Omega-3
yes, but how much and when?
La Trobe University and Joint Centre

La Trobe University and Peking University have finalised an agreement to establish a Joint Centre for China Studies at La Trobe University’s Melbourne (Bundoora) campus.

It will be the first such China Centre to be set up in Australia.

Announcing the initiative, the Vice-Chancellor of La Trobe University, Professor Michael Osborne, said: ‘This is an exciting initiative which reflects the significant activities of La Trobe University in China; it is also timely, as Australia engages more closely with China.’

He said it was a great initiative as it was the first such Centre in Australia with which Peking University was associated.

He strongly believed the Centre would be successful in strengthening cooperation between the two universities and friendship between the People’s Republic of China and Australia. Peking University would make every effort to enable the Centre to operate effectively and efficiently.

The Vice-President of Peking University, Professor Hao Ping, also warmly praised the establishment of the Centre, observing: ‘La Trobe University already engages in a large number of teaching, research and training projects in China and has an especially close link with Peking University, notably in the areas of Economics, History, Linguistics, Archaeology and Public Health.’

Amongst current collaborative research projects a particularly significant one is that for the publication of the diplomatic archive of British relations with the Qing Dynasty. This important archive, which has been rendered fragmentary as a result of fire damage, is housed in the First Historical Archive of China in the Forbidden City in Beijing.

This project is now well under way. The first volume of texts is due to be published in both Chinese and English early in 2006, followed by four further volumes.
Additionally, a joint conference will be held in Melbourne early in 2006 to launch the first volume with contributions from senior researchers of La Trobe and Peking universities and from the First Historical Archive of China.

La Trobe University is also co-operating with Peking University in development programs in Western China. In this regard the two universities recently signed a tripartite agreement with Shi He Zhi University in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region for the development of higher education programs there, especially in the fields of Agriculture, Education and Public Health.

Quite apart from promoting these activities, the Joint Centre will facilitate the interchange of students and staff, co-ordinate teaching and training programs in China, arrange international conferences and workshops, and serve as an information and resource centre for scholars in Australia interested in China studies.

A series of public lectures by professors of the two institutions will commence later this year.

The first visitor to Australia will be Professor Wu Qiaoling, of the School of Economics at Peking University, who will deliver a number of public lectures in August 2005. Professor Osborne will deliver a series of lectures on Greek History and Archaeology at Peking University later in the year.

Professor Hao Ping and Professor Osborne will serve as foundation co-Presidents of the Joint Centre and Dr Pei Likun, currently Head of the China Office of La Trobe University, has been appointed as the Executive Director.

Peking University establish for China Studies
Death of noted La Trobe University founding father

Dr Davis McCaughey, a former Governor of Victoria who was deeply involved with the foundation of La Trobe University, died on 25 March, aged 90.

Churchman, academic innovator, ecumenical pioneer, family man, lover of the arts and social justice advocate, he became Governor of Victoria at the age of 71 when most men are enjoying retirement.

Before becoming Governor, he is well remembered at La Trobe University for the important contribution he made as a member of the Interim Council, then of the Council of the University between 1965 and 1974, during its formative years.

His interest and further contributions to the University during the period he served as Governor of Victoria, and in that capacity, as Visitor to the University, are greatly appreciated.

In 1992, in the company of former Prime Minister, Mr Gough Whitlam, he was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Letters during a graduation ceremony.

Belfast-born Dr McCaughey came to Australia with his wife and five children in 1953 to take up the post as Professor of New Testament Studies in the Theological Hall at Ormond College.

As well as being Governor from 1986 to 1992, Dr McCaughey was an eminent theologian, Master of Ormond College at the University of Melbourne, and the first president of the Uniting Church in Australia.

He played a prominent role in the movement which brought together the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches in Australia to form the Uniting Church, being the primary author of a document entitled *The Basis of Union*, the foundational theological document that led to the new denomination.

He was Master of Ormond between 1957 and 1979 and Deputy Chancellor of Melbourne University in 1978-79.

Dr McCaughey is survived by his wife of 64 years, Jean, and by five children - including former National Gallery of Victoria Director Patrick McCaughey, 11 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

La Trobe researcher to study in China

Dr Yan (Danna) Zhang, a lecturer in La Trobe University’s School of Sport, Tourism and Hospitality Management, will undertake six months postdoctoral research in China under the auspices of the Endeavour Programme.

Dr Zhang has won a 2005 Endeavour Australia Cheung Kong Award to work at the Zhejiang University of Technology investigating the role of Chinese travel agents in the development of the Chinese tourism market to Australia.

Valued at $25,000, the Endeavour Australia Cheung Kong Awards are available to scholars from Asia to come to Australia to undertake short-term research and for Australians to do the same in Asia.

