CLIVE JAMES
Poetry matters

FINANCE
From Iraq with hope
Restoring Iraq’s financial infrastructure

The Head of La Trobe University’s Department of Economics and Finance, Professor Imad Moosa, is hopeful that Iraq will regain its banking and financial infrastructure and commercial stability.

Professor Moosa spent from early May to mid-July working in Baghdad, Kuwait and Washington as an adviser to the US Treasury and a member of a team of economists assembled to rebuild Iraq’s financial sector.

In Baghdad he stayed in the Presidential Palace on the banks of the Tigris River where the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) for Iraq had its headquarters.

‘Our job was to revive the Central Bank of Iraq and other financial institutions which had ceased operation by the end of the fighting,’ Professor Moosa said.

“We had to restore the physical as well as the financial structures as the major central bank building was destroyed by fire, while another building was flooded.’

Working from one of the bank’s training buildings, Professor Moosa and his colleagues appointed new local staff, including an Iraqi as Acting Governor and started a minimal level of banking operations, including the accounts of government institutions.

Professor Moosa negotiated with the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Arab Planning Institute (Kuwait) for training programs for bank officials. He wrote 14 papers for the CPA regarding ways of restoring the financial sector.

One included options for a new currency, discussing whether it should have fixed or flexible exchange rates. CPA Head, Paul Bremmer, announced recently that a new Iraqi currency was planned for later in 2003.

Professor Moosa said that war, sanctions, tyranny and neglect had led to hardships for the Iraqi people – but there were signs that things were improving. For example, there was a free press, with 120 newspapers now being published.

‘Above all there is brisk commercial activity,’ he added.

See also: ‘Collar that dollar’, page 9
The strange appetite of arsenic-eating bacteria – and the varied cognitive abilities of honey bees...

Research into these projects recently won two young La Trobe University scientists coveted places as finalists in this year’s ‘Fresh Science’ forum. They are microbiologist, Dr Joanne Santini, and vision scientist, Dr Adrian Dyer.

The ‘Fresh Science’ forum was a highlight of National Science Week held during August. ‘Fresh Science’ featured sixteen of Australia’s brightest young scientists chosen from 105 nominations nation-wide. They presented their work to the public at media conferences, in schools and at other special events throughout Australia.

Dr Santini leads a research group that is working out how to use bacteria with an appetite for arsenic to clean up contaminated wastewater on Australian and overseas mining sites and in drinking wells in Bangladesh and West Bengal, India.

She and her students are studying 13 rare bacteria that were isolated from gold mines in the Northern Territory and at Bendigo in Central Victoria. Dr Santini says her laboratory is the only one in the world that has isolated these bacteria.

‘If the iron guts of bacteria that can eat arsenic without dying could be harnessed to process this waste, less damage would be done to the environment and hopefully, when exposed to air and water, it becomes soluble and toxic to plants, animals and humans. Mining and boring rock for drinking wells can expose the arsenic and turn it into two toxic forms: arsenate and arsenite.

Arsenate is easy and safe to get rid of. But arsenite is not, and it is this form of arsenic Dr Santini hopes can be removed by the use of arsenite-eating bacteria on a mass scale. Dr Santini’s group has found the enzyme directly responsible for converting arsenite to arsenate. It is now working to identify the same enzyme in the other microbes and hunting for other proteins and genes involved in eating arsenite.

Dr Dyer’s research on the significance of bee vision deals with multi-spectral colour systems and how these operate in varied lighting conditions. He says bees can discriminate between far more colours than once thought, even various shades of blue if they take their time. They can also see ultraviolet colours.

Possible applications of his research, which was recently also published in the international science journal, Nature, range from improved greenhouse crop pollination, where most plastic coverings block ultraviolet light, to the development of robotic vision.

See ‘Bee prepared’, page 7
La Trobe University recently sponsored a visit to Mildura by celebrated writer and television performer Clive James.

James delivered the La Trobe University-Australian Book Review Annual Lecture on The Meaning of Recognition, and was a guest writer at the Mildura Writers’ Festival, of which La Trobe is also a sponsor. The festival featured other well-known writers including Les Murray, Coral Hull, Geoff Page, Lisa Gorton, Peter Goldsworthy, Paul Kane, James Griffin, Diane Fahey and Peter Rose.

Clive James, who has lived in Britain since 1962, was educated at Sydney University – where he was literary editor of Honi Soit and wrote for various other university magazines – and later at Cambridge University. Author of more than twenty books, he is particularly recognised for his autobiographies, essays and literary criticism and, in Australia, is a regular contributor to the Australian Book Review (ABR), of which La Trobe is chief sponsor.

At the lecture, James was awarded the annual Philip Hodgins Memorial Medal by Peter Goldsworthy, Chair of the Literature Board of the Australia Council. Hodgins, an accomplished poet from Shepparton in rural Victoria, died in 1995 in his mid-thirties, having lived much of his adult life with leukaemia.

Delivering the La Trobe-ABR Annual Lecture, James spoke on the difference between celebrity and recognition – noting, however, that he was ‘quite content to go on having my life distorted by my own small measure of celebrity.’

