will continue with research.

The Pro Vice-Chancellor role is often reserved for those who have reached the ‘pinnacle’ of academia: professorship. Jemaima is still working towards that so as well as being Pro Vice-Chancellor Pacific, she must continue to lead her research project and teams.

“I am grateful the University has let me take up

this role with some allowance to still work on my Health Research Council-funded project (climate change and mental well-being in the Pacific). I have an excellent research team and we truly are smashing out the work.

“We are in the last phases of this study, which is a global first, and I am really happy with how it is coming together. I will miss conducting research and teaching but such is life, lots to compromise.

“You get pulled in so many directions in a role like mine and it’s easy to miss things, but I am getting better at balancing life and work. Prioritising things for the ones I love is especially important to me.”

What is not a compromise to Jemaima is her belief in Pacific peoples’ responsibility to tangata whenua. “We have a duty and responsibility first

and foremost to our Māori whanaunga. To tautoko (support) them in their journey to regain tino rangatiratanga as they see and understand it. Until we see Māori being given what they rightfully deserve, Pacific peoples will not be able to see our true potential as tangata Tiriti (people of the Treaty) here in Aotearoa.”

Jemaima says Māori and Pacific peoples have a special relationship that’s part of the sacred vā – the invisible space that connects people, entities and all things. She will be working closely with the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor Māori to ensure a lifelong continuance of that vā.

“This role is a celebration of life for me. After traversing all the rough patches, the breaking points and the bubbling over, the fact that I am here at this point in time, is a celebration. There were many times I wanted to give up, but it was the young people around me that kept me going.

“Similarly in this role, I know there will be tough times, but working to serve our students and our staff is what keeps me going.

“I know I can make a difference and that my ancestors opened this door and probably pushed me in. We are only here for a short time; every second counts. There is always someone watching and it’s important that I am here celebrating all of it because we are all worthy of this success.”

■ Emmaline Pickering-Martin



Jemaima at her welcome ceremony at the Fale in June.



*Dr Geoffrey Handsfield enjoys shinrin yoku, the Japanese practice of 'forest bathing'.*

*Photo: Billy Wong*

## TAKING WORK-LIFE BALANCE INTO THE FOREST

Dr Geoffrey Handsfield is hard at work on research into cerebral palsy that could change lives. But he also makes sure his own parasympathetic nervous system gets plenty of rest – through immersion in nature.

**When he isn't using mathematical modelling and MRI technology to better understand the musculoskeletal system, Dr Geoffrey Handsfield could be swimming, tramping, surfing or playing water polo.**

He might also be found leading guided tours in what is called shinrin yoku, the Japanese practice of 'forest bathing'.

Geoffrey, who grew up in southern Nevada in the United States before his family moved to North Carolina, is a senior research fellow with the Musculoskeletal Modelling Group at the Auckland Bioengineering Institute (ABI). Having been athletic from a young age, including competitive swimming from the age of six, he'd always been interested in how the body works. "It's capable of remarkable things."

He graduated with a Bachelor of Science in physics and mathematics from East Carolina

University in the United States, and began to apply the laws of physics and maths to the body, specifically the musculoskeletal system, for his PhD at the University of Virginia. It was there that he began to focus on the muscles of those with cerebral palsy.

He became interested in forest bathing during lockdown in 2021.

"I wasn't having a great time and was looking for something to put my energy into. I came across these courses to become a certified guide in forest therapy. At first I was sceptical, but I took some time to read up on it, and the deeper I got, the more I realised how legitimate this practice was."

The theory behind one aspect of forest bathing is that it engages the parasympathetic nervous system, colloquially known as the 'rest-and-digest' system, the opposite of the 'fight-or-flight' sympathetic nervous system.

"The balance of both is important to general health. But in the modern world, because of email, our phones, our constant deadlines, our sedentary lifestyles, we keep getting pummeled by 'fight-or-flight' triggers which puts us into recurrent states of stress. Forest bathing – also known as forest therapy – is partly about engaging the 'rest-and-digest' parasympathetic nervous system."