The awards aim to attract high performing scholars and particularly research proposals which will benefit the further development of the social and economic environment of Asia and Australia.

The Endeavour Programme is administered by Australian Education International within the International Cooperation Branch of the Federal Department of Education, Science and Training.

This is the first year that these new postgraduate scholarships have been awarded.

Dr Zhang has an extensive background in tourism, from not only teaching tourism development at two universities in Victoria, but also from her time as a tourist guide in that State.

She hopes her research will assist with the growth of tourism in China and draw more Chinese tourists to Australia.
WORKSHOP ON SPECTROSCOPY AND IMAGING IN ITALY

A La Trobe University Emeritus Professor of Physics, Robert Leckey, recently led a group of 11 Australian synchrotron scientists to the 2nd Italian-Australian Workshop on Future Directions of Spectroscopy and Imaging with Synchrotron Radiation, at Trieste, Italy.

Professor Leckey organised the event with Professor Kevin Prince, an Australian working with the Italian Synchrotron source ELETTRA. Both had organised the first workshop in 2003 at Lorne.

It was such a success that the second was funded generously by the Australian Department of Education, Science and Technology, through the International Science Linkages Programme, the Victorian Department of Industry, Innovation and Regional Development, and ELETTRA.

Professor Leckey said the major theme was imaging with synchrotron radiation, which was particularly important to Australia, given the synchrotron currently under construction at Clayton.

Both Professor Leckey and La Trobe University Queen Elizabeth II Research Fellow in Physics, Dr Andrew Peele, made significant contributions to the workshop proceedings.

Dr Peele discussed experimental methods and numerical algorithms for image analysis during a session on methods for the recovery of structure from the diffraction patterns of non-periodic objects.

The workshop expressed support for a third edition of the event, timed to coincide with the opening of the Australian synchrotron in 2006.

LA TROBE AND SYNCHROTRON LIGHT

La Trobe University’s Centre for Materials and Surface Science is involved with the Australian Synchrotron Project, currently under construction at Clayton, and research with synchrotron light.

The recent completion of the synchrotron building was celebrated with a community open day which attracted about 12,000 visitors.

A synchrotron is a large machine about the size of a football field producing intense beams of light which have a spectrum from infrared to X-rays, and up to a billion times brighter than conventional X-rays. Many materials can be investigated non-destructively and product solutions can be derived from the analyses.

‘We are looking forward eagerly for the time when the synchrotron comes into operation in Melbourne,’ says the director of the Centre for Materials and Surface Science, Dr Paul Pigram, an associate professor in the Department of Physics.

He said that currently, researchers in the Centre conduct experiments at synchrotron facilities in Europe, Asia and North America.

For example, members of his own group used a synchrotron in Taiwan to characterise micro-patterned conducting polymers and to analyse the surface of semiconductors.

‘It is the intensity and “tuneability” of synchrotron light that make these projects possible,’ Dr Pigram says.

The Victorian Government’s Synchrotron Access Program and the federally-funded Australian Synchrotron Research Program support a project through the La Trobe Centre to assess the chemical state of chromium in contaminated soils.

This project is conducted by the Centre’s Dr Peter Kappen in collaboration with the company, Environmental Resources Management (ERM, Melbourne). Chromium, in certain forms, poses health risks. To measure these levels, Dr Kappen conducts a series of experiments at the synchrotron in Hamburg, Germany.

The results are expected to make land management and remediation of contaminated land more cost effective.

‘Our researchers identify issues with surface properties and work out ways to address those issues. If companies that produce chromium don’t characterise the surface of a product, they may be unaware there is a problem,’ Dr Pigram said.
A novel emerges and the literary world takes note

It started a decade ago when Catherine Padmore and fellow Creative Writing students workshopped her short story idea during a tutorial on the fourth floor of the Humanities 2 Building on the Melbourne (Bundoora) campus.

With much perspiration, and plot and character changes, the idea gradually metamorphosed into a novel produced in tandem with her own academic progress from La Trobe BA undergraduate to Doctor of Philosophy.

The result is Dr Padmore’s first major literary creation, *Sibyl’s Cave*, which, besides achieving strong praise in a number of reviews in Australian newspapers, was short listed for the 2001 *The Australian* Vogel Literary Award and the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize (first book category, South East Asia and South Pacific Region).

Now a lecturer in La Trobe’s English Program, Dr Padmore is using her own recent fiction writing experience to help Bachelor of Arts students taking one of her units, Writing Fiction.

*Sibyl's Cave* is the story of an Italian orphan, Billie, who emigrates after a childhood in Italy and the United Kingdom to a new life as an adult in Australia. It is a rich story about family and the importance of identity. The novel was a component of her PhD studies in creative writing at Deakin University.