Celebrities, he said are recognised in the street, usually because of who they are, or who they are supposed to be. ‘To achieve recognition, however, is to be known for what you have done – and quite often the person who knows what you have done has no idea of what you look like. What I did to get this medal with Philip Hodgins’ name on it – this outstanding emblem of recognition in a country which has so spontaneously developed an outstanding literature – never made me famous while I was doing it.

‘As a poet, I spent two thirds of my career without even a reputation. Receiving this award, I feel like someone who has run the whole race invisible and popped into sight at the finishing line. To be recognised means to be reassured that you were right to pursue a course that had no immediate rewards and got in the road of activities that had.

‘Poetry is something I gave at least part of my life to. Now, to remind me that I had things easy, I have been honoured in the name of a man who gave his whole life to it, and his death as well. So the honour seems disproportionate; but I suppose an honour ought to.’

J ames praised Hodgins’ poetry. ‘Lavishly talented, Hodgins would have been a major poet whatever the circumstances,’ he added. James said the prognosis Hodgins received when he was twenty-four, that he would live only three more years, was short by almost a decade.

‘At one stage stuck in my study in London, a long way from the Australian poetic action, I first noticed him in a little poem about a dam in the country. The rim of the dam featured a pair of ibises: “Two ibises stand on the rim like taps”. Immediately, I reached the correct conclusion that Philip Hodgins had the talent to write anything.

‘It was the only correct conclusion I was to reach for some time,’ James said. ‘For a student of literature the advantage of living abroad is that he is less likely to have his judgment pre-empted by gossip.

‘The disadvantage is that there is always some gossip he ought to hear. Knowing about Hodgins’s possible death sentence earlier wouldn’t have altered my estimation of his qualities, but it would have drastically affected my appreciation of the way he brought them into action.’

James quoted excerpts from a number of Hodgins poems, for example ‘Question Time’:

What you knew began with wonder
On your father’s farm
And though it wouldn’t be that good again
You could have gone on so easily.

And then from one of the death poems, ‘Walking Through the Crop’, starts like a renunciation, said James:

It doesn’t matter any more
The way the wheat is shivering
On such a beautiful hot day
Late in the afternoon, in Spring.

‘But it does matter, or he wouldn’t be saying so. It’s the writerly paradox that lies at the base of all poetry about despair.’ James spoke at length about Hodgkin’s contribution as one of Australia’s great contemporary pastoral poets. ‘Les Murray was clearly right to salute Hodgins as a pastoral poet without equal,’ he said. ‘Hodgins defied, as Les Murray did, the inexorable expansion of the sealed surface’.

‘There is a connection between agrarian conservatism and pealed-eyed poetic realism (but) it has little to do with the traditional opposition of left and right. Agrarian poets, indeed, are likely to find an even bigger enemy on the right than on the left, because it is the capitalist imperative of industrial efficiency that denatures the country.’

The full text of Clive James’ lecture appears in the Sieptember issue of the Australian Book Review.
North America’s foremost expert on the indigenous languages of the USA and Canada, Professor Marianne Mithun, recently gave a public lecture at La Trobe University. A Special Visiting Fellow in the University’s Centre for Linguistic Typology, she delivered the lecture in English – one of the estimated 5,000 languages currently spoken on earth.

But not for long. According to language experts, including the Director of La Trobe’s Centre for Linguistic Typology, Professor Bob Dixon, who hosted her visit, between 50 and 90 per cent of these languages will be dead within a century.

Professor Mithun, from the University of California at Santa Barbara, spoke on the topic: Alternative worlds in peril – What do we lose when a language disappears?

She said the loss of linguistic diversity world-wide was cause for concern, not just among local communities and linguists but also among the thinking public. Each language was vital and irreplaceable and should be recognised as the cumulative product of the creative capacities of the human mind. It was built up piece by piece as generations of speakers made sense of their experiences and communicated on a daily basis.

‘Lose your language and you lose the intellectual heart of your culture – the ability to interpret your experience,’ she told the audience.

Professor Mithun has written more than 100 books, chapter, articles, and conference papers in her field. She is President of the International Association for Linguistic Typology, a member of the editorial board of the language journal, Studies in Language, and is involved in grammar and dictionary projects for many native American peoples.

Her consultancies include working with the consortium of the six Mohawk Nations, and of the Tuscarora Nation. Professor Mithun also trains native speakers of American Indian languages to become linguists for their own languages, and has published on literacy issues and on orthography planning.

La Trobe’s Vice-Chancellor, Professor Michael Osborne, conferred on Professor Mithun the Honorary degree, Doctorate of Letters, for her contributions to the advancement of linguistic knowledge, and our understanding of the cognitive language ability of the human race.

New sponsorship for Writers’ Festival

La Trobe University helped sponsor this year’s Melbourne Writers’ Festival which showcased more than 200 of Australia’s, and the world’s, best writers. Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences, Professor Roger Wales, said the new sponsorship formalised La Trobe’s strong relationship with the festival in previous years.

Members of the University involved in this year’s festival included Adjunct Professor Morag Fraser, Chairperson of the Festival Board of Directors. Reader in Politics, Dr Judith Brett, author of the recently released book, Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class – From Alfred Deakin to John Howard spoke on biography writing, the state of the nation, and George Orwell.