You could argue you could 'rest and digest' anywhere – in a chair in a comfortable room at home in a suburb – but the nature immersion has

other benefits, he says. It means walking among the phytoncides, the chemicals that plants release to fight off bacterial or fungal infection.

"In response to infection, plants will emit droplets and aerosols of these, showering themselves and their neighbours. When you're going through forest environments, you're literally bathing in these chemicals that have been shown to boost the human immune system, including the cancer-fighting natural killer T-cells."

As evidence of the efficacy of forest therapy, he points to the research of Professor Yoshifumi Miyazaki, director of the Centre for Environment, Health and Field Sciences, at Chiba University, Japan, or Qing Li, Associate Professor at Nippon Medical School and one of the directors of the Forest Therapy Society in Japan. They have published several books and many journal papers on the health benefits of forest therapy.

"They've shown in randomised controlled trials that it lowers blood pressure, pulse rate and levels of the stress hormone cortisol among other positive health benefits, collectively leading to improved health, as well as feelings of calm and an improved state of mind."

It works for Geoffrey, anyway, and so far, according to feedback from groups of people he's taken forest bathing, it worked for them too. Geoffrey has always spent a lot of time in nature, open-water swimming, surfing, rock climbing, tramping and so on, but 'forest bathing' is different. It's about taking time to 'be' rather than get from A to B.

"How often on a hike are you looking to find maybe four or five unique textures of a plant? I think most people are usually purpose driven. Forest bathing is about taking time to slow down,



## “They’ve shown in randomised controlled trials that forest bathing lowers blood pressure, pulse rate and levels of the stress hormone cortisol.”

– Dr Geoffrey Handsfield, Auckland Bioengineering Institute

to pay attention to the textures and seasonal nature. It was definitely immensely helpful for me during lockdown.”

The motivation behind freelancing as a forest guide isn’t so far removed from what motivates his research.

“I got into bioengineering because I wanted to help people, because I was interested in health and well-being, and there’s a lot of science, and concrete data to support forest bathing as a therapeutic tool for people who are physiologically and psychologically stressed.”

He hopes his research at the ABI will help people too, particularly those with cerebral palsy (CP). CP is a disorder caused by damage to parts of the brain before, during or soon after childbirth. The symptoms aren’t immediately apparent.

“You’ll often have a child with CP who is two or three years old who looks normal, but whose movements are slightly atypical. By age five or six, the movements become more unusual, which is when you traditionally get a diagnosis.”

The lesions that cause the condition are static, meaning they don’t change, but the motor disabilities worsen over time which leads to abnormal bone and muscle development in the lower limbs, further affecting movement. Some

people with CP who can move almost normally when young, may eventually need a wheelchair in their later years.

Geoffrey says earlier intervention could change this. In a narrative review recently published in *BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders*, he and his team identified a significant research gap in cerebral palsy and its effect on muscles, and how stimulus (such as the mechanical loading on muscles and bones) or the lack of it in early childhood, will affect movement over a lifetime.

In collaboration with Gisborne-based Mātai Medical Research Institute, he and his team aim to close this gap through a longitudinal MRI study of the leg muscles. The study involves taking MRI images of the same person over several months, of people with CP and those without it.

He expects the research will contribute to the better understanding of the condition and, as a result, the identification and development of therapeutic interventions that could prevent or slow muscle degeneration. There is much to discover.

“We have found, for instance, that certain aspects of growth and regeneration at a cellular level of muscles in CP actually contribute to muscle degeneration,” he says.

CP manifests in idiosyncratic ways, so intervention needs to take that into account.

“It affects individuals differently, and each individual needs tailored treatment to have the best possible outcome.”

Geoffrey came to New Zealand in 2015 with the support of a Whitaker International fellowship, which supports Americans working overseas in bioengineering.

“I had met Thor [Professor Thor Besier, head of the ABI’s Musculoskeletal Modelling Group] at a conference and thought it would be neat to work with him. I was also aware of the ABI as it has a global reputation for bioengineering.

“And the lifestyle in New Zealand sounded like it would be nice outside of work – what’s not to love about mountains and ocean all within reach?”

Geoffrey packs a lot in outside work; along with the long list of physical activities mentioned above, and being a forest bathing guide, he finds time for a lot of reading, particularly fiction, history and philosophy.

