Bottling precious shark blood to help fight disease
Australian history: neither fad nor fading – Greener factories, better transport

Our most threatened landscapes | Same-sex parents & separation | Mick Malthouse takes up mentoring role | Research toward earlier autism diagnosis | College life boosts academic success
In this issue:

Bottling precious shark blood to help fight disease

Australian history: neither fad nor fading

Greener factories, better transport systems

Study names Australia’s most threatened landscapes

Same-sex parents – what happens after separation?

Mick Malthouse takes up mentoring and leadership role

Women’s toilets in Australia – the real story

New study finds college life boosts academic success

Look here! Research toward earlier autism diagnosis

Australia’s first courses on new iTunes U delivery system

Progress in better detection of child development problems

Soil scientist honoured in ‘Landmark’ publication

La Trobe tops growth in demand for university places

John Dewar takes up post as new Vice-Chancellor

Tribute to foundation Chancellor

Australia-bound from Germany – by kayak
Bottling precious shark blood to help fight disease

*International collaboration evaluates new antibody technology*

**Australian research into shark antibodies that holds out the potential for new drugs and diagnostic agents is a step closer to realising its goal following an agreement with international diagnostic and pharmaceutical giant, Roche.**

The pioneering work, which has attracted worldwide interest, is based on research led by Associate Professor Michael Foley at the La Trobe Institute of Molecular Science (LIMS).

It builds on discoveries over the last decade that shark antibodies could offer a lot of advantages over existing therapies in the fight against cancers and autoimmune diseases.

The research agreement between Roche and the Melbourne-based biotechnology company AdAlta aims to identify and evaluate the way in which these small antibodies isolated from shark blood are able to bind to a diagnostic target.

Dr Foley is founding scientist and Chief Scientific Officer of AdAlta. He and his co-researchers have built the world’s first test tube ‘library’ of disease-targeting antibodies based on modified shark antibodies.
Shark antibody (blue) penetrating into the cleft (green) of malaria protein (pink). Photo by Fung Lay

He says his company is pioneering a range of new technology that uses modified shark antibodies for both treatment and diagnosis, offering prospects for new and more effective approaches to a wide range of diseases.

**Small, stable and right on target**

Shark antibodies are very small and extremely stable protein molecules, says Dr Foley, and are particularly good at seeking out and binding to target cells.

‘Furthermore, because they are extremely stable, they may overcome some of the problems encountered with traditional human antibodies when stored and used at high temperatures.

‘Because of their small size and stability, such new therapies can be manufactured in bacterial systems rather than in animal cells, as is presently the case for therapeutic antibodies, and it raises the possibility that they may be taken orally instead of injected.

‘So the next generation of pharmaceuticals might make good use of these small proteins, and sharks have them naturally in their blood.’

For the global pharmaceutical industry antibody treatments represent a multibillion-dollar market.

Dr Foley says as part of the collaboration with Roche, AdAlta will screen his shark antibody library and provide relevant shark antibody ‘binders’ to Roche for further evaluation.

He explains his research involves taking genes from sharks and modifying them in the laboratory by inserting random sequences – mimicking the way the human immune system works – to develop antibodies capable of a defensive response.

**Spare the needle – use the lab bench**

In other parts of the world, Dr Foley says, shark antibody research is done by injecting captive sharks, usually held in tanks or pools, and drawing their blood.

But the system invented by Dr Stewart Nuttall within the Cooperative Research for Diagnostics and now developed by AdAlta, enables this work to be done in test tubes at a bench – a far quicker, not to mention safer, method.

Dr Foley’s discoveries on shark antibodies follow his earlier work on malaria.

He says one of the key features of shark antibodies is they have a finger-like loop that can ‘bind’ into a cavity on a target protein, something he first came across in his malaria studies where it was ‘irreverently tagged as “giving malaria the finger”’.

‘Then, when we saw pictures of the shark antibody binding to a hole in the protein, we immediately thought of a situation like the flu,’ Dr Foley says. ‘That’s because this sub-cellular sabotage was similar to that involved in the development of the anti-influenza pharmaceutical Relenza.

‘It’s like covering up part of a keyhole. You don’t have to cover the whole keyhole; if you cover up part of it, you can’t get the key in.’
Australian history: neither fad nor fading

Will our next generation end up knowing enough about the land they live in and what it means to be Australian?

That question has become an early contender in public debate about the possible long-term impact of student course choices under the new demand-driven higher education system.

While he admits Australian history may no longer be the most popular area with some of today’s students, La Trobe Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tim Murray says: ‘It is important for us as a nation that students have a good grasp of our history’.

The challenge for educators, he adds, is to change any such perceptions by redesigning courses that make Australian history more relevant for students in the 21st century.

And La Trobe – which has one of the leading higher education history programs in the country – remains committed to achieving that. Despite recent concerns, first year numbers are holding up very well at the University.

Six hundred undergraduates are studying Australian history on five campuses this year. Professor Murrays says 350 of them are on the Melbourne campus and 250 at four regional campuses: in Bendigo, Albury-Wodonga, Shepparton and Mildura.
**Best first-year enrolments in four years**

Head of History and leading Aboriginal historian, Professor Richard Broome, says more than 330 of the 600 were first year students enrolled in two subjects, with eight Australian history subjects being taught at all levels.

‘In fact, in our first-year Australia subject on the Melbourne campus, student numbers are the best in four years: 193 compared with 172 last year. We have had to cancel only one subject this year due to lack of student interest.’

Professor Broome says Australian History enrolments at La Trobe are about twenty per cent of all history students. La Trobe’s Australian history and total history enrolments are among the largest, if not the largest, in the country.

He says this year’s Australian History offerings are Global Migration Stories; Australian Aboriginal History; Australian Environmental History (online); Art and the Environment; Australian Colonial History; Community History; Heritage Studies; and History of Australians at Work.

Under a new two-year rotating curriculum model about to be introduced, (of which more later) eight subjects will be available next year. These are still being finalised, but one will be ‘Australians at War’.

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**New curriculum for changing times**

Australian History has always been among La Trobe University’s strengths. Many of its staff are world-recognised researchers, teachers, commentators and authors in the field.

With some of its lectures a global ‘hit’ on iTunesU – peaking at 80,000 downloads in one day – and its pedigree as Australia’s only Pulitzer Prize winning History Program*, La Trobe is in the final stages of planning a whole new history curriculum starting from next year.

‘Our track record shows that La Trobe History has always been big on quality and innovation, and we are working hard to maintain that edge,’ says Professor Broome.

‘As part of our curriculum redesign we surveyed first and second year students. There is clear enthusiasm among students for the discipline, and for choice and diversity.’