Professor of Politics, Robert Manne, launched his book Whitewash at the festival. He also appeared in a session with Patrick Dodson, Henry Reynolds and Malcolm Fraser on the Fabrication of Aboriginal History. A key debate between Professor Manne and the book’s author, Keith Windschuttle, was chaired by La Trobe historian, Dr John Hirst. Historian and author, Professor Marilyn Lake, led a session titled: ‘Can We Change the Past?’ which examined this most contentious of questions facing historians. Professor Lake is co-author of the prize-winning book Creating a Nation. Her most recent book is Faith: Faith Bandler, Gentle Activist.

Professor of Politics, Dennis Altman – following his recent controversial ‘La Trobe University Essay’ in the Australian Book Review on ‘Superstition and Idolatry’ – spoke at sessions on ‘God’ and ‘Transgressions’. Mr Richard Thompson, from Cinema Studies, contributed to a number of events on crime writing. A discussion about some of today’s best women crime writers was chaired by lecturer in Media Studies, Dr Sue Turnbull. Dr Turnbull also led various individual sessions featuring women crime writers.

La Trobe University also sponsors the Mildura Writers’ Festival, see previous page.
La Trobe Law goes regional

From next year La Trobe University will teach three five-year undergraduate combined law programs at its Bendigo campus.

This will make La Trobe the only university to offer on-campus law education outside the metropolitan areas of Melbourne and Geelong. The three La Trobe Law programs to be taught at Bendigo are the Bachelor of Laws degree combined with Arts, Business and Science.

Head of La Trobe Law, Dr Oliver Mendelsohn, said students will undertake the first two years of study at Bendigo and then complete the program at the main Melbourne campus at Bundoora.

“These five-year combined degrees provide an accredited professional qualification in law as well as a degree in arts, business or science,” he said.

“They are intended for school leavers and, initially, admission will predominantly be limited to commencing, rather than transferring students.”

While the general admission requirement is the satisfactory completion of the VCE or equivalent, Dr Mendelsohn said that as part of its regional mission, the University may adjust upwards the ENTER score of applicants from local schools.

He said the new course has already attracted considerable interest, with many enquiries at the recent Open Day at La Trobe University, Bendigo.

“...a lot of people are pleased that it will make studying law easier and more affordable for country students if they can spend the first two years studying locally while living at or near home.”

Law Institute Victoria President, Mr Bill O’Shea, has welcomed La Trobe University’s initiative as a way of grooming Bendigo’s lawyers for the future and creating new opportunities for school leavers in the region.

The President of the Bendigo Law Association, Mr James Leach, said the Law School at La Trobe University was strongly supported by the legal profession in Bendigo.

Research to improve water management in India

Researchers in the School of Business at La Trobe University’s Albury-Wodonga campus have won a $344,000 grant to help improving water resource management in India.

The grant, from the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, is funding research in a country where agriculture contributes to most employment and is critical to alleviating poverty.

The research team includes La Trobe’s Dr Lin Crase and Dr Gamini Herath, Professor Vasant Ghandi from the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad and Professor Jennifer McKay from the University of South Australia.

Dr Crase is the Australian team leader. He says many of the problems with irrigation in India are institutional in nature, rather than engineering or hydrologically driven.

Problems frequently arise from inappropriate rules governing the use of water, which has led to widespread deterioration in water quantity and quality.

A workshop on issues relating to water institutions was held recently at the La Trobe Beechworth campus, attracting bureaucrats from state and national water management agencies in Australia and India.
Aristotle was the first scientist on record to note that bees displayed considerable ‘brand loyalty’ when shopping for nectar, by settling repeatedly on the same flowers.

But it has taken until now, some 2,500 years later, to demonstrate that some bees are more focused and successful on their shopping trips than others – and that, given a suitable ‘incentive scheme’, all bees can become more discriminating ‘shoppers’, thus improving the outcome of their foraging expeditions.

These findings emerge from an international study into the cognitive abilities of bees carried out by La Trobe University vision scientist, Dr Adrian Dyer in collaboration with three researchers in Britain and Germany. The study has just been published in the scientific journal *Nature*. Dr Dyer says while bees have impressive cognitive capacities, the strategies used by individual bees in solving foraging tasks had been largely unexplored until now.

The main message from the study is that bees trade off speed for accuracy – in other words they choose their source of nectar wisely or rapidly – and that this trade off varies greatly among individual bees.

‘To our knowledge, bees are the first example of an insect where we have demonstrated speed-accuracy trade-offs,’ says Dr Dyer. Although task discrimination studies are common using other animals, these studies have been usually more concerned with accuracy of discrimination, and not speed.

Testing bees in colour discrimination tasks on a ‘virtual flower meadow’ in their laboratory, the researchers found that – as is the case in humans – accuracy of choice depended on how much time was allocated to solving the task.

Some bees consistently made rapid choices but with low precision, whereas others were slower, but highly accurate. The study also included a ‘carrot and stick experiment’ – or the aparian equivalent: sugar and quinine. Dr Dyer believes this was the first ‘penalty-reward’ study involving bees. It revealed that bees can be ‘taught’ to improve their accuracy when foraging for food.

‘We found that when we punished bees for making errors, they slowed down and performed better.’

