

## Weighty issues debated

Sparks flew at the May Faculty Board meeting as three controversial issues were placed high on the agenda.

The issue attracting the most attention was the admissions policy. Other issues in the spotlight were the strategic planning process and the proposed revamp of the University's mission statement.

The Vice-Chancellor, Dr Max Price, attended the meeting and gave an update on the strategic planning process, while Prof Francis Petersen, Dean of the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment gave some background to the decision to

revisit the mission statement.

But it was the admissions policy and the use of race as a proxy for disadvantage that sparked lively debate. Alternatives were put forward and the flaws of the current system discussed, to the extent that the Dean eventually had to call an end to the discussion in order for participants to return home at a decent hour! Prof Jacobs thanked the attendees for their enthusiasm and participation and announced that there would be a lunchtime debate held in the near future to get to grips with the admissions policy issue and the impact that it has on the Faculty of Health Sciences.

## Winning ways ... for charity!



The Rural Support Network (RSN) recently held a raffle to purchase stationery for rural high school learners, toys for rural paediatric wards in the Eastern Cape and additional beds for hospitals in the Eastern Cape. Members of RSN drew the winning tickets on 30 April 2009 and took time to pose for a photo with Faculty Academic Administration Manager Brenda Klingenberg. Itumeleng Ntamatama, Mlekeleli Gambu, Brenda Klingenberg, Lwando Mpotulo, Pauline Nkondo. The winners are: First Prize: Yousuf Mohamed (1st year Medicine), Second Prize: Sheetal Silal (UCT Staff member) and Third Prize: Tende Makofane (6th year Medicine). R5 323 was raised and the students would like to thank everyone who participated.

## Getting to grips with UCT's proposed seven strategic goals

When deciding on the strategic way forward, there were three core questions that the VC and his team took into account:

- What would make UCT the preferred place – the destination of choice - for students, young post-docs and senior academics in South Africa, Africa and internationally?
- How should we ensure UCT can better play its part in demonstrating its commitment to and actively influencing issues of social justice?
- How can UCT adjust its activities to better meet the social,

economical and developmental needs of South Africa and the African continent both for the sake of broadening intellectual knowledge but also for the sake of actually impacting the problems?

From these critical questions, a set of seven strategic goals were identified, not merely as a checklist, but to get to grips with areas requiring more attention. And they are described as follows:

1. A transforming university: focusing specifically on race and how the university can overcome this

barrier;

2. An Afropolitan university: widening, sharpening and constantly measuring our engagement and footprint in Africa;
3. A research-led university: increasing the impact of our research and to increase our research engagement by making our research focused on Africa and relevant to our students and the broader community;
4. Operational size and shape: to ensure that our enrolment planning and implementation is geared to producing a broad-based,

- demographically representative undergraduate class and a diverse and expanded postgraduate class;
5. A responsive university: sharpen our engagement with developmental and other challenges facing our society;
6. A producer of a distinct graduate: to differentiate UCT from other institutions through calibre of the graduates we produce;
7. An international university: aims to expand UCT's international footprint by claiming our place in the global market.

## DEAN'S CORNER

In the wake of appointment of the new cabinet, calls by the newly appointed Minister of Higher Education, Dr Blade Nzimande, for improving access to tertiary education and also ensuring greater throughput, and by Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, the new Minister of Health, for increased recruitment of rural students are both critical challenges for health sciences' contribution to health equity.

We are ready to engage with these challenges. Along with staff from health and rehabilitation sciences, our student-led Rural Support Network has played a big part in recruiting students from rural areas, with positive outcome. Students receive support from our student support staff, from student

mentors and from societies such as the Impilo Students' Society. And while the content and sites of delivery of the curriculum align with the needs of the health care system, the intervention programmes have had a huge impact on increasing throughput.

Two initiatives from the last week warrant special mention.