The new curriculum is likely to be based on a series of six distinct pathways: studies of the ancient world; Europe, the Americas; Australia in the world, Empires; and Art History. The aim is to offer a series of rotating subjects over two years to provide students with subject diversity and consistency over their degree.

‘In any one year we will teach four subjects at first year and 16 per year at second and third year levels, with some core and key subjects available every year,’ says Professor Broome.

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**History in international context**

‘With the challenges of an increasingly crowded and globalised world – from the Euro meltdown and Wall Street sit-ins to ethnic and religious conflicts in many regions – a good grasp of history taught in an international context is more important than ever for Australia to successfully negotiate the years ahead,’ says Professor Broome.

‘Employers in both government and private enterprise tell us this; and students say they want to learn their history in a new, relevant and more coherent way.’

All up, La Trobe University’s History Program is one of the largest in Australia. It has more than 3,100 students on five campuses this year – a figure that has remained fairly constant for the last five years.

Students can come to grips with the background to many of the world’s major problem spots and emerging nations, including Brazil, Africa and the Pacific region. And students from many other academic areas, including Business,
International Relations and Health Sciences, also take history subjects as electives.

'Students like the wide range of choices offered at La Trobe. And they like to work closely with our researchers, many of whom are leaders in their field, because they can see the inherent interest and relevance of what they are doing,' says Professor Broome.

Some key facts about La Trobe History

- La Trobe History's award-winning researchers, authors, and commentators include Australian historians Professors Marilyn Lake and Richard Broome, Associate Professor Katie Holmes and Drs Tracey Banivanua Mar, Robert Kenny and Clare Wright; Europe specialist Dr Stefan Auer; Americanists Professors Tim Minchin and Diane Kirkby and Dr Claudia Haake; and young scholars Drs Roland Burke and Ian Coller. Key associates include Emeritus Professors David Day, Alan Frost and Inga Clendinnen; and Drs Patrick Wolfe and John Hirst.

- La Trobe academics featured in the Australian History iTunesU Podcast Collection include Professor and Dean Tim Murray, Professor Chris Mackie, Professor Marilyn Lake, Professor Richard Broome and Dr Marina Larsson.

- La Trobe historians played a key role in pioneering a new way of writing history, described as 'ethnographic' or 'social' history. This led to a more exciting approach to teaching about the past and, to this day, the only Pulitzer Prize (the late Professor Rhys Isaac, 1983) ever awarded in Australia for work in the discipline.

Australian Aboriginal History

Now available to the world on iTunesU

'Australian Aboriginal History', a second year subject, has been launched as an iTunes U Course, offering lectures and readings every week while it is taught during first semester.

'Aboriginal-settler relations from the outset were one of the most difficult things both sides faced in their daily lives, and today little has altered,' says subject co-ordinator Professor Richard Broome.

'This subject explores how relations unfolded in several frontier case studies – early NSW and the Northern Territory in more recent times. It helps to explain the basis of relations today'.

The subject is being taught from the Melbourne campus, and is also offered to regional students at Mildura and Shepparton.

iTunes U Courses is a new delivery method from Apple Corporation which allows a worldwide audience to access freely available course teaching material through iTunes at the same time as students, regardless of location or enrolment.

La Trobe University is the first Australian university to provide content on iTunes U courses, joining a community consisting of universities such as Stanford, Oxford University and Yale University.

Links:

For full details about Australian History Courses at La Trobe click here

Australian Aboriginal History course on iTunes U

Tagged: Australian history, historical studies, history curriculum, La Trobe University, Richard Broome, Tim Murray

Posted in: Autumn Issue 2012, History, Humanities and Social Sciences, News, Teaching

Posted on March 1, 2012
You're at work and there is a power blackout. So your company's electrical grid taps into your car batteries. Along with roof-top solar panels and the energy stored in hundreds of your colleagues’ vehicles, this keeps the wheels of industry turning.

It’s a scenario that one day may not only overcome temporary power interruptions, but manage our dwindling energy supplies and reduce greenhouse gas emissions throughout the industrialised world.

Joint Research and Development links between La Trobe University and Indian electric vehicle manufacturer Mahindra Reva – one of the first companies to introduce electric vehicles worldwide – are now working to turn that goal into global reality.

The project, one of two new La Trobe R&D links with India, was announced by Premier Ted Baillieu while leading a Victorian trade mission to India.

La Trobe University Vice-Chancellor, Professor John Dewar, who accompanied the Premier, said the advanced energy management system will be developed and trialled by Mahindra Reva at its new electric vehicle plant in Bangalore.

The plant’s power supply includes solar panels with a back-up diesel generator, which the company would eventually like to replace by ‘harvesting’ energy from hundreds of company and employees cars in their car park.

Trialled on La Trobe’s Melbourne campus

The project is based on cutting-edge Information and Communications Technology (ICT) developed by La Trobe’s Centre for Technology Infusion and trialled in buildings on the Melbourne campus since 2008.

The La Trobe system is already used for domestic applications following its successful installation by the University, CSIRO and commercial builders in Australia’s first Zero Emission House last year.
Among other features, it enables electric vehicles to be plugged into the home grid, drawing down car battery power, for example during the evening peak, and then, overnight when power is cheaper, recharging the car’s battery for the morning.

Mr Chetan Maini, founder and Chief of Technology and Strategy at Mahindra Reva, said his company pursues a low-energy manufacturing process where not only cars are emissions free, but the way they are made is also highly energy efficient.

‘This collaboration will make future manufacturing plants a benchmark in energy management,’ Mr Maini said.

Developing ‘Intelligent Transport Systems’

The second La Trobe University R&D agreement in India involves collaborating with leading multinational company, HCL Technologies, on research and development of Intelligent Transport Systems.

This project deals with problems associated with traffic and infrastructure management, security, enhanced driver safety and logistics support for transport operations.

Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor Professor John Rosenberg, who was in India with Vice-Chancellor Dewar, said both projects were exciting developments for Victoria’s research and high-tech development sector in general, and the University in particular, by recognising La Trobe’s key role in such leading-edge ICT research.

‘They are based on systems developed by staff and higher degree students at La Trobe’s Centre for Technology Infusion led by Professor Jugdutt (Jack) Singh on our Melbourne campus,’ he said.

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor Tim Brown, explained that the HCL transport project is based on technology now being trialled in Victoria, part of a $5.5m rail crossing safety project involving 100 vehicles fitted with special wireless communications systems.

La Trobe Centre for Technology Infusion's Professor Singh

Safety – and potential export markets

Expected outcomes include improved traffic flow for commuters, fewer road accidents, better transport information for city planners, increased productivity for business, and reductions in fuel consumption and carbon emissions.