Although she herself underwent the migrant experience, having emigrated with her family from Britain at the age of 11, the story is by no means autobiographical.

‘It is pure fiction, although I drew on some elements from my own experiences where appropriate to the story,’ she says.

She intends to continue teaching and writing, mining the intellectual ores of each aspect of her work to enhance the other. Her current writing project, a novel about Elizabethan women, is in the preliminary research stage.

‘I have always wanted both to write and to teach. I suppose for many writers there is an element of the solitary figure seeking inspiration alone in the garret away from the temptations of daily life.

‘However for me there is another element and that is what well may be the relatively new writers’ process of workshopping writing ideas. The teaching process is very helpful to my writing as the freshness and enthusiasm of the students in discussing their own writing efforts gives me strength and encouragement.’

Her students today undergo the same highs and lows as she did when her writing was workshopped.

‘It can be nerve-wracking when a fellow student comments on your prose or your plot but this has advantages because Creative Writing is one of the few subjects where students gain inspiration and practical help from their classmates. Workshops can reveal what we sometimes don’t see in our own writing’.

Dr Padmore plans to have her next novel completed within two years.

For further information, contact
Dr Evans tel: (03) 9479 3369
A collaborative research team from La Trobe University and the University of California has identified and characterised a new progressive neurological disorder in older men.

The disorder which presents as tremor, walking and balance problems (ataxia), and intellectual decline, has been provisionally named FXTAS.

A La Trobe group led by Dr Danuta Loesch, and another from UC at Davis led by Professor Randi Hagerman, identified the disorder while investigating families with fragile X syndrome, the most common cause of inherited severe developmental delay.

Their findings were recently published in The Journal of American Medical Association and Clinical Genetics.

The newly-identified disorder affects older men who are carriers of a small change, known as a ‘premutation’, in the same (FMR1) gene that also causes fragile X syndrome.

Dr Loesch, a Senior Research Fellow in La Trobe’s Department of Psychological Science, said that at least one in 800 men in the general population carried the premutation in the FMR1 gene.

‘Our collaborative research showed that, both in Australia and the USA, as many as 30 to 40 per cent of these carriers may develop progressive tremor/ataxia symptoms after the age of 50,’ Dr Loesch said.

‘This indicates that at least one in 3000 older men in the general population will develop fragile X-associated tremor ataxia, which has serious implications for the community at large, as well as medical professionals.

‘The underlying cause of this disorder, premutation in the FMR1 gene, is generated by small expansion of a particular gene segment, which is repeated too many times.

‘This repetition is called “CGG repeat”, because it contains the same trio of DNA building blocks (cytosine, guanine, guanine) in the same repetitive order. The average normal number is 30 such trios, and the expansion between 55 and 200 CGG repeats has been defined as “premutation”, which leads to neurological disorder later in life.

‘These expansions tend to increase further in successive generations, leading to a “full mutation” corresponding to less than 200 CGG repeats, which causes fragile X syndrome.

‘Although fragile X syndrome occurs by a completely separate mechanism and affects different individuals to late-onset neurological disorder, both these conditions are related to the same gene and may occur in one and the same family.

‘Because the size of CGG repeat tends to increase in following generations, young children affected with fragile X syndrome seen in paediatric or genetic clinics often led us to their grandfathers affected with neurological disorder.

‘However, neurologists or other medical professionals who see older people with tremor/ataxia, are rarely aware that they need to look for a family history of fragile X in their grandchildren.

‘But not all individuals affected with balance problems and tremor caused by fragile X premutation may have grandchildren or other relatives affected with fragile X.

‘Because this premutation may be, according to our results, the fairly common cause of neurological problems in elderly population, these individuals themselves should be tested for the presence of this premutation.

‘Screening for the premutation in older men who have tremor and balance problems is important regardless of their family history, especially if they have been diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease or various forms of ataxia of unknown cause,’ Dr Loesch said.

A new NHMRC funded study from 2005 to 2007 led by Dr Loesch will determine what proportion of males affected with late-onset tremor/ataxia/atypical Parkinson’s syndromes of unknown cause, are also the carriers of premutation in the FMR1 gene.

This study will be conducted at La Trobe’s School of Psychological Science, in collaboration with Monash and Melbourne university neurology clinics and institutes.
La Trobe University ornithologists have confirmed the success of an ambitious project to rescue a population of nationally endangered Black-eared Miners.

The project not only saved the birds from local extinction. In doing so it provided ‘wives’ for some lonely bachelor birds who had no hope of finding mates without the scientists’ help.