“I love a good philosophical chat over a drink with friends. I’m the type of person who genuinely ponders the meaning of life.”

Asked if he had found it, he pulls up a quote by American writer Joseph Campbell: “People say that what we’re all seeking is a meaning for life. I don’t think that’s what we’re really seeking. I think that what we’re seeking is an experience of being alive.”

■ Margo White

**Anyone interested in forest bathing, visit [forestbathingaotearoa.com](http://forestbathingaotearoa.com).**

## HIGH-TECH TOOLS TO BEAT ASTHMA ATTACKS

**A project to develop a risk-prediction tool to help patients and whānau predict asthma attacks has won funding from the Health Research Council (HRC).**

The funds will be used to develop a real-time tool that takes information from the environment and smart devices and uses it to help patients and whānau predict and prevent asthma attacks.

School of Pharmacy senior clinical research fellow Dr Amy Chan is getting the project under way with \$250,000 over three years from the HRC to develop the model.

“Asthma attacks are still the main cause of loss of life from asthma and loss of quality of life,” Amy says. “We don’t have any good tools that can predict when someone will have an attack.”

In the first stage, Amy will devise an algorithm that draws on data from mobile phones and devices, such as smart watches. These

could include step counts, sleep patterns, breathing rate, medication use, peak flow and weather information.

An important part of the research will be ascertaining what information is most predictive of the risk of asthma attacks. Amy will also seek feedback from patients, clinicians and health providers. She will then test the prediction tool by integrating it into a smartphone app and testing it in a clinical trial.

The clinical trial, and her salary for the upcoming five years, will be funded by an Auckland Medical Research Foundation senior research fellowship.

“We want patients with asthma to be able to see what’s happening with their asthma attack risk in real-time. If that risk is increasing, they can do something about it, like change their medication or see a doctor,” Amy says.

She will work closely with mentors Professor Jeff Harrison (School of Pharmacy) and Professor Partha Roop (Electrical and Computer Engineering), as well as with support from



Dr Amy Chan

Associate Professor Matire Harwood, Dr Alana Cavadino and Asthma NZ.

Amy is also the lead author of a Cochrane Review that has found technology can halve the risk of asthma attacks. She and other authors reviewed 40 international studies covering around 1,500 asthma patients. “Digital technologies can increase people taking their medication in way it has been prescribed by 15 percent, and improve asthma control and quality of life,” Amy says.

■ Jodi Yeats

## *Ruia ngā kākano*

*Ruia, ruia ngā kākano i*

*Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa*

*Wherahia ki te moana rongonui*

*Herea ngā waka ki te pou whakairo*

*Ka tū ki Waitematā*

*I raro i te marumaru o ngā*

*Maunga tapu ko Waipapa te manawa whenua*

*o te whare wānanga nei*

## OUR STORY IN A SONG

We all remember our school songs, but not too many people know the University has its own waiata. It has, and it's now a decade old.

**Ten years ago, Michael Steedman, Kaiarataki at Waipapa Taumata Rau University of Auckland, composed *Ruia*.**

It is a song speaking to the history and connections of the place and space of the University. Since then, the song has become known as the University waiata.

Although it didn't start with that purpose in mind, Michael says the waiata is certainly a gift, and for us all to use. "A big part of the song's origin is the opportunity to tell our University story in a journey form – and a big component of storytelling is whakapapa."

The catalyst for *Ruia* was a conference in New Plymouth for Māori tertiary professional staff. The Auckland visitors felt a sense of whakamā (shame) without a song to uniquely identify themselves during the pōwhiri.

"As the leading university, we didn't have something to call upon. On the way back, and

after discussion with my colleagues, I decided I would have a go at writing a song."

*Ruia* is separated into four parts and follows a traditional chant style of a mōteatea. For those unfamiliar with the form, Michael explains that the cadence is not carried by guitar. "You have to find the cadence and tune yourself."

Carefully chosen words and phrases reference ancient proverbs, place names, histories and local waiata. These, in turn, create rich layers of identity and meaning. The lyrics draw in the singer and the listener on a journey from the ancient seed of Rangiātea, to the arrival of Pacific waka and Pākehā ships crossing the Moana nui a Kiwa, then moving through the safe harbour of the Waitematā to te pou whakairo (carved pillar).