‘It promises to be of great benefit not only for driving safety and traffic management, but has the potential of creating export markets for Australian innovation,’ Professor Brown said.

HCL Technologies will also provide opportunities for students to undertake internships on community and government ICT projects. The company will recruit graduates from La Trobe who, after completion of training, will be allocated to projects in Victoria, or at other HCL locations globally.

Bringing together universities and industry

Victorian Minister for Technology, Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips, welcomed the signing of the MoU and said the collaboration was important in bringing together academia and industry.

He said Victoria’s ICT industry, generating around A$29 billion in revenue and A$2.45 billion in exports annually, leads the way as an internationally competitive source of innovative products and services, and provides many opportunities for partnerships and investment.

While in India, La Trobe University also signed a higher education exchange and co-operation agreement for research and teaching with the Birla Institute of Technology and Science, in Pilani, Rajasthan.
Study names Australia’s most threatened landscapes

‘Act early, act local’ to avoid ecological ‘tipping point’

Two La Trobe University scientists are part of a national effort that has helped identify Australia’s ten most highly-threatened environments.

A campaign based on this work, launched today, is urging Australians to ‘act early, act local’ to save large tracts of important landscape before they reach ecological ‘tipping point’.

The scientists are Dr Ben Gawne, Director of the Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre, a specialist on aquatic ecosystems, and Dr Ewen Silvester, Deputy Head of Environmental Management and Ecology and Director of the Research Centre for Applied Alpine Ecology.

Both are based on the Albury-Wodonga campus.

They are part of a team of 26 leading ecologists from Australia’s Innovative Research Universities whose work ‘The 10 Australian ecosystems most vulnerable to tipping points’ has just been published in the international journal ‘Biological Conservation’.

‘In ecological terms,’ says Dr Gawne, ‘a tipping point is a threshold beyond which an ecosystem may change rapidly and irreversibly into alien landscape, often dominated by introduced or unfamiliar species.

‘It often happens quite fast, for example when a wetland is highly fragmented by agriculture and other human activities, or damaged coral reefs become infested by seaweeds, or a rainforest is destroyed by fire.

‘When this occurs, it’s very difficult – if not impossible – to restore the original natural system,’ he says.

Landscapes our grandchildren may never see

‘It means that, unless we act with speed and decision, there are Australian landscapes today which our grandchildren will never get to see.’

Dr Gawne says the wetlands and floodplains of the Murray-Darling Basin are very vulnerable to
tipping points. Apart from agriculture and other human activities, they face increased stresses from long periods of drought, invading plants and fish.

They also depend on a relatively small number of ‘framework species’, such as river red gums, many of which are struggling to survive.

The report notes: ‘The southern half of the Basin is at risk of further drying under climate change. We consider the most threatened areas, however, are those with acid-sulphate soils – which can send flushes of toxic water along creeks and rivers. The Coorong is also at high risk of tipping permanently to a highly saline state.’

Some of the remedies advocated include reconnecting the river to natural bushland and floodplains, reducing land clearance, allocating more water for natural ecosystems and river flow, removing redundant weirs, and installing fish ladders on those that remain.

Dr Silvester says mountain ecosystems are threatened by global warming, fire and various human impacts. Those of the Great Dividing Range, Tasmania and southwest WA are especially vulnerable to climate change which may bring warmer and drier conditions, loss of snow cover, more fires and invasive pests.

**Mountain ecosystem under greatest threat**

The report says mountain animals will be under growing threat as their habitats shrink and fragment and competition from outside animals increases. Tipping points will be reached here sooner than almost anywhere else.

Proposed countermeasures include re-establishing ‘corridors’ to link forest remnants, conserving threatened habitats as long as possible, relocating nature reserves to increase their resilience to global warming, and if possible, relocating some declining species to cooler areas.

Drs Gawne and Silvester say while some of these changes are global – many are also local – and can be mitigated by well-planned local action.

**The study lists the ten landscapes, and the threats they face, in the following order:**

- Mountain ecosystems: threatened by global warming, fire and human impacts.
- Tropical savannas: invasive plants and animals, huge bushfires, extreme events.
- Coastal mangroves and wetlands: sea-level rise, human development and climate change.
- Coral reefs: ocean warming, ocean acidification, overfishing, coastal runoff.
- Dry rainforests: changing fire regimes, hotter temperatures, water regime changes.
- Murray-Darling Basin: overexploitation, water regime changes, salinisation.
- Southwest forests and sand plains: water regime changes, hotter conditions, extreme events.
- Offshore islands: invasive plants and animals, extreme events, ocean changes.
- Temperate eucalypt forests: hotter temperatures and changes in fire and water regimes.
- Mangroves and salt marshes: hotter temperatures, rising sea-levels, water regime changes.

More details: Protecting Australia’s most endangered landscapes

**Photo top of page:** Arthur Mostead, Murray-Darling Basin Commission

**Tagged:** Ben Gawne, biological conservation, ecological ‘tipping point’, Ecology, Environment, Ewen Silvester, Innovative Research Universities, IRU, La Trobe University

**Posted in:** Environment, News, Research
Same-sex parents – what happens after separation?

Sociologist Luke Gahan has began a groundbreaking study exploring the experiences of same-sex parents who have children together and later break up.

‘Same-sex parents face many unique challenges both on their way to parenthood and then once they have their children,’ says PhD candidate Mr Gahan.

‘Same-sex couples and parents are not immune from separation, yet so often their unique experiences are not heard or understood.’

While there is much focus on same-sex relationship recognition and equal parenting rights, he says little time is spent looking at the issues faced by same-sex parents and their families after their relationship comes to an end.

‘Campaigns for same-sex marriage and parenting rights often focus on happy couple stories in their effort to show same-sex relationships to be worthy of marriage or having children.

‘Subsequently separated parents may feel stigmatised and embarrassed and refrain from sharing their unique experiences,’ says Mr Gahan, from La Trobe’s Bouverie Centre.

Are the legal processes working?

Same-sex parents have historically not had equal recognition as separated co-parents, and in some instances they still do not. ‘Legal changes have ensured same-sex couples are treated in a similar way to heterosexual couples in the family court system. Yet there has been no research on whether these legal processes are working for, or appropriate for, same-sex couples.

‘This is important because even in places where laws protect both same-sex parents, culture and attitudes often lag behind – leaving some same-sex parents vulnerable or unrecognised as a parent before and after separation,’ says Mr Gahan.

The diversity of same-sex parented families has been highlighted through modern television dramas like ‘Brothers and Sisters’ or ‘Greys Anatomy’, as well as the hit comedy ‘Modern Family’. The diversity of same-sex families can make separation even more complex.