For example, the ‘best’ of the bees, normally displaying accuracy of up to 75 per cent, slowed down and achieved 100 per cent accuracy after being ‘punished’ for errors with a taste of quinine. The ‘worst’, on about 50 per cent accuracy, only boosted their performance to 65 per cent after ‘penalty’ training.

For biological scientists, Dr Dyer says the important conclusion is that whenever accuracy is quantified in discrimination tests on animals, response time should also be measured – and the possibility of speed-accuracy trade-offs should be evaluated.

The study was carried out with Dr Lars Chittka at the University of Würzburg in Germany where Dr Dyer worked at as an Alexander von Humboldt Research Fellow before joining La Trobe in September of 2002. It also involved Ms Fiola Bock (Würzburg) and Dr Anna Dornhaus from the University of Bristol.

Starting out with a degree in photography and a passion for problem solving, Dr Dyer says his chosen field of research – vision – is both fascinating and useful in many areas, from plant evolution to forensics, even fine art. For example, why are certain flower colours rare in nature? Why are some of us colour blind when others, like Monet, can see light in a certain way and revolutionised modern painting?

A post-doctoral research fellow in orthoptics, Dr Dyer says ten years ago scientists thought bees could discriminate between only 100 colours. Now with much finer training and testing regimes the bees
Good coaching motivates footballers to manage their skills to win games.

Equally, good coaching enables health professionals to motivate and support patients to better manage their health problem – and therefore ‘score’ better in the game of life.

But health professionals need coaching skills. Here is where La Trobe University health psychologist, Dr Helen Lindner, has stepped in with an innovative coach training program.

A lecturer in Psychological Science and a world-renowned health psychologist, Dr Lindner is involved in a novel two-year program designed to train 45 health professionals in how to inspire 360 sufferers of type-2 diabetes to better ‘self-manage’ their illness.

In doing so, she believes she has forged a new field for psychologists – teaching groups of health professional ‘coaches’ the skills to motivate patients to deal with their chronic illness.

This training and supervision role adds to the traditional role of psychologists. It enables the benefits of basic psychological interventions to reach a larger number of patients, improving the health and emotional consequences of chronic illness. Moderately and severely distressed patients would still benefit from one-to-one intervention from a psychologist, Dr Lindner says.

Research in Australia and abroad indicates that only about 50 per cent of people with chronic illnesses adhere to recommended medical treatments and lifestyles. One British survey found that as few as seven per cent of people with diabetes maintain optimal self-management behaviours.

She says people with type-2 diabetes who neglect basic self care – such as dieting, taking prescribed medicine, monitoring their blood glucose levels and exercising – face serious consequences. These include circulation problems resulting in amputations, loss of sight, heart disease and renal failure. In most cases these consequences are preventable.

Because of the disturbing number of patients’ failing to ‘self-manage’, the Whitehorse Division of General Practitioners obtained funding under Federal Government’s Better Health Outcomes initiative to investigate ways to improve self-help for people with type-2 diabetes.

They sought assistance from Dr Lindner, who is Chair of the Victorian Section of the Australian Psychology Society’s College of Health Psychologists and a consultant to the World Health Organisation.

In a program called Good Life Project Coach Training – which started in April 2002 and runs until April 2004 – she conducted workshops for three groups of 15 allied health professionals who volunteered to coach people with type-2 diabetes for a year. The volunteers included nurses, dieticians, physiotherapists, speech pathologists, social workers, occupational therapists, health promotion officers, diabetes and asthma educators, counsellors, and exercise trainers recruited from community health services and general medical practices in Melbourne’s eastern suburbs. The diabetes sufferers they ‘coached’ were recruited through general practitioners.

Coaches did not have face-to-face contact with their patients. All contact was by telephone. In this way, Dr Lindner says, the program can be readily adapted to rural and remote areas, especially inland and northern Australia, where long distances make personal contact difficult.

She says people who manage their illness are less likely to succumb to depression.

Interim results indicate that coaches were satisfied with the content and usefulness of the skills they acquired during the program. Findings from patient data indicate a significant improvement in treatment goals.

‘We will have a better idea of the overall success when the program finishes next April – but all indications are that it is running very successfully for coaches and patients.’

Word of the program has spread. Dr Lindner has been invited to conduct a workshop at the National Asthma Conference in Melbourne in April next
New foreign exchange hedging techniques

GIVEN the billions of dollars Federal Government has lost through currency fluctuations in defence contracts with the USA, any new techniques to hedge against currency movements has potential interest.

So La Trobe University economists have proposed to use two operational hedging techniques to minimize the effect of currency fluctuations.

Developed by the Head of Economics and Finance, Professor Imrad Moosa and associate lecturer Mr Brien McDonald, the two techniques were the subject of a paper presented by Mr McDonald at the annual meeting of the European Financial Management Association in Helsinki in June.

Professor Moosa was to have delivered the paper – but shortly before the event he was recruited to join the US Treasury team of economists to work on the re-construction of the financial sector of Iraq, being the only non-American on the team. (See page 2.)

Mr McDonald said that the two techniques were well received by economists from around the world. He explained that while the possible solutions stemming from the underlying models were still theoretical, he believed the research was a significant contribution to the literature on hedging foreign exchange risk.