Finally, we are guided under the gaze of the sacred maunga and deep into Papatūānuku to the heartbeat of the University, Waipapa, the marae.

"*Ruia* is one aspect of the broader whakapapa of the University. My hopes, and they still stand, are that songs like this provide an opportunity to do more storytelling. This is ours."

Michael adds that this waiata may be used in all sorts of forums.

"Ngā Tauria Māori (NTM) are the ones who sing *Ruia* the most. NTM spend more time in that

traditional storytelling space in terms of waiata. It would be great to have more people who know *Ruia* and can sing it, because then they become part of the storytelling that is represented."

"The lyrics, recording, and explanatory notes of *Ruia* can be found on Te Kūaha app. Te Kūaha is great because it opens the door for more people to connect with the waiata."

Kaiārahi for Te Tumu Herenga Libraries and Learning Services, Manuhiri Huatahi, says soon after *Ruia* was composed, Michael joined a Te Pou Rāhui (Māori staff in Te Tumu Herenga) hui and shared the story about *Ruia*'s origin.

"From that moment on, we took every opportunity to engage all Te Tumu Herenga staff in learning *Ruia*. We were so successful that for a while, many thought *Ruia* was the Library waiata."

Vanda Ivanovic is part of the Library team. She admits she found learning *Ruia* a challenge for a long time.

"For me it was hard to understand when I didn't have the language, even with the translation of the song. Then, we had the great fortune last year to have Michael tell us the story behind Waipapa Taumata Rau, the University's new name.

"At the same time I learnt some of the history of the harbour, what it used to look like before and after European contact. Places that had different roles and looked very different. So, with my new understanding of the history of Tāmaki Makaurau and Michael's explanation, *Ruia* came together. Not as a song about the University, but about this place that eventually hosted the University."

Michael says he looks forward to a time when *Ruia* is sung by a really big crowd of people.

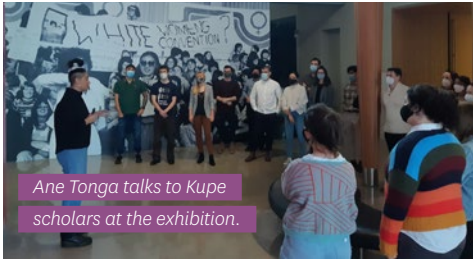
"It would be truly awesome to experience that moment."

■ Megan Fowlie



***"Ruia is one aspect of the broader whakapapa of the University. My hope is that songs like this provide an opportunity to do more storytelling. This is ours."***

— Michael Steedman, Kaiarataki, Waipapa Taumata Rau



Ane Tonga talks to Kupe scholars at the exhibition.

## KUPE SCHOLARS GET PACIFIC ART INSIGHTS

### The exhibition *Declaration: A Pacific Feminist Agenda* continues at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki until 31 July.

It brings together 12 Pacific artists whose works set a feminist agenda by shining light on issues such as climate change, tino rangatiratanga and social justice. The exhibition is curated by alumna Ane Tonga, the inaugural

curator of Pacific Art at the museum. Admission is free. (See [tinyurl.com/AAG-Declaration](https://tinyurl.com/AAG-Declaration).)

Ane was a Kupe Leadership scholar in 2019 and in May she took the 2022 Kupe scholars on a tour of the exhibition and offered insight into the artists' works and lives. She also shared her own leadership path with the 16 2022 scholars.

The scholars are now well into their leadership programme and recently took part in a community breakfast discussion on housing in Aotearoa, led by Kupe mentor Rod Oram. Speakers included Professor Laurence Murphy, Kupe alum Tane Pamatatau-Marques and Helen Robinson, Auckland City Missioner, as well as Kupe sponsors and mentors.

Applications are open for the 2023 Kupe Scholarships (until 25 August). Scholars receive a bespoke leadership programme and mentor; a leadership speaker series and a stipend of \$22,000.

■ See [auckland.ac.nz/kupe](https://auckland.ac.nz/kupe)



Gina Cole has won a writer's residency.