Co-parenting over many households

‘Some families begin with two mums and two dads. If either of these couples break up, the entire family unit experiences separation. Co-parenting may be end up being shared over three or four households and parents may form new relationships potentially adding more parents into the family,’ says Mr Gahan.

Researchers are interested in experiences of same-sex parents after separation and hope to give a voice to a group of people often left feeling marginalised. Participants must have had at least one child while within a same-sex relationship which has now ended. They do not necessarily have to still be parenting or have custody of their child.□
Mick Malthouse takes up mentoring and leadership role

La Trobe journalism and sports management students were the first to meet Mick Malthouse today at the inauguration of his role as the University’s first Vice-Chancellor’s Fellow.

The former Collingwood coach has joined La Trobe on a three-year part-time appointment to support Vice-Chancellor John Dewar in areas such as student aspiration and leadership, strengthening schools in La Trobe’s catchment areas and supporting community learning opportunities.

He aims to help raise education aspirations of school students who have had little previous exposure to the benefits of higher education, and also boost higher education participation by Indigenous students.

As a leader and mentor, Mr Malthouse will also work closely with staff, students and the community on sports development as well as provide practical support for academic programs including sports journalism, sports management, physiotherapy and podiatry.

He will help mentor individual students, work with campus residential colleges and contribute to staff leadership, team-building and personal development.

Vice-Chancellor, Professor John Dewar, says Mr Malthouse brings with him ‘extraordinary motivational ability based on inspirational teamwork’.

Life coach

‘La Trobe has many programs that support increased access to higher education through partnerships with schools, sports clubs, and leadership initiatives in Melbourne’s north and among our regional communities. He will be able to make a valuable contribution to these.'
Throughout his coaching career, he has learnt life lessons that transcend the sports field, that apply to any person chasing a dream, pursuing their goals or embarking on challenging endeavours.

La Trobe University, says Professor Dewar, is about established excellence in teaching and research in many fields, for example biosciences and food security at the new $288m AgriBio centre and $94m Institute of Molecular Science (LIMS).

**Opportunities for all**

‘But this University is also about providing educational opportunities for people from all walks of life, and it has done so since its inception.

‘For more than 40 years La Trobe has made a difference to many people’s lives, resulting in amazing career outcomes for students from a wide range of backgrounds.

‘So Mick Malthouse’s new role fits perfectly with that objective, encouraging students from all backgrounds to consider a university education. We will work together as peers in the pursuit of knowledge through practice,’ says Professor Dewar.

After 40 years experience in professional football, Mr Malthouse says he made the move to La Trobe because he was seeking new directions and wanted to put his practical expertise to good use.

**New learning methods**

‘It is inspiring that the University is taking a chance on new learning methods by giving their students a more practical education.

‘I’m honoured to be a part of such a ground breaking program and that my lessons from life on the football field can be used to make a difference.

‘Individual, organizational and community leadership has been core to my professional life and is also a major part of the success of students and local communities,’ says Mr Malthouse.

‘La Trobe University is proactively supporting local leadership development, and I am proud to be at the heart of championing this and supporting La Trobe students to be the best that they can be,’ he says.

‘The University has a fantastic track record and is one of the strongest in Australia. I am proud to be associated with La Trobe.’

Practical pointers for students based on life experience

- Tagged: higher education, John Dewar, La Trobe University, Mick Malthouse, practical skills, Vice-Chancellor's Fellow
- Posted in: News, People, Sport, University
- Posted on February 14, 2012
Women’s toilets in Australia – the real story

La Trobe University’s Dr Jan Schapper recently completed a study into signage and writing on women’s toilets in Australia. The research, published in the international journal, ‘Gender, Place and Culture’, has generated more heat than light in some media reports. She writes:

Many European toilets are shared by men and women. Those countries tend to have ‘toilets’, not ‘the men’s’ or ‘the ladies’. In many parts of Asia, Africa, and to some extent in southern Europe, squat toilets are part of the culture, with various toileting practices prescribed by custom and religion.

Australia is now an extremely multicultural nation. We value the tourist dollar and invite international students to join us, creating greater understanding and links between nations of the world – and a substantial boost to the national economy and tax base.

Insights into social practices

People go to the toilet many times a day, like we go shopping, to the library, cinemas, to school, catch public transport, and so on. Extremely useful knowledge has been gained about activity at all these places over the years, revealing much about the world we live in. Toilets, too, can give us insights into broader social practices, for example those related to organisational, cultural and gender tensions.

For example, my study found that much signage in women’s toilets is racist and many foreign students are uncomfortable and confused with how western toilets work. Cultural prejudices that no longer find voice elsewhere can be expressed in our official prescriptions of toilet practices.

Graffiti on toilet walls, while this was not the immediate thrust of my study, has in the past also told us many things about attitudes and responses to the world we live in. Today, with an increasing emphasis on uncluttered and hygienic physical space, much of that comment has moved into social media, such as twitter and face book, and on-line media comment.

Dr Schapper, a specialist in ethics and corporate social responsibility, is a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Business, Economics and Law. This item was first published in The Conversation.

Can we please try and NOT throw toilet paper on the floor? 
- thanks

Posted on February 10, 2012
New study finds college life boosts academic success

University students can greatly improve their chance of getting top marks, decrease their risks of failing subjects – and boost their prospects of continuing through to graduation...

The secret to such academic success is residential college life, according to a new La Trobe University study.

In research just published in the journal ‘Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning’ Laura Burge found that students living in colleges, particularly those in first-year, outperformed the wider university student body.

‘They achieved 18 per cent more “A”s and 21 per cent more “B”s. Even more significant is the comparative fail rate, with 49 per cent of residential students achieving fewer fail marks,’ she says.

Ms Burge is Acting Co-ordinator of ‘Residential Life’ at La Trobe. She says another significant benefit is a lower attrition rate for those students living in colleges: 13 to 17 per cent fewer dropped out between 2008 and 2010.

The La Trobe research is particularly significant in the context of Federal Government policy to increase opportunities for non-traditional higher education students – those from rural, Indigenous, first generation or low socio-economic backgrounds.

As universities begin their first year under a new deregulated admission system, Ms Burge says the research highlights the importance of ‘going beyond just providing increased access to higher education’. ‘It is simply not enough to give low-income students access to our universities and colleges,’ she says.

Residential students had and eighteen per cent better chance of getting “A”s
Improving results for under-represented groups

'We also need to ensure the availability and quality of continuing support programs to enable their success. The study shows there are lessons to be learnt about the importance of college life for improving educational outcomes for under-represented groups in society.