‘Those entering agreements across national borders and currencies traditionally used hedging techniques to protect themselves from currency fluctuations over the period of the agreement. Currency fluctuation is hedged by resorting to derivatives such as forwards, futures and options, or by using money market hedging,’ he said.

However in some cases, financial hedging may not be possible or too expensive and other methods may not be appropriate. For example, forwards, futures and options may not be available for some currencies or for long maturities, and it may not be possible to obtain credit lines in certain currencies which are seldom traded – such as the Nepalese rupee and Papua New Guinea kina.

In these circumstances, Professor Moosa and Mr McDonald have proposed to use ‘currency collars’ and a ‘risk sharing agreement’ instead of currency derivatives.

A currency collar ensures there is an upper and lower limit set on the value payable. In practice, these levels are negotiated between the parties. In a risk sharing agreement signatories to a contract agree to share equally any upside or downside currency movement. Again, the parameters would be negotiated.

‘Based on historical data and using six currency combinations, we showed that currency collars can be highly effective if the upper and lower values of the conversion rates are close to each other. On the other hand, a risk sharing arrangement can be highly effective if the neutral zone is wider.’

The techniques provide a viable alternative hedging technique in the absence of forward contracts on the exposure currencies.
Fragile X Syndrome may cause even more problems

New studies carried out by researchers at La Trobe University indicate that a number of illnesses in older people may be caused by a small change in a gene known as fragile X.

In 1991 Dr Danuta Loesch, a Senior Research Fellow in La Trobe’s Department of Psychological Science, helped discover that a mutation in this gene, called FMR1, was responsible for Fragile X Syndrome. This mutation, she says, is caused by expansion of trinucleotide (CGG) repeats. Nucleotides are the building blocks of DNA.

Since then it has been established that carriers of large size CGG expansions – FMR1 gene ‘full mutations’ – suffer from a range of behavioural problems and cognitive deficits, named ‘Fragile X Syndrome’.

While it has been known for more than a decade that the carriers of the ‘full mutation’ are affected by intellectual and learning disability since early childhood, the carriers of small expansions of CGG repeats were generally thought to be spared most of the problems associated with full mutation – hence small expansions were defined as ‘premutation’.

However, the latest research carried out by Dr Loesch in collaboration with Professors Randi and Paul Hagerman from the University of California Medical School, has established a link between premutation and a range of health problems.

These problems, which involve progressive severe tremor and difficulty with walking and balance, appear to specifically affect some older people carrying premutation, generally grandfathers of children with Fragile X Syndrome.

Dr Loesch says: ‘This connection was only a hypothesis at the time. However it has been confirmed by the results of a parallel project conducted over the past three years at the University of California Medical School, and in the School of Psychological Science at La Trobe University.’

Dr Loesch, and her colleagues and collaborators at the University of California, deliberately kept their studies apart so that they could compare results when both were complete.

They told the research world about their findings at the International Fragile X Syndrome Workshop held in Cyprus in August.

Dr Loesch says an important discovery resulting from this collaborative study is that carriers of a small-size FMR1 gene mutation, who show no effects from it early in their lives, may be affected by neurological problems as they get older.

‘This neurological disorder occurs by completely different mechanism than those involved in developmental delay in Fragile X Syndrome and affects different individuals. But it is caused by the same gene and therefore further research on how and why this disorder occurs in premutation carriers may help us to understand how the fragile X gene works.’

‘Because premutation carriers are as common as one in 300 females and one in 750 males in the general population, the practical implications of these findings for the entire population loom large and we have an urgent need to investigate this,’ says Dr Loesch.

Over the past 12 months, Dr Loesch recruited 13 men aged over 50 years who were carriers of ‘premutation’ and whose families had a history of Fragile X. Their medical conditions were closely examined – and six of the 13 were found to have obvious tremors, imbalance, and some other neurological problems or memory loss, all of which has only become evident as they aged.

Dr Loesch says that every such case seen in adult neurology clinics has been misdiagnosed because adult neurologists are not generally aware of Fragile X and, especially, that it can cause problems in older people.

“Our findings in Melbourne are remarkable in their similarity to the assessment in California although the degree and progression of neurological and cognitive involvement appear lower in the Melbourne sample. However, this may be attributable to the smaller sample size of the Melbourne survey, and a larger more comprehensive investigation of bigger sample groups is required,” Dr Loesch says.

“It was recently shown by our collaborators from the University of California that small expansions of CGG repeats lead to elevation of a messenger RNA (mRNA) level. Indeed, all our patients had elevated FMR1 mRNA levels.

“We are considering a possibility that this changed mRNA may excessively bind a corresponding protein, which then becomes depleted in brain cells and leads to their death.”

“By conducting detailed investigation along these lines, an answer can be found not only why premutation causes neurological disorder, but also why full mutation causes developmental delay.”

Both the California and La Trobe studies were funded by the National Institutes of Health in the USA. Dr Loesch says it is important to expand this research independently in Australia.
La Trobe Asian specialists head study associations

La Trobe University professors have recently been elected to head the two largest Asian Studies professional associations in Australia.

Professor Robin Jeffrey is President of the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) and Professor John Fitzgerald is President of the Chinese Studies Association of Australia (CSAA).