Dr Rohan Clarke discovered three breeding groups of the birds near Ouyen to confirm a major accomplishment by a National Recovery Team, working for the birds’ conservation for 12 years.

According to the leader of La Trobe’s team, Dr Mike Clarke (no relation to Dr Rohan Clarke), the Black-eared Miner is one of Australia’s most endangered birds.

‘It requires large areas of mature mallee vegetation not burnt for at least 40 years, now a rare and precious commodity.’

‘In the early 1990s it appeared to be suffering a catastrophic decline in the Victorian parts of its range to broad-scale clearing of habitat, loss of long-unburnt mallee due to fires and the threat of genetic swamping by its more common relative, the Yellow-throated Miner,’ Dr Clarke said.

The Recovery Team was particularly concerned about the viability of one colony that had been declining steadily in 12,000 hectares of long-unburnt mallee near Ouyen.

Dr Clarke’s team suspected that this was due to a critical shortage of breeding females. Their research had shown that young females do not breed in the colony in which they are raised but disperse to neighbouring colonies.

Their fear was that in the Ouyen habitat there were bachelor birds waiting around for the arrival of immigrant females that were never going to arrive, due to the absence of neighbouring colonies within the reserve and its isolation from other patches of old mallee.

In 2003, with funding from the National Heritage Trust, the Mallee Catchment Management Authority and Zoos Victoria, an ambitious and long-term solution was attempted. This involved a major collaborative effort by staff from La Trobe University, Healesville Sanctuary and Parks Victoria.

The team’s plan was to establish two or three new colonies within the reserve using captive-reared Black-eared Miners from Healesville and Monarto sanctuaries and Cleland Wildlife Park in South Australia in the hope they would act as a source of females.

In the spring of 2003 staff from Healesville Sanctuary led by Gary Slater and Lindell Andrews, with the help of staff from Melbourne Zoo, Parks Vic and La Trobe University, supervised the construction of two huge temporary release aviaries within the reserve and the release of 45 miners into the reserve, several of which were radio tagged.

Recently, Dr Clarke discovered the released birds had established two new breeding groups nesting near the wild colony. To top it off, a captive-released female had joined the wild colony and was sitting on eggs!

‘This population and species is not out of the woods yet and still faces the threat of fire and genetic swamping,’ says Dr Clarke.

‘However, our efforts highlight what can be done when a group of dedicated and determined people work together for a common purpose.’

Love and life for lonesome bachelor birds
How do young men initiate and organise their social and sexual relationships with young women? How, and very importantly where, do such friendships develop?

A La Trobe University research project is seeking answers to these questions, which have widespread ramifications for sexual and reproductive health.

A post doctoral fellow at La Trobe’s Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society (ARCSHS) Dr Michael Flood, has received a $218,000 ARC Discovery Grant to study these questions over three years.

A sociologist specialising in gender studies, Dr Flood says such research is timely given the growing attention being paid to men’s issues and changing gender roles.

He will recruit three groups of 30 young men aged between 16 and 25 from three areas, a workplace, a social group, and a sporting club. He will then trace the relations formed within the groups and then ‘work outwards’, tracing how relationships spread from these groups.

Dr Flood said Australian research on boys’ and young men’s participation in gender relations is among the best in the world, but it has not addressed substantially the intersections of masculinity and sexuality, particularly among males who are neither gay nor same-sex attracted.

‘Despite the increase in public and policy attention to the plight of boys, men’s issues and the state of masculinity, little is known about one important aspect of boys’ and young men’s lives, their sexual and social relations with girls and young women,’ he said.

Research in Australia on boys’ and young men’s participation in heterosexual sexual relations is remarkably rare, although more than 90 per cent of young men are heterosexual.’

The project will research three major areas:

• What meanings, cultural understanding and social relations shape young heterosexual men’s sexual practices and relations?
• In what way are men’s social and sexual practices shaped by settings, contexts and social collectives?
• How is the organisation of young heterosexual men’s lives affected by other aspects of social differentiation such as work, class and ethnicity?

Dr Flood said results from the project would feed directly into prevention and education strategies in relation to four important issues of public health and public policy.

‘These are sexually transmitted infection, unplanned pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and sexual violence.

‘It will provide a wealth of information on the ways in which young heterosexual men understand and organise their sexual lives. This will enable health educators, service providers, and policy makers more effectively to address young men’s specific health needs, engage with young men in the promotion of sexual and reproductive health, and foster men’s health in general.’

He said social research of sexuality had shifted to the recognition that sexual relations were organised by local social networks associated with work, leisure, community and wider social structures.

‘These offer both possibilities and limitations for forming sexual activities. As well, male-male relations give meaning to young men’s sexual involvements with women but as yet there has been little research on ways in which heterosexual relations are shaped by setting and context.