Photo: Kelly Newland

## WRITING CAREER SWITCH PAYS OFF FOR LAWYER

### Ockham award-winning writer and former lawyer Gina Cole will work on her upcoming Pasifika futurism novel in Australia this year, thanks to a new writer's residency.

Despite dedicating more than 30 years of her life to law, the University of Auckland alumna is unlikely to return to practising anytime soon.

Gina, known for her Pasifika futurist science fiction, is heading to Australia's Blue Mountains in September after being awarded an inaugural writers' residency.

Gina will spend four weeks at the Varuna National Writers' House in Katoomba, New South Wales, thanks to the Michael King Writers Centre in association with Varuna, which is the foremost institution for literature development in Australia.

Varuna's creative director Amy Sambrooke says the opportunity to connect Gina with First Nations writers and with Pacific writers in Western Sydney was too good to pass up. "We will be thrilled to meet her and have her here for the Blue Mountains Writers' Festival."

Gina, who is of Fijian, Scottish and Welsh descent, is looking forward to linking up with First Nations authors and Pacific writers, as well as working on a new book, which, like her new novel *Na Viro* (Fijian for whirlpool), will be a science-fiction fantasy and a work of Pasifika futurism.

Gina began practising law in 1991 but it wasn't until 2009 that she started writing seriously. In 2013, she gained her masters in Creative Writing from the University, while still working full-time as a lawyer. In 2017, Gina's collection of short stories told through a Fijian lens, *Black Ice Matter*, won Best First Book of Fiction at the Ockham New Zealand Book Awards. The following year Gina closed her legal practice to start writing full-time and hasn't looked back.

■ Sophie Boladeras

## BOOKS



### Thief, Convict, Pirate, Wife: The Many Histories of Charlotte Badger

Jennifer Ashton has a PhD in history from the University. This book, a piece of historical detective work, unravels the many mysteries of one of the first Pākehā

residents in New Zealand, Charlotte Badger.

Badger was a thief sentenced to death in England and then transported to New South Wales. She then became a pirate who joined a mutiny to take a ship to the Bay of Islands, where she became the wife of a rangatira.

Jennifer Ashton, Auckland University Press, \$35, due 14 July



### Te Koroua me te Moana

Ernest Hemingway's classic story of an old man, a young boy and a giant fish, *The Old Man and the Sea*, has been translated into te reo Māori. This novella won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and directly led to Hemingway's Nobel

Prize in Literature in 1954.

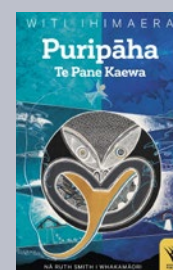
Ernest Hemingway, translated by Greg Koia, Auckland University Press, \$30, due 14 July



### No Other Place to Stand: An Anthology of Climate Change Poetry from Aotearoa New Zealand

Ninety-one writers with connections to New Zealand grapple with one of the biggest issues facing the planet.

Edited by Jordan Hamel, Rebecca Hawkes, Erik Kennedy, Essa Ranapiri, Auckland University Press, \$30, due 14 July



### Puripāha: Te Pane Kaewa

A te reo Māori translation of Witi Ihimaera's award-winning novel *Bulibasha: King of the Gypsies* about two rival Māori families on the East Coast. The book won the 1995 Montana

New Zealand Book Award, and later became the film *Mahana*.

Witi Ihimaera, translated into te reo Māori by Ruth Smith, Auckland University Press, \$40



Natalia Booth holds the Ukrainian flag in protest at her birth country's actions.

Photo: Elise Manahan

*“Aotearoa is not immune to the sharp power of Russian propaganda.”*  
– Natalia Booth

## NO JUSTIFICATION FOR WAR IN UKRAINE

**On 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation started a war against Ukraine.**

My colleague asked, “You must have been shocked?”

I said, “No. I was angry.”

I am from Russia but of mixed ethnic heritage. Reflecting on my identity, I consider myself 100 percent Russian, 100 percent Korean, and 100 percent New Zealander.

I felt angry at my country for falling into the trap of imperialism. Again.