Laura Burge: potential to expand success of La Trobe model

‘Our experience is that, given the opportunity and appropriate structures and guidance, such students have the ability to become academic high-achievers, skilled leaders, communicators and talented future employees,’ says Ms Burge.

La Trobe is a multi-campus university serving regional communities. Some 17.7 per cent of students come from a low socio-economic background and 33.6 per cent from rural and remote areas.

Out of the 1,200 undergraduate students who live in La Trobe college style accommodation, 75 per cent have a rural or regional background.

Ms Burge says there is considerable potential to expand the success of the La Trobe residential services model into the wider university community. Probably the best way, she says, is to duplicate selected residential services initiatives and offer them on a larger scale to all university students.

‘The other way is to build stronger links with academic areas and the general student population, providing them with the option of joining select residential services activities and programs.’

The La Trobe Residential Services model

The La Trobe University Residential Services model centres on the unique role students themselves can play in enhancing their own and others’ development and in creating an equally important learning environment outside the university classroom.

It comprises four key areas: pastoral care & welfare; academic mentoring & support; community & outreach (which extends student volunteer activities into Asia, Africa and the Pacific); and student leadership. For example, the pastoral care network has a team of 150 senior student leaders.

‘It is now widely accepted that a considerable amount of student learning and development takes place outside traditional academic contexts like the lecture theatre, tutorial room or laboratory,’ says Ms Burge.

‘The things that prepare students for employment in an increasingly globalised world are not only knowledge gained from their degree but, perhaps more importantly, the essential skills developed alongside, through internships, work experience, community and volunteer work, or everyday peer-to-peer interaction and social integration.’

Read the full report here

Tagged: academic success, college life, La Trobe University, residential services

Posted in: News, Research, Teaching

Posted on January 31, 2012
Look here! Research toward earlier autism diagnosis

Measuring how a baby's brain reacts to shifts in eye contact might help predict the development of autism symptoms from as young as six months, a new study has found.

La Trobe University psychologist Dr Kristelle Hudry, from the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre on the Melbourne campus, is one of the key researchers in the international study which was released today.

She says the results of the study, 'Infant neural sensitivity to dynamic eye gaze is associated with later emerging autism', have been published in the January 26th issue of the journal 'Current Biology'.

'These results are important because early diagnosis can secure the best possible outcome for individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), through early access to intervention,' says Dr Hudry. They also open up new avenues for scientists to carry out further research, to help us better understand the condition.

While behaviours characteristic of autism emerge over the first few years of life, a firm diagnosis using existing methods can usually only be made after the age of two.

Very little known about early symptoms

In reality, however, diagnosis often doesn’t happen until much later, says Dr Hudry, so most autism research has concentrated on children older than two years, which means we still know very little about the very earliest symptoms and signs.

In response to this, La Trobe’s Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre has opened an Early Diagnostic Clinic with the support of the RE Ross Trust.
A lecturer in developmental psychology, Dr Hudry specialises in ASD in infants and toddlers. She is particularly interested in their language and communication development, and in patterns of interaction between parents and their young children.

Dr Hudry returned to Australia recently after five years in London, working in this area of research.

**Close links with British teams**

She maintains close research links with Britain’s Preschool Autism Communication Trial team, who published the results of a landmark early intervention trial in 2010, and with the British Autism Study of Infant Siblings team who are behind the current findings.

Dr Hudry and her British colleagues studied six- to ten-month-old babies who were at risk of developing autism because they had a sibling with the condition.

The researchers placed sensors on the babies’ scalps to register their brain activity while they viewed videos of faces that switched from looking at them to looking away, or vice versa.

Releasing the study’s report in the UK last week, Chief Investigator Professor Mark Johnson from Birkbeck College at the University of London, said:

‘Our findings demonstrate for the first time that direct measures of brain functioning during the first year of life associate with a later diagnosis of autism – well before the emergence of behavioural symptoms’.

**Processing social information in a different way**

The human brain shows characteristic patterns of activity in response to eye contact with other people, he explained, and it is well known that older children diagnosed with autism have unusual patterns of eye contact, and atypical brain responses to social interactions with others.

‘The new study reveals that the brains of young infants who will go on to develop autism already process social information in a different way. At this age, no behavioural signs of autism are yet evident, and so measurements of brain function may be a more sensitive indicator of risk,’ Professor Johnson said.

However, he added that the method would need to be further refined before forming the basis of a predictor accurate enough for clinical use.

The study involved researchers at the University of London, Kings College London, and the University of Cambridge in the UK, McGill University in Canada, and the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC) at La Trobe University, Australia. It was funded by the UK Medical Research Council and the BASIS funding consortium led by Autistica.

Dr Hudry is now doing a similar study in Australia, looking at the early development of infants at high-risk for autism, based on having an older sibling with a diagnosis. The project is a collaboration between the Olga Tennison Centre and Swinburne University’s Babylab.

**Read the full paper here**

See also: [La Trobe role in world-first study of a new test that could revolutionise Fragile X diagnosis’](#)
La Trobe has become the first Australian university on iTunes to release ‘iTunes U courses’ – a new delivery method from Apple Corporation which allows a worldwide audience free access to course teaching material at the same time as students, regardless of location or enrolment.

The development coincides with La Trobe’s celebration of its three millionth podcast downloaded from iTunes U in more than 150 countries.

Since its launch in October 2009, ‘La Trobe University on iTunes U’ has established itself as an important member of the iTunes U community, with more than 600 podcasts and videos covering the spread of the University’s wealth of knowledge.

The first two La Trobe courses under the new delivery method, which was announced by Apple on Friday 20 January, are ‘History of Children’s Literature’ and ‘The European Union in the New Millennium’. More will follow as the semester progresses.

**Right time to learn about Europe**

Dr Stefan Auer, who teaches about the European Union, is excited at the prospect of a huge worldwide audience for his courses.

‘This is an especially relevant time to study contemporary European politics and I am thrilled about this new platform, which we can use to reach students well beyond our campus. The EU is global, and so is our subject!’

Since 2009 La Trobe University has been providing a wide range of free material including lectures, interviews, and videos, reaching thousands of new listeners and potential students on a daily basis.
Many notable interviewees

Notable interviews include former Prime Minister of Australia Malcolm Fraser, Nobel Prize winner in medicine Professor Harald zur Hausen, human rights and refugee advocate Julian Burnside QC, former Australian of the Year Professor Patrick McGorry, and many respected La Trobe academics.

‘I’m delighted that La Trobe University continues to be at the forefront of developments in online digital education,’ says Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor John Rosenberg.

‘iTunes U courses bring all relevant material together to make it simple for anyone who wants to study a subject, however complex or challenging it might be.