Convenor for the Politics Program in the School of Social Sciences, Professor Jeffrey teaches about India and Pakistan and politics and media. His most recent book is about the revolutionary growth of newspapers in Indian languages. He has also written about politics and social change in Kerala in south India and about the 1980s insurgency in Punjab state in north India.

The Asian Studies Association publishes an international refereed quarterly journal, the *Asian Studies Review*, an electronic journal and a monograph series. As part of his role as president, Professor Jeffrey is convenor of the Association’s 15th biennial conference to be held in Canberra in July 2004.

He is also involved in disseminating *Maximizing Australia’s Asia Knowledge*, a report on the state of the study of Asia in Australian universities, published last year.

Associate Dean (International) and Chair of Asian Studies at La Trobe, Professor Fitzgerald teaches East Asian politics and history. Before becoming President of the Chinese Studies Association of Australia in July, Professor Fitzgerald held a number of honorary positions in the Association.

He has also been heavily involved in ASAA, the Melbourne China Study Group, and the Asia Education Foundation, and has worked in an advisory capacity with National Library of Australia, the Australian Research Council and the Australia-China Council. He was awarded the 1998 Levenson Prize for Twentieth Century China by the US Association for Asian Studies.

The Chinese Studies Association held its inaugural conference in Melbourne in 1989 and its next conference is scheduled to be held at La Trobe in July 2005.

ANTHROPOLOGIST HEADS TO HELSINKI

Anthropologist, Dr Alberto Gomes, is spending five months as a Visiting Professor at the University of Helsinki from August to December 2003.

Dr Gomes is a specialist in anthropology and sociology of development, environment and ethnicity, and cultural identities in South and South-east Asia. The Finnish Government is funding his appointment as part of a bid to encourage intellectual and research interest in South-east Asia.

The University of Helsinki teaches in Finnish and Swedish, with some units also taught in English. Currently four Finnish students are enrolled at La Trobe, in Law and Management and Humanities and Social Sciences.
It's only been published for a few weeks – but it's already known among biochemists, chemists and biomedical professionals as 'Gideon’s Bible'.

It is the 864-page *Biochemical Targets of Plant Bioactive Compounds*, a pharmacological reference guide to sites of action and physiological effects, by Dr Gideon Polya, La Trobe University Reader in Biochemistry in the School of Molecular Sciences.

Published in New York and London by Taylor & Francis, the book is a timely addition to the literature of plant properties given the current debate in Australia on complementary medicines – most of which are plant-based.

Comprehensive, highly-indexed and cross-referencing, the book details the structure, sources, molecular targets and physiological effects of thousands of bioactive chemical compounds isolated and characterised from plants and shown to have particular molecular targets such as neurotransmitter or hormone receptors, enzymes and DNA.

It includes summaries of plant natural product chemistry, biochemistry in general and specific relevant areas of biochemistry such as neurotransmission, hormone action, gene expression and odour receptors.

The culmination of many years of research and analysis of scientific literature, the book devotes more than 500 pages to detailed, cross-referencing tables which list compounds, plant sources, biochemical targets and physiological effects.

Designed both for biomedical professionals and scientifically literate lay people, it contains many ‘human interest’ and surprising scientific, cultural and historical snippets.

Dr Polya says his new work should be extremely useful for students and professionals in medicine, paramedical disciplines, pharmacology, chemistry, biochemistry, life sciences, veterinary science, toxicology, ecology, herbal medicine and complementary medicine.

‘If you know the common or scientific name of a plant, you can look up one of the four detailed indexes and rapidly access a wealth of information about its bioactive chemical constituents.’

Many of the world’s great universities such as Oxford, Cambridge and Yale are located in regional areas.

While much has been written overseas on universities and their economic and cultural impact on communities, very few studies have been conducted in Australia on this theme, particularly in regional areas.

That’s now been remedied with a new book by La Trobe University, Bendigo Head of Education Studies, Dr Anthony Potts.

Titled *Civic Leaders and the University: State and Municipal Politicians Perspectives on Higher Education in Australia*, the book follows seven years of research in Australia and overseas by Dr Potts and describes the role of civic leaders in the development of their universities.

Dr Potts says universities do not simply arise from nowhere. Throughout history, civic leaders have supported their establishment and growth for various social, political, economic and other reasons.

He interviewed current and past politicians to obtain their views on the role and value of regional universities. He said Bendigo and Ballarat politicians are very supportive of regional universities in their cities – as are most politicians in most parts of the world.

‘While many are quick to admit they are not experts in the area, they have highly developed notions of the role of universities, and what they can do for their cities, especially in an increasingly global age.

Published by Peter Lang, Bern, Switzerland, the book has already generated considerable interest in educational circles.
**Matter matters!**

Life, the universe -
let’s rethink everything

Most humans regard matter as nothing but an inert backdrop to human presence.

This attitude, according to La Trobe University senior lecturer in Philosophy, Dr Freya Mathews, is the deepest root cause of our environmental crisis which in turn is a symptom of a larger, metaphysical crisis.

She believes we need to look at our basic attitude not only to living nature but to matter itself. If we do, we will start caring for our planet.

Dr Mathews’ views are expressed in a new book, *For Love of Matter: a Contemporary Panpsychism* published by SUNY (State University of New York) Press.