Georgia, Moldova, North Ossetia-Alania, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Chechnya, Dagestan, Ukraine, Syria, Central African Republic, Belarus and Kazakhstan. All these countries have felt the boot of a Russian soldier since the establishment of the Russian Federation in 1991.

Like many other empires, the 300-year-old Russian empire has nearly completed its cycle and is now in decline. However, it is still trying to devour more lands and people to prolong the agony it inflicts. The danger of this war is that it sets another historical precedent where crude force trumps justice. It changes the perceptions of the world order where watchdogs like the UN appear toothless. Furthermore, it questions the values underpinning our societies.

Aotearoa is not in direct danger from this war; the effects are significant but primarily economic and geopolitical. However, there are three value-based points that this war has made salient, and I would like academics and activists in Aotearoa to consider them.

First, the war in Ukraine has strong parallels to gender-based domestic violence. For brevity, let me present it as a simple analogy. She (Ukraine) tried to separate from an abusive partner. He (Russia) wanted her to stay and used bribes (cheap oil and gas before 2014) and punishment

(annexation of territories in 2014). She had enough and packed her bags (move towards the EU and NATO). He tried to use force, but she resisted (the war). He decided that, “If I can’t have you, no one else can” (carpet bombing of the cities, indiscriminate killing of the civilians).

Seeing the war from this perspective helps to understand why an argument like ‘there is a long and complicated relationship between these two countries’ is atrocious.

In Aotearoa, we would not accept that gender-based domestic violence can have any excuses. The same comes to relationships between countries. Nothing that happened in history can justify an attack on another country. Especially outrageous is when Westerners accept that Putin’s war is ‘understandable’ because Ukraine was gifted to Russia in a verbal agreement with NATO. Would we even listen to a claim that the wife belongs to the husband because he paid a bride-price?

Secondly, the Russkiy mir paradigm (loosely translated as a Russian worldview) influences perceptions of Ukraine despite accepting that Ukraine is a sovereign state with its own culture and language. Russkiy mir is the domination of internal and international discourse with ideas of Russian superiority and presentation of other cultures in the presumed Russian zone of influence (including Ukraine) as subservient and dependent. These cultures are silenced, and the world only sees them as a reflection in the mirror of Russkiy mir.

For years, the Soviet Union and then the Russian Federation have been rewriting the history books minimising the merits of other nations and reassigning victories to Russians. There is even a Russian joke about this: ‘The world has an unknown future. Russia has an unknown past.’

Not only history but academia in general has been used as soft power to shape the unconscious attitudes where the Russian voice is given more weight. Ukrainian academics, for example, reported instances when Western

universities invited Russian scholars to present on Ukrainian issues.

To draw a parallel, discourse about Māori in Aotearoa used to be dominated by Pākehā. It is widely accepted now that ‘nothing about Māori without Māori’ is the only way to reverse the harm of colonisation. It is a political decision with long-lasting consequences whenever universities decide whose voices to hear and let be heard. Will we amplify the voices of Ukraine?

Thirdly, the effectiveness and power of the Russian propaganda machine inside and outside Russia deserves very close examination. Initially tested during the American elections in 2016, the Russian propaganda keeps abusing the freedom of speech and the freedom of expression in Western societies to undermine these societies. Aotearoa is not immune to the sharp power of Russian propaganda. There is evidence that some Russian immigrants and even New Zealanders not connected to Russia support Putin and his war.

The example of the anti-vax/anti-mandate protests at Parliament’s grounds earlier this year shows that such events fuelled by disinformation can quickly get out of control. I believe it is the role of academics to activate the discussion on what are the limits to the freedom of speech concerning this war. Academics, students and activists should take time to think about the war in Ukraine. This seemingly faraway war is not that far, since being a global community means the free flow of information has a worldwide impact.

Let’s ponder, what are our values? Whose voices shape our understanding of this war? What should drive the political decisions around the war in Ukraine?

Because one thing is for sure – this war is more than just pain at the petrol pump. It’s a painful piece of history that Russia will no doubt distort in its telling in the future. We need to tell it honestly.

■ Natalia Booth is a research fellow in the School of Population Health.

*The views in this article reflect personal opinion and are not necessarily those of the University of Auckland.*