‘This is an idea that fits perfectly with La Trobe’s founding philosophy to make education available to everyone,’ says Professor Rosenberg.

Look at La Trobe University on iTunes U

Tagged: EU European Union, iTunes U courses, La Trobe University, podcasts, Stefan Auer

Posted in: Humanities and Social Sciences, International, News, Teaching

Posted on January 27, 2012
Progress in better detection of child development problems

Two La Trobe University neuroscientists, Dr Danuta Loesch and Professor Glynda Kinsella, have played an important role in a world-first study of a new test that could revolutionise Fragile X diagnosis, paving the way for screening new-born children for this troubling developmental disability.

The innovative test – developed at the Royal Melbourne Hospital’s Murdoch Childrens Research Institute by Dr David Godler and Dr Howard Slater in collaboration with Dr Loesch – was first reported in the journal Human Molecular Genetics in 2010.

A new study involving Dr Loesch and Professor Kinsella has now been published in the latest edition Clinical Chemistry which provides strong evidence that this test can detect both males and females affected with the Fragile X Syndrome.

‘The results,’ says Dr Loesch, ‘have created the sound basis for early application of this test for population screening, which has the potential to improve the quality of life for thousands of patients and their families, through earlier intervention and by providing information about this familial condition for better management and reproductive choices.’

She says this is particularly important for Fragile X diagnosis in girls for whom existing tests are complicated and expensive.

Fragile X Syndrome, a disorder caused by a faulty genetic ‘switch’ on the X chromosome, is the most common known cause of inherited developmental disability world-wide.

It is associated with many physical and behavioural problems including autism, where early diagnosis and intervention is particularly important. However, she says, while Fragile X is
one of many genetic conditions associated with autism, the cause cannot be identified for the majority of children diagnosed with autism disorder.

Dr Loesch is a world authority on genetic research into Fragile X Syndrome. She has worked at La Trobe on many manifestations of the condition – from young children to the elderly – since the mid 1980s after relocating her research from Poland to Australia.

**Discovery of gene mutation**

In 1991 she helped discover that a mutation on a gene, called FMR1, was responsible for Fragile X Syndrome. This mutation, says Dr Loesch, is caused by expansion of trinucleotide (CGG) repeats. Nucleotides are the building blocks of DNA.

Fragile X research, says Dr Loesch, uses many cutting-edge and cross-disciplinary methods to learn about the nature and origin of developmental and behavioural conditions, including autism and attention-hyperactivity.

This has involved a series of genotype-phenotype relationship studies (how genes affect physical and mental condition), which formed part of the assessment of the Fragile X disorders test in the *Clinical Chemistry* paper.

La Trobe clinical neuropsychologist Professor Dr Glynda Kinsella has also collaborated with Dr Loesch in several earlier studies at the other end of the age spectrum, looking at brain behaviour effects of small Fragile X mutations, or ‘premutations’, which can cause problems in later life in nearly half of the people with this genetic anomaly. Another long-standing La Trobe collaborator in these studies was Dr Richard Huggins from the Department of Statistics.

**Better treatment and outcomes**

A former clinical neurologist turned geneticist, Dr Loesch is a regular co-researcher with leading Fragile X authority, Professor Randi Hagerman, Medical Director of the MIND Institute at the University of California, Davis.

Professor Hagerman is on the record as advising the US House of Representatives Subcommittee on Health and Environment that ‘Fragile X represents a portal through which we hope to view and treat a wide variety of other disorders of brain development and function. All children with autism...should be tested for Fragile X.’ The new diagnostic test could bring that goal a step closer.

In the official announcement of the research findings, President of the Fragile X Association of Australia, John Kelleher, said the test could lead to better treatment and improved outcomes

‘We may be able to test and treat affected individuals earlier on in their lives, giving them the best chance to live to their full potential and to save parents the anguish of spending years searching for a diagnosis.’

**Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre**

La Trobe University is also home to the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC) – Australia’s first centre dedicated to research into Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Headed by developmental psychologist Dr Cheryl Dissanayake, it helps advance knowledge of the nature and causes of Autism Spectrum Disorders, and develops evidence-based strategies for supporting individuals and families.

**See also:** ‘Look here! Research toward earlier autism diagnosis’

Tagged: autism, Danuta Loesch, Fragile X research, Fragile X test, Glynda Kinsella, La Trobe University, Psychological Science

Posted in: Biomedical Science, Research

Posted on January 25, 2012
Soil scientist honoured in ‘Landmark’ publication

A La Trobe University soil scientist has been honoured in the latest issue of a leading publication, the European Journal of Soil Science, for her enormous contribution to understanding how soils are formed and stabilised.

Dr Judith Tisdall was recognised for the ‘huge relevance’ of her work to modern farming techniques and many critical environmental issues such as water quality, pollution, carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas emissions.

The just-released February issue of the journal has chosen joint research carried out in the 1980s by Dr Tisdall and Professor Malcolm Oades from Adelaide to launch a ‘Landmark’ series of the most influential scientific papers that have appeared in its pages over the last sixty years.

Dr Tisdall, a senior lecturer in soil science, graduated from La Trobe with a Masters degree in Agricultural Science in 1977. She says the paper built on research in the two decades leading up to the 1980s when Australian farming land experienced massive wind and water erosion.

La Trobe Dean of Science, Technology and Engineering, Professor Brian McGaw, congratulated Dr Tisdall on the widespread impact of her research.

He said it was wonderful international recognition for Dr Tisdall personally, as well as for La Trobe agricultural science research and education at a time when the new $288 million AgriBio Centre was about to be opened on the University’s Melbourne campus.

Soil – one of our most precious resources
Paper spawned many new concepts

In its pre-amble, the *European Journal of Soil Science* says the paper by Tisdall and Oades was unique because it outlined the first model of how aggregate formation and stabilization in soils were affected by chemical, microbial, plant, animal and physical processes.

‘It emphasized the importance of biota – especially roots, bacteria, fungal hyphae and earthworms – and the materials they produced for aggregate dynamics in soils that are mainly stabilized by organic matter.

‘These concepts embody a holistic perspective of aggregation that is one of the most significant theoretical advances of the last fifty years towards our understanding of the interactions between aggregates and soil organic matter dynamics.

‘The seminal paper by Tisdall and Oades ... spawned many new concepts related to aggregation and soil structure,’ the journal concluded. ‘We are confident (the work) will continue to inspire future scientists to study soil – one of our most precious resources.’

Dr Tisdall says the scientific paper was published in Chinese, in *Advances of Soil Science*, Nanjing, in 1995.