In it she argues that if our relation to matter is wrong, then everything will be wrong, including our attitude to knowledge as well as to living nature.

The new work builds upon concepts first developed in her book *The Ecological Self* published 12 years ago. In that work Dr Mathews argued that the physical universe was a self-realizing unity with ends of its own, in which we were implicated.

The new book goes even further, attributing a dimension of subjectivity to the universe, with the consequence that it is seen as capable of ‘communicating’ with us.

‘If we see matter as “dead stuff”, as in physics, then our basic way of being in the world will be instrumentalist. We will treat the material furniture of our world any way we like, because we will assume that how we treat it cannot matter to it.

‘But if this is our basic way of being in the world, then it will be difficult for us to switch over into a different – caring or mutualistic – modality when we are faced with living things,’ she said.

‘We are in a metaphysical crisis. We have to go back to the most basic metaphysical level and re-think the whole thing.

‘Any adequate philosophical response to the so-called “environmental crisis” cannot be encompassed within the minor discipline of environmental philosophy, but must instead address the full range of existential questions.’

**ROMANCING THE TOMES**

*Romancing the Tomes: Popular Culture, Law and Feminism*, edited by La Trobe Law’s Professor Margaret Thornton, is a collection of essays by scholars from the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand exploring the relationship between law and popular culture from a feminist perspective.

The essays consider the representation of law in film, crime fiction and the media, and the representation of popular culture in legal texts. They show that while popular culture is bewitched by law – particularly anything to do with sex and crime – law is anxious to resist the unruliness of popular culture.

**Top award for multimedia artist**

La Trobe University, Bendigo Visual Arts student, Qing Huang, has won two awards in this year’s prestigious ATOM Awards for excellence in film, television and multimedia.

His 3D computer animation entitled, *The Way* was recognised as the ‘Best Tertiary Animation’ and ‘Best General Animation’ in the awards which attract entries from across Australia, including work commissioned by Film Australia.

Mr Huang’s animation combined traditional Chinese art forms and brush stroke methods with modern computer technology.

He is completing a Masters degree in Multimedia on the Bendigo campus and studying for a Diploma of Education at La Trobe University’s main Melbourne campus at Bundoora.
Cyclops - with an eye to the present

Greek myths and Homeric tales of ancient gods ... do we suspend belief and read them for entertainment? Or are they symbols, illuminating things which still bear upon the modern soul?

La Trobe University’s Dr Roger Sworder recently treated his audience to a fascinating perspective on this theme when he delivered the annual Worner Research lecture on the Bendigo campus.

Head of Arts in the Faculty of Regional Development in Bendigo, Dr Sworder is about to have published a book, Homer on Immortality: the Journey of Odysseus as a Path to Perfection.

His lecture, a ‘mystical and philosophical journey’, asked: Is the Poetry of Homer Philosophical?

Referring to Odysseus’ expedition to the cave of the Cyclops, Dr Sworder examined how the Cyclops ate some of his men and how Odysseus and the others escaped.

‘This well-known story reveals a permanent state of affairs which we might prefer to ignore,’ he said.

Dr Sworder holds a Master of Arts from the University of Oxford, and a Doctorate from the Australian National University.

His previous book, Mining, Metallurgy and the Meaning of Life, dealt with the consecration and, more recently, the desecration of these crafts in Western history.

The text of the lecture is available on www.latrobe.edu.au/bendigo

Republican Ned?
It’s a possibility

Did Ned Kelly have a declaration of a Republic of North-Eastern Victoria in his pocket when he was captured at Glenrowan?

Was it passed on by police to the government, who suppressed its existence because of the unsettled nature of the north-eastern region of the colony?

These questions were canvassed recently by the Chief Justice of Victoria, John Phillips, in the inaugural Telstra-La Trobe University George Briscoe Kerferd Oration, held on the La Trobe University Beechworth campus.

Titled The North-Eastern Victoria Republic Movement – Myth or Reality?, the oration outlined Justice Phillip’s research which has turned up sufficient references about the possibility of a republic movement to clothe rumour and legend with an ‘aura of reality’.

Legend has it that the declaration found on Kelly was passed by police to the government, who suppressed its existence because of the unsettled nature of the north-eastern region of the colony.

Justice Phillips’ oration was a highlight of the Beechworth 150th Anniversary celebrations which also included a heritage forum and an anniversary ball held on the University’s campus.

The Oration is named after G. B. Kerferd, (1831–1889) a local businessman who went on to become one of Victoria’s early Supreme Court Judges, Attorney-General and Victoria’s 15th Premier.

Wildlife reward for British visitors

A group of Britain’s top young fundraisers – each of whom has raised more than five thousand dollars for cancer victims – recently visited La Trobe University as part of an Australian tour that rewarded their fund-raising efforts.

Aged from 16 to 18, the 58 visitors were from Britain’s Joshua Foundation which provides holidays and other experiences for children with terminal cancer.

To learn about Australian native wildlife, the young fundraisers worked with Conservation Volunteers Australia on the Melbourne Wildlife Sanctuary at La Trobe University’s main Melbourne campus at Bundoora – and then hosted a party for thirty children from the Royal Children’s Hospital, which was attended by a celebrity guest from the television show, Neighbours.
L a Trobe University Dean of Health Sciences and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Health Development), Professor Stephen Duckett, has won the 2003 Sidney Sax Medal – the most prestigious award of the Australian Healthcare Association.