‘In addition, my examination of the intersections of masculinity, heterosexuality and other dimensions of social difference such as ethnicity and class will make contribution to our knowledge of gender and sexuality.

‘It will form part of the booming international scholarship on men’s sexual and reproductive health and will complement similar studies in the USA and UK.’

Boy meets girl: how, where, what then?

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Bicycle research prize

La Trobe University 2004 honours student and part time tutor, Mr Paul Willard, has won equal first prize in the Ron Shepherd Memorial Bicycle Research Prize.

His research was based on his 2004 Honours work on the economic benefits of Rail Trails.

The prize is awarded by the Cycling Research Network with support from Bicycle Victoria. Any Honours or Masters research relevant to cycling is eligible.

The award is named for Ron Shepherd, a founder of Bicycle Victoria who was instrumental in changing the shape of cycling in Victoria. He died in January 2004, but left a lasting legacy, which has included the annual research prize of $1,000 for each winner.

Mr Willard will present an outline of his work at the Research Prize and Awards evening on 24 May, 2005 at Bicycle Victoria’s Melbourne office.
The world of nutritional science agrees there are numerous benefits from consuming Omega-3 fatty acids.

Such organisations as the American Heart Association and the Heart Foundation of Australia recommend eating fish, particularly fatty fish such as mackerel, herring, sardines, certain types of tuna and salmon, at least twice a week.

Such fish are high in two kinds of Omega-3 fatty acids, eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA).

In addition, some food like soybeans, canola, walnut and flaxseed, and their oils, contain a shorter Omega-3 fatty acid, alpha-linolenic acid (ALA). Enzymes in the body metabolise the ALA into the longer Omega-3 fatty acids, EPA and DHA.

When, in what quantities and in what form should Omega-3 fatty acids be taken? And is there a point when it could be harmful like the closely related saturated fat?

(Saturated fat comes from animal fats and is found as hidden fat in many of the processed foods we in the Western world consume in high quantities).

The answers to these questions may soon be known. An international team, led by La Trobe University behavioural neuroscientist, Dr Richard Weisinger, recently received a three-year $277,000 grant from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) to find answers to these basic questions.

Dr Weisinger is supervising two PhD students working in his laboratory on the project, Ms Nora Chen and a medical doctor, Dr Jian Shi.
Dr Loesch said that the results of the screening will impact on future diagnostic procedures in neurological practice and allow neurologists to tailor more effectively treatment of neurological conditions associated with fragile X premutation.

‘Another important clinical application of our study is that the carriers identified will be informed of genetic risks for future generations who may inherit fragile X syndrome,’ she said.

‘The way premutation causes a progressive neurological disorder is unknown, but the results of our study will help to understand how a serious neurological disorder occurring late in life in otherwise normal people, is caused by the same gene known to cause mental retardation in early childhood.

‘This will be accomplished by conducting comprehensive neuropsychological and neurological investigations, including magnetic resonance imaging, in patients identified as premutation carriers by our initial screening.

‘The clinical findings will be then compared with the molecular changes in the FMR1 gene, including the number of CCG repeats, and the level of this gene’s transcript, mRNA (messenger RNA).

‘Recent studies have found consistently elevated FMR1 mRNA levels in premutation carriers, which led to a hypothesis that overactivity of the gene, the mechanism termed “RNA toxic gain-of-function”, may be involved in causing progressive degeneration of brain tissue and neurological disorder.

‘We hope that these fascinating developments will soon attract even wider collaborations, and both La Trobe University internal, and external support, to study this new genetic mechanism in more depth using both human data and animal models,’ Dr Loesch said. ☹️

An unusual university-community program to further the interests and skills of gifted children in rural and regional areas has been given a boost.

The La Trobe University ‘Able Learners Enrichment Program’ at the Bendigo campus, has been extended this year following support from a Telstra Community Development Grant to expand it over the next two years.

Deputy Head of the School of Education at La Trobe Bendigo, Dr Michael Faulkner, said that the Telstra Foundation support had significantly improved the University’s ability to make available enrichment activities for gifted and talented youngsters in regional Victoria.

‘As a result, the University will be offering three one-day workshops for gifted young people this year, the first in May for primary school- aged children. Further workshops are planned for July and September and will cater for both primary and secondary school children.’

Dr Faulkner said until now the program had offered just one workshop each year and these had always filled to capacity with some 200 children attending from right across the north central region.

‘The grant has also enabled us to employ a co-ordinator, Ms Pam Lyons, who has been working to enhance networking with teachers and assist with parent education.’

Ms Lyons has just developed a new website for parents and schools to provide information, resources and support, and to publicise the activities of the enrichment program.