It has been quoted in research on topics such as carbon sequestration, greenhouse emissions, mathematical modelling of organic matter, dynamics of soil aggregation, food webs, indicators of soil quality and sustainable land use.

**Tagged:** agricultural science, European Journal of Soil Science, Judith Tisdall, La Trobe University, soil science

**Posted in:** Environment, People, Science

**Posted on January 19, 2012**
La Trobe tops growth in demand for university places

La Trobe University has experienced the greatest growth in first preference applicants of any university in the State over the last three years.

This is revealed in tertiary applications and offers data published last night by the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC).

The three-year period represents the time since the Commonwealth Government first signalled it would remove caps on undergraduate places, a policy which finally came into effect this year.

The VTAC figures show that between 2009 and 2012 La Trobe University’s first preference applications have risen by 28 per cent – from 6,846 to 8,793, compared with a State-wide average rise of only nine per cent.

During that time the University has also increased the number of places in its early and main round offers, from 6,345 to 8,555 – an increase of 35 per cent. This compares with an overall increase of offers by all Victorian universities of 22 per cent.

‘It’s an excellent and extremely pleasing result, in keeping with La Trobe University’s mission to increase higher education opportunities in Melbourne and throughout the State through our network of regional campuses,’ says Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor John Rosenberg.

Strong growth in Health and Education

He says very significant growth has taken place in Health Sciences and Education courses in particular over the past three years.

Allied Health courses are up 79 per cent. These include clinical areas like Audiology, Prosthetics and Orthotics, as well as Physiotherapy,
Occupational Therapy, Dietetic Exercise, Physiology, Speech Pathology, and Paramedic Practice which is based at the Bendigo campus.

Teacher Education courses on all campuses were up 179 per cent, from 265 offers in 2009 to 739 this year.

‘One reason for the dramatic growth in teacher education programs is that we have introduced primary and secondary teaching undergraduate programs at the Melbourne campus,’ Professor Rosenberg says.

And offers in Law courses are up 73 per cent – from 179 in 2009 to 309 this year. The University has also experienced double-digit growth at all regional campuses: Bendigo, Albury-Wodonga, Shepparton and Mildura.

**Double-figure increase in regions**

While the Melbourne campus has had the greatest increase in offers over the last three years – 36 per cent (from 4,538 to 6,154) – offers at Bendigo have risen 33 per cent (1,347 to 1,785).

Bendigo Campus Director, Dr Andrew Skewes, says local expansion plans mean that student numbers there are expected to exceed the milestone of 5,000 for the first time this year.

Albury-Wodonga offers have increased by 32 per cent (241 to 317) while the figure in Mildura was 12 per cent (151 to 169). At Shepparton, where a new campus building was completed last year, the increase was 79 per cent (68 to 122 offers).

**Welcoming students to La Trobe University**
John Dewar takes up post as new Vice-Chancellor

Professor John Dewar has taken up his post as La Trobe University’s sixth Vice-Chancellor.

In a message to staff, the former University of Melbourne Provost says his goal is to ensure that La Trobe is ‘recognised as the natural alternative to Victoria’s two Group of Eight universities, with a unique appeal other universities can’t offer’.

‘I want to see La Trobe placed in the top dozen universities nationally on all standard measures of quality and excellence. We should aim to be well on the way to achieving these objectives in time for the University’s 50th birthday in 2017,’ he adds.

La Trobe’s founding purpose, he says, was to be a nationally and internationally significant teaching and research university providing new educational opportunities in Melbourne’s north and in regional Victoria.

‘Over the past 45 years we have fulfilled that role with distinction, daring and flair, with the result that La Trobe staff are often at the forefront of major scientific and academic breakthroughs, and leading participants in the national conversation. Our alumni are making a difference to the nation and the world.’

In her welcoming comments, the Chancellor, Adrienne E Clarke AC, said ‘Professor Dewar joins the University at a time of critical change and challenge in the Australian higher education system.

‘His leadership will build on the foundations established by the former Vice Chancellor Professor Paul Johnson, which has included revitalising the Bundoora and Bendigo campuses and identifying the University’s strategic priorities,’ Professor Clarke said.

Reaching out to communities

Professor Dewar came to Australia 15 years ago from Oxford and has held senior positions at Griffith University and the University of Melbourne. In his inaugural La Trobe podcast
with media officer Matt Smith, he spoke about his passionate belief in the transformative power of education.

'A key part of La Trobe’s mission is to reach out to communities that traditionally have not been able to participate in higher education. I experienced this in my own life,’ he says.

'I’d been in a state school which traditionally never sent anyone to Oxford or Cambridge. I was lucky enough to get in to study law at Oxford and benefited hugely from it. My life changed as a result. So for me, that aspect of the La Trobe mission is incredibly important and very powerful.

He said he moved to Queensland’s Griffith University attracted by the challenge of helping shape a new law school in another part of the world and fell in love with Australia.

Commenting on his transition into university leadership, he says while he was ‘very happy’ as a legal researcher at Griffith, when the opportunity presented itself to become Dean of the Law School he accepted it and enjoyed the role.

‘Lead and influence – not just react

Professor Dewar sees the Vice-Chancellor’s role as setting the strategic agenda and direction for the University and ‘managing a myriad of external relationships’.

Deregulation of higher education, which starts this year, is ‘just one of a range of things that are in flux at in the sector,’ he says.

‘This means we have to be much clearer than in the past about why students would come to study at La Trobe. So we need to sharpen both the image we present to the outside world (and) the value proposition we’re offering students.’

He stresses it is also important for vice-chancellors to ‘lead and influence public policy in this new environment’ and not just see themselves as ‘victims’, constantly reacting to it.

‘I’d want to play an important part in national debates about higher education policy and higher education funding, obviously with the interests of La Trobe and whatever strategic directions we set, very much at heart.

‘I wish the sector,’ he concludes, ‘would see its role in those terms more than simply reacting to what’s thrown at it by government or regulators.’

International reputation in family law

Professor Dewar is an internationally-known family law specialist and researcher. He is a graduate of the University of Oxford, where he was also a Fellow of Hertford College.

Speaking about his background, he said he ‘very nearly’ went to the Bar in London as a Family Law barrister, but decided it would be ‘more stimulating’ to follow his own interests ‘rather than what clients brought to you through the door’.

‘I haven’t regretted it. The most rewarding research I’ve done has been in the area of children who are caught up in divorce (to) understand better how the system produced its results and how it could be fixed when it wasn’t producing the right ones.’

Hear the full podcast interview

Tagged: John Dewar, La Trobe University, new appointment, Vice-Chancellor

Posted in: News, People

Posted on January 15, 2012
La Trobe University’s first Chancellor Sir Archibald Glenn OBE, a key founding figure of the University, died on 4 January at the age of 100.