The Association’s Executive Director, Ms Prue Power, said the medal recognised Professor Duckett’s commitment to policy leadership in the health sector over the past twenty years, including his role as a former Secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health.

‘His past and continuing contribution to the fields of health services policy, organisation, delivery and research are unequalled in this country,’ she said.

Professor Duckett’s latest national health care study has warned that the $2.4 billion a year private health insurance rebate could eventually lead to the collapse of Australia’s health care system.

He said the rebate was insufficient incentive to encourage young people to take out insurance. His study revealed a four per cent decline in people aged 30 to 59 years of age taking out health insurance, thereby adding to pressure on the public health system.

‘The last year of data shows that we’ve gone back more or less to the pre-existing trend so that the shift from public to private was a one-off effect.’

Professor Duckett has also been an influential advocate of a ‘no-fault’ medical indemnity system and a hospital ‘culture of openness and innovation’ so that, should adverse events occur, they are reported and analysed to minimise the risk of similar events in the future.

In August he addressed the National Health Summit in Canberra on innovative arrangements for the care of acutely ill older patients.

An economist with a PhD in Health Administration, Professor Duckett is also Chair of the Board of Directors of Bayside Health, which incorporates the Alfred, Caulfield General Medical Centre and Sandringham and District Memorial hospitals.

The Australian Healthcare Association award citation noted that as Professor of Health Policy, Stephen Duckett ‘maintains an active research program, currently in casemix and co-ordinated care, as well as leading and managing the Faculty’.

‘The Faculty of Health Sciences at La Trobe University has a major role in health professional education in Victoria, graduating about 1,000 nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, orthoptists, health information managers, podiatrists and prosthethists/orthotists per annum.

‘In most of these fields, it is Victoria’s sole provider of undergraduate and postgraduate education. In addition to initial professional education, it has a large postgraduate program, both coursework and research, leading to graduate diplomas, masters and doctorate degrees.’

Health and water appointments

La Trobe University School of Public Health staff members, Judith Dwyer and Sophie Hill, were among ten new expert members recently appointed to the National Health and Medical Research Council’s Health Advisory Committee.

Ms Dwyer, an Associate Professor and senior health care manager, works in the areas of health system and clinical governance. Ms Hill is co-ordinating editor of the Cochrane Consumers and Communication Review Group. Based at La Trobe, the group reviews consumer interactions with the health system.

Two academics from the University’s Albury-Wodonga campus have been appointed to Albury’s new five-member Water Board. They are ecologist Professor Terry Hillman, Adjunct Professor in the Department of Environmental Management and Ecology and former Director of the The Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre; and economist, Dr Lin Crase, Deputy Head of the School of Business, a specialist in public policy and regional microeconomic reform, including the water issues.

See, also ’Water management research in India’, page 6
Is it possible to improve the future social and economic well-being of South Africa where, according to UNAIDS reports, half of all 15 year-old-boys may not reach the age of 50 – and up to 10 per cent of university students may be HIV positive?

According to prominent South African social scientist, Mary Crewe, recently a La Trobe University Distinguished Visiting Fellow, the answer is ‘yes’, provided we look beyond the orthodox public health interventions used in the past. These were judgemental, cautious and ‘anti-desire’, she says, and ignored the complexities of modern day South Africa and its ‘debilitating youth culture of fatalism and bravado’.

She believes, instead, in an approach that involves a range of issues including race, colour, class, sexuality and human rights.

‘If you ask “status quo” questions, you get “status quo” answers – and they have not worked. We need to spark the intellectual interest of students in the epidemic.’

Honing this approach is one of the reasons why Ms Crewe, Director of the Centre for the Study of AIDS at the University of Pretoria, recently spent six weeks at La Trobe’s Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society.

There has been a slight increase in the incidence of HIV/AIDS in Australia following initial successful awareness campaigns. Research by the Centre’s Deputy Director, Associate Professor Gary Dowsett and two colleagues, Dr Jon Willis and Mr Michael Hurley, is concerned with this increase.

Ms Crewe cites in particular Dr Dowsett’s work on sexuality, masculinity and gender as relevant to her own concerns.

Paradoxically, she says, the AIDS epidemic in South Africa has provided an insight into the social conditions which brought about the epidemic.

‘Therefore, I can find hope in this epidemic,’ she said, ‘because now we are starting to look at things differently. We know we must make up the backlog of education (as well as) determine the kind of education needed for people with an average life expectancy of only 45 years.’

She says South Africa must train graduates to ensure that the country survives the epidemic.

‘If up to 20 per cent of students – particularly at the level of Masters and PhD – come from homes and communities dealing with HIV/AIDS and ten per cent may be infected themselves, how does a university cope with its alumni dying so young? This situation impacts on the whole life of a university.’

Working with university students, a privileged group in South African society, her centre, founded in 1999, also trains student volunteers as counsellors and peer educators.

Ms Crewe believes that through AIDS and a more complex and detailed understanding of it, a transformed society, with new families and new communities, can be created.