Ms Lyons says La Trobe University is the only university in Victoria offering an enrichment program to give gifted young people a chance to learn from artists, academics, community teachers and specialists in a range of fields.

Formerly known as the Daedalus Program, the workshops are offered in conjunction with PACSA (Parents Association for Children of Special Abilities), and are supported by the Department of Education and Training, the Catholic Education Office and the Bendigo Gifted Education Teachers Network. ☻️

Clarification: Article: 130 years of change at Kew Cottages Issue: La Trobe Bulletin March 2005

The research team acknowledges that the book The World of Dolly Stainer (2002) by Cliff Judge and Fran van Brummelen was based on a history given by Dolly Stainer, a former resident of Kew Cottages. Our Project seeks to further this innovation on a wider scale. We would be delighted to hear of other such projects or recorded memories of the Cottages. Please contact Dr Lee-Ann Mank 9479 2366.
For two weeks from Sunday 27 March, 15 La Trobe University fourth year Bachelor of Agricultural Science students visited the Yunnan Agricultural University in Kunming, PRC.

They were accompanied by Dr Mark Jois, senior lecturer in Animal Science from the School of Life Sciences.

The students undertook a ‘Case Study’ on the sustainability of agricultural practices in Yunnan Province, Southwest China. With a group of their peers from the Yunnan Agricultural University, they acted as ‘consultants’ with a brief of identifying major threats to sustainability of agricultural practices and to made recommendations for improving current practices.

The ‘case studies’ involved field trips, speaking with local farmers and consultations with local professionals including scientists.

During ten days of the visit the group observed three different cropping systems used in Yunnan Province. These are the famous terraced rice fields of Yuan Yang County, the flat irrigated mixed farming systems and the greenhouse cropping systems around Lake Dianchi.

Two of the major problems threatening sustainability of agricultural practices identified by the student ‘consultants’ were the catastrophic pollution of Lake Dianchi and rural poverty. The students also were able to observe several animal production systems including dairy and beef cattle enterprises and poultry production centres.

Throughout the visit the students participated in a frenetic program and learned a great deal about the causes and possible solutions to the problem of pollution in Lake Dianchi. Moreover, they had the opportunity to gain an understanding of agricultural practices and more generally like issues in a heavily populated and intensively used area which is common to many cities and areas in China specifically, and Asia more generally.

At the end of their visit, the students presented their findings to staff and students from the Yunnan Agricultural University. Their recommendations included measures to reduce the pollution in Dianchi Lake, improve the profitability of agricultural production systems and prevention of ground water pollution around the lake.

In addition to the busy but very informative period of study, the La Trobe students had the opportunity to mix socially with their peers from the Yunnan Agricultural University. Immediately after their arrival in Kunming the students of the host University staged an impressive welcome festival which set the scene for forging strong individual and group ties.

There were some opportunities to visit significant tourist sites. One such visit was made to the famous Stone Forest near Kunming.

Much public attention in Kunming was focused on the visit with local print media, radio and television providing excellent coverage of activities undertaken by the two groups of students.

It is planned to stage a reciprocal visit to La Trobe University in late May and early June, 2005 with students from both universities scheduled to undertake an investigation into a problem faced by a Gippsland dairy producer.

These reciprocal visits follow prior visits involving students from La Trobe and peers from Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. ‘The exposure of students to agricultural practices and problems encountered as a result provides extremely valuable experience which equips the students well for the future careers as professionals expected to deal with the complex issues facing people all over the world,’ Dr Jois says.
La Trobe University is conducting the Australian segment of a cross national pilot study aimed at improving services to families with emotional difficulties.

The ultimate aim of a subsequent full scale study, in which universities and other organisations in nine nations involved in the pilot study hope to participate, is to pinpoint precise methods to prevent or alleviate such family problems as child abuse, domestic violence, child neglect, physical and sexual abuse and learning difficulties.

La Trobe University practice-based social work researcher, Dr Trish McNamara, conducted in Melbourne the Australian research of the pilot study entitled Outcome-based Evaluation in Child and Family Services (OECFS).

She reported on research she conducted with a Melbourne family in conjunction with the Berry Street Victoria family counselling program to the Fourth World Conference on OECFS at Ubano, Italy in early October.

More than 150 world specialists in family problems attended the conference in which the nine participating countries reported back on their initial pilot studies.

A lecturer in the Department of Social Work and Social Policy at La Trobe, Dr McNamara is a member of the board of the International Association of OECFS and was one of a number of researchers who inaugurated the pilot project during a Third International OECFS Conference in Malosco, Italy in June 2003.