One of Australia’s leading industrialists he was chief advisor to the State Government during the 1960s on all matters relating to the establishment of Victoria’s third University, later to become La Trobe University.

La Trobe University’s Chancellor, Adrienne E Clarke AC, said that Sir Archibald set the foundations for La Trobe to become one of Australia’s best internationally ranked universities.

‘He had the vision of establishing an outstanding and enduring institution dedicated to education and research. Importantly, from his experience in industry, he had the practical skills to make it happen.

‘He chaired the key committees during the planning and establishment phases of the University and then steered it through the challenging times of its first five years in his role as foundation Chancellor,’ she said.

Sir Archibald Glenn, left, with the then Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies.
Passion for education

An engineer and Managing Director of what was then ICI (now Orica) with a passionate interest in education, Sir Archibald was invited in 1964 by the then Premier, Sir Henry Bolte, to Chair Victoria ‘s 13-member Third Universities Committee.

His task included selecting the University’s site at Bundoora, preparing a detailed development program, planning and calling tenders for buildings, and formulating an administrative structure.

Sir Archibald also oversaw the appointment of the Academic Planning Board and the recruitment of key staff, including the foundation Vice-Chancellor, Dr David Myers, in preparation for enrolling the first cohort of students in 1967.

Imaginative vision

The citation for the award noted that ‘those of us who saw those undulating paddocks before the bulldozers got to work (on the original Melbourne campus at Bundoora) will realise the imaginative vision needed to foresee their development’ to the splendid university it eventually became.

Sir Archibald’s contributions to, and interest in, the University continued well after his retirement. In 1976 he gave ‘generously of his time’ to chair the appeal to mark the retirement of foundation Vice-Chancellor Myers.

This appeal provided a legacy which resulted in the construction of the University’s iconic outdoor Moat Theatre near the Union Hall, the Leonard French glass panels in the Undercroft area of the David Myers Building and a range of other significant acquisitions for the University’s Art Collection.

As recently as two years ago Sir Archibald visited the Melbourne campus where he met the then Vice-Chancellor, Paul Johnson and former Chancellor Mrs Sylvia Walton. And he was planning another visit in this, his centenary year before he succumbed to a brief illness.

Sir Archibald is survived by his second wife Sue, his son Gordon Glenn, and two daughters Elizabeth Howcroft and Fleur Glenn. He was predeceased by his daughter, the well known publisher and editor Di Gribble.

College carries his name

At La Trobe University’s formal dedication ceremony on 8 March that year Sir Archibald was installed as the University’s foundation Chancellor. The ceremony was presided over by the Governor of Victoria, Sir Rohan Delacombe, and also attended by the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies

And the Council’s first meetings were held in Glenn College, which had by then already been named in his honour.

La Trobe’s construction and growth overseen by Sir Archibald was phenomenal. By 1972 when he retired as Chancellor, La Trobe already had a student population of more than 4,000.

In 1981 LaTrobe University further honoured Sir Archibald, by recognising his contributions with the prestigious award of Doctor of the University, honoris causa.


Tagged: Foundation Chancellor, La Trobe University, obituary, Sir Archibald Glenn

Posted in: News, People

Posted on January 10, 2012
Australia-bound from Germany – by kayak

La Trobe University graduate in outdoor education Sandy Robson is a ‘boat person’ with a difference.

The adventurer recently completed the first leg – a challenging 4,000 km five months paddle from Germany to Cyprus – of what she plans as an epic solo kayak voyage all the way to Australia.

Her 50,000km route will retrace the historic kayak journey by German immigrant Oskar Speck, who arrived on Thursday Island in the 1930s.

The European section behind her, Ms Robson is now back in Australia, marshalling her resources for the rest of the voyage which she expects will take five years.

She began her trip along the Danube, Europe’s second longest river, from the German city of Ulm on May 14 this year, the 79th anniversary of the day Speck set out from his homeland.

She paddled down the scenic Danube and Vardar rivers, through Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Macedonia and Greece, crossing the Aegean Sea to Turkey. From there she followed the Mediterranean coast to Cyprus.

The European media was fascinated by her exploits, with many TV and press reports including one in the leading German newspaper Der Spiegel.

Sandy Robson on the Danube near Nueburg
Kayaking part of her studies

Interviewed recently by award-winning sports journalist Raelee Tuckerman from the *Bendigo Advertiser*, Ms Robson said that she expects the marathon expedition to take five years.

A veteran extreme kayaker herself, she describes Speck’s achievement as ‘one of the most amazing kayak journeys of all time’.

Now based in Perth, Ms Robson completed her graduate diploma in outdoor education at La Trobe University’s Bendigo campus in 1994. It was there that she first learnt to kayak as part of her studies.

‘Doing outdoor education affects your philosophy on life and what you value. I just like exploring new places,’ she told the *Bendigo Advertiser*.

Paddling around Australia

She recalls her time at La Trobe as ‘one of the best years of my life’, having engaged in bushwalking, rock climbing, skiing and paddling.

‘(It) is the best outdoor education course in Australia,’ she says. ‘When you get a student who has come out of La Trobe in Bendigo, you know you are getting someone with a good quality education.’

In 2007 Ms Robson embarked on a year-long trip, paddling as far as she could around Australia. Setting out from Queenscliff, she covered 6000km, undaunted despite being attacked by a crocodile on Cape York.

In 2009 Ms Robson was hired by La Trobe University to lead a 16-day sea kayaking expedition for students through the less treacherous waters of the Whitsundays.

Being a solo female paddler didn’t pose any major problems for her on her European odyssey: ‘You have to be careful, but I had more problems paddling around Australia than overseas,’ she told the *Bendigo Advertiser*.

Next stage more dangerous

The next stage of her extreme kayaking adventure will be more dangerous, travelling through some war-torn countries. Speck crossed from Cyprus to Syria, caught a bus to the Euphrates River, followed it to Iraq, ended up in the Persian Gulf, and then went on to Pakistan and India.

Yet, as she told the Raelee Tuckerman: she is not scared of pirates – but she is afraid of not having sufficient sponsorship!

You can read more here – and learn how to help support her journey

Raelee Tuckerman’s feature article from the *Bendigo Advertiser* appears here

Learn more about Oskar Speck’s incredible journey at the Australian National Maritime Museum in Sydney

Tagged: Bendigo campus, La Trobe University, marathon kayaking paddling, Oskar Speck, outdoor education, Sandy Robson, solo kayak voyage Germany Australia

Posted in: Alumni, Bendigo, People

Posted on December 21, 2011