Dr McNamara said that the problems were found across families in all social classes in all countries, although they appeared to be more prevalent when economic stress was an important contributing factor.

She said that social workers around the world have over the years collected data which has provided some understanding of the outcomes of certain kinds of intervention into families with emotional problems.

However much more detailed knowledge was needed and the aim of the project was to gain greater sophistication in understanding how different interventions work.

‘The aim of this research is to identify the “steps along the way” to outcomes in community based child and family interventions. In the past we have understood something of the “crude” outcomes of interventions but have not identified the sensitive indicators of change,’ she said.

‘The “crude outcomes” of family preservation, reduction in family conflict and domestic violence and promotion of school retention, have been identified as central in this case study.

‘In the case of poor child school retention, children do not want to go to school for a number of reasons. Often it comes down to poor self esteem or a lack of any hope for the future.

‘In this instance, the answer is to inaugurate programs to discover why these two conditions exist. It can often be traced to learning difficulties, some of which can be resolved by a basic remedial program in literacy or numeracy.

‘A number of “Steps on the way” or changes leading to these “crude outcomes” have been identified in the pilot study.

‘We have found evidence that it is very helpful if family members express more emotion, providing feelings of warmth, affection and loyalty.

Also encouraging distanced family members to re-enter the family circle can be extremely helpful as well as positive parenting strategies such as greater containment of anger and aggression.’

Dr McNamara said that the International Association of OECFS hoped that the pilot study would lead to a full scale international study with each country contributing studies on a number of families.

Professor Marianne Berry, world director of the study and Professor Mark Ezell, both of the University of Kansas, gave a seminar at La Trobe in April.
A La Trobe University team is leading ground-breaking research to discover why young children develop language problems.

Team members are working with researchers from the Royal Children’s Hospital, Murdoch Children’s Research Institute and the Australian Stuttering Research Centre at the University of Sydney to examine the development of speech, language and stuttering in pre-school infants.

The Associate Dean of Research in La Trobe’s Faculty of Health Sciences, speech pathologist Professor Sheena Reilly, is leading the study.

La Trobe’s team comprises another speech pathologist, Dr Patricia Eadie of the School of Human Communication Sciences and Associate Professor Edith Bavin of the School Psychological Sciences.

‘This work is of great significance because of the growing importance of communication skills in the modern world,’ says Professor Reilly.

In the USA two-thirds of people with communication disorders are unemployed or in the lowest income brackets. Unemployment is 75.6 per cent in those unable to speak intelligibly.

Professor Reilly’s team was awarded $506,000 from the National Health and Medical Research Council for a five-year project entitled ‘Early Language in Victoria Study’ (ELVS).

It aims to investigate whether risk factors for language delay at four years can be reliably identified at eight, 12, 24 or 36 months. The study began in 2003 with the recruitment of 1917 eight-month-old infants, 973 boys and 944 girls.

Early speech and language data was collected at eight and 12 months. The next wave of data collection at 24 months is currently in progress. Data will also be collected at 36 months and at outcome when the children are four years of age.

In 2004 the team joined forces with researchers Professor Mark Onslow and Dr Ann Packman from the Australian Stuttering Research Centre at the University of Sydney to explore the onset and natural history of stuttering in these same children.

Professor Reilly said that although stuttering was one of the oldest conditions known to man, and one of the most researched communication disorders, its cause remained unknown and there were countless unanswered questions about its onset and development.

‘For the first time we are examining many factors thought to be predictive of, or implicated in, the onset of stuttering. These include language levels, temperament and family interaction prior to the onset of the condition.’

In November 2004 the combined research team was awarded a $260,000 ARC Discovery grant for the study entitled “A study of early stuttering”.

Professor Reilly said results would generate unique data of interest to numerous researchers around the world. Already it is generating interest following conference presentation in Australia. During 2005 a series of presentations will be made to audiences by the research team in England, Scotland, France and Germany.

Ultimately the team hopes that the earlier these problems are detected, the better the chances are of helping the children. In some cases prevention may be possible and for many, treatment or therapy can resolve or greatly alleviate the problem.
Listen guys! You may not know it but you’re living in ‘the affluence of the post scarcity cultural condition’. And what is more, it could be affecting your environmental ethics and politics.

In other words, because there is no shortage of goods and services, as there was when your grandparents were young, you are not as conscious of ‘green’ or ‘conservation’ issues as you might be.

This is one of the main findings of a La Trobe University research project entitled: Green families and intergenerational environmental ethics and politics.

The ‘post scarcity cultural condition’ is how Dr Phillip Payne of the School of Education describes the current era in which today’s youngsters are being raised amid a plethora of consumer goods, entertainment and ample services.

Dr Payne said it was worrying that Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show household concern for the environment has declined from 75 per cent of people in 1992 to 62 per cent in 2000. Other studies reveal youth feel ‘powerless’ about the prospects for the environment.

‘Because of this decline and sense of disengagement, I wanted to ascertain how the family household acts as a site of environmental education,’ Dr Payne explained.

He said there had been allegations that environmental education in schools had not lived up to expectations, partially because there is a lack of knowledge about the influence of the family and home on the ‘baggage’ children bring to school.

Dr Payne conducted two parallel investigations, the first into the intergenerational environmental ethics and politics of 30 ‘normal’ (non-Green) families in Bendigo and the second, a comparative study of six Bendigo and six inner city Melbourne ‘Green’ families.

They aimed to describe the environmental interests and actions of family members and whether parents negotiate their environmental commitments with their children.

Because Dr Payne also investigated how the current ‘Green’ parents developed their active concern for the environment, he examined three generations to ascertain how an environmental ethic and eco-politic are ‘socially constructed’ via intergenerational processes.

The data obtained from the survey and in-depth interviewing of the members of six inner Melbourne families has been analysed.

Each of the six data sets included at least one child between the age of eight and 16 and both parents where at least one was a member of the Greens or voted Green.

The findings show intergenerational continuity across three generations although the type of environmental ethic and politic has changed according to prevailing social circumstances, educational opportunities and cultural conditions.

For example, current parents’ environmental ethics and eco-politics are more domestically focused, following strong involvements in environmental issues in the 1980s which evolved from participation in social justice causes in the 1970s, when most parents attended university.

Parents reflected fondly on the social and political changes that came about through their involvements in the Vietnam War, feminism, and early practices of environmentalism.

Dr Payne found that the parents of today’s youngsters are legacies of their own parents’ scarcity conditions caused by the Depression of the 1930s and World War II.

Most parents were highly educated and many deliberately earned far less than their potential earning capacity. Their children had fewer opportunities for these rebellious ‘rites of passage’ or sense of support by the current educational, social and political climate.

Household frugality and parents’ anti-consumerism and anti-materialism views are under pressure with their children due to a combination of the culture of children’s rights, consumer/entertainment, and ‘post material’ imperatives that seem to limit the possibility of social alternatives.

However, some children expressed pride in their parents’ environmental commitments and actively resisted the peer group pressures they felt at school.

Dr Payne, a member of the international editorial boards of Environmental Education Research and The Journal of Environmental Education, believes his study could serve as a template for other studies into persistent social, political and educational concerns about children’s citizenship, health, indigenous and ethnicity issues, social relations, and globalization.

Dr Trobe University BULLETIN May 2005
La Trobe University is working to develop a new clinical tool to help physiotherapists ascertain the progress of treatment for certain shoulder problems.

It will take the form of a database which for the first time will enable physiotherapists to gauge whether their shoulder rehabilitation program has caused real physiological changes in the activation patterns of muscles around the shoulder region.

This will be done by comparing the electrical activity (EMG) of normal healthy shoulder muscles with the EMG of a person with, for example, a shoulder laxity problem like multidirectional instability.

EMG, or electromyography is the measurement of electrical activity muscles produce when performing various movements.

Lecturer in human anatomy, Dr. James Wickham, will work with physiotherapy lecturer, Dr. Tania Pizzari, honours student Ms. Katie Stransfeld, and 20 volunteers from La Trobe staff and students to develop the database.

Dr. Wickham said exercise programs for the rehabilitation of shoulder pathologies were written in accordance with what is currently known about the functional anatomy and biomechanics of the shoulder complex.

‘Much of this knowledge comes from EMG studies that determine which muscles are involved in certain movements and how much force these muscles exert during these movements. However these studies have not been able to provide a comprehensive overview of shoulder muscle function during certain movements.

‘We believe a new approach is necessary and to this end we will produce our own reference database from our 20 volunteers with healthy shoulders which can be used to detect any differences that may become apparent when comparing the EMGs of normal and abnormal shoulder muscle activation patterns,’ Dr. Wickham said.

When the data has been collected and analysed later this year and next, leading Melbourne shoulder rehabilitation physiotherapist, Ms. Lyn Watson, will use it in clinical trials.

‘Basically we will be looking at the quantification of “normal patterns” of shoulder muscle activity in our 20 volunteers who will perform a variety of shoulder joint movements,’ Dr. Wickham said.

Wearing ten surface electrodes and five intramuscular fine wire electrodes placed in or on muscles around the shoulder joint, the volunteers’ EMGs will be recorded for up to three hours as they perform a series of movements of the shoulder joint against light resistance.

The movements will enable the EMG’s of 15 shoulder muscles to be recorded.