A staff visit to Beaufort West suggests that this underserved area should be included in our expanded teaching platform. And on Saturday, our Health Sciences Students Council invited approximately 100 Grade 12 students from schools in Khayelitsha and Guguletu to our campus – to encourage them to consider a career in

health sciences, to demystify the process of application, to inform them about opportunities for support, and to prepare them for the academic and social challenges. There was active participation from the scholars, as well as an opportunity for voluntary counselling and testing for HIV.

Our current and planned processes are strongly indicative of our faculty's readiness to engage with the challenges presented by the new government.

We will also ensure that we make opportunities for both student and staff discussion on admissions policy as one important step in our mission to develop human resources fit to meet the needs of health equity in our country.

## Publication of the Month

One of the great pleasures, and indeed responsibilities, of academics is to encourage their students to submit written work for publication. David Watkins is a final-year medical student from Duke University, working with Bongani Mayosi, Liesl Zuhlke and Mark Engel, who has just published a letter in the prestigious journal *Science*:

Watkins DA, Zuhlke LJ, Engel ME, Mayosi BM, "Rheumatic fever: neglected again", *Science*, 324: 37, 4 April 2009.

The authors highlight a neglected disease that has been neglected once again: rheumatic fever (RF). RF and its sequel, rheumatic heart disease (RHD), are almost exclusively restricted to developing

countries, with a mortality comparable to that of rotavirus, and about 50% of that of malaria. According to the George Institute report, only 0.07% of global funding is directed toward RF, much less the treatment and prevention of RHD. This limited allocation for RF illustrates the misdirection of global health funding.

Although the complications of RF/RHD are potentially lethal, they are entirely preventable with antibiotic prophylaxis, which has been shown to be cost-effective in individuals with prior group A streptococcal infection. Some developing countries have been able to control the disease, simply by investing heavily in existing technologies.

Although a consensus on preventative vaccine development for RF/RHD has been noted in the literature, the authors have failed to document two other critical areas of research—epidemiologic surveillance and disease control. Several promising initiatives for RF/RHD surveillance and control have been recently published, but funding opportunities for such programmes are still rather scant.

Watkins and his colleagues encourage the international donor community to critically examine their funding priorities regarding RF/RHD, and have suggested that future surveys include epidemiological and treatment programmes, which are crucial to the eradication of neglected diseases.

## Andrea scoops second in Women in Science honours

Congratulations to Andrea Rother for winning the second prize in a prestigious Women in Science Competition for African researchers, which was organised by a consortium of science and development agencies, including CTA, ATPS, AGRA, FARA, NEPAD and RUFORUM.

The competition sought to identify, recognize and reward the hard work and excellence of young professionals and women scientists who are engaged in innovative and pioneering research and communicating the outputs (knowledge, technologies, approaches) to improve agricultural productivity and the livelihoods of rural communities.

Andrea's paper, dealing with "Pesticide Risk Reduction Strategies for Vulnerable African Populations through Regulatory Capacity Building and Gender

Appropriate Risk Communication Strategies," was shortlisted out of 258 abstracts received. The 10 finalists in the Women in Science section were invited to



Andrea Rother at the competition finals, which were held in Ethiopia.

present their papers at the finalists' event in Addis Ababa last week. Following her presentation, she was awarded second prize - in a very competitive process. The awards were made at the AU meeting of Agricultural ministers on Friday and were handed over by Ms Njabulo Nduli, director general of Agriculture for South Africa.

This is a great honour and a fantastic

achievement. It reflects lots of hard work on Andrea's part building links in Africa and should encourage us all to keep pursuing social responsiveness, particularly in engaging with African issues, in our work.

Well done, Andrea!

- Leslie London

## Undergraduate Awards 2008



Dr Tricia Pickard (left) won the following prizes at the 2008 Undergraduate Awards, held on Saturday, 4 April 2009: The Barnard Fuller Prize for the best student qualifying for MBChB with first class honours, The Prof Mary Robertson prize for the top female MBChB graduate and the University Gold Medal in Medicine for the student with overall top performance in the MBChB programme. She is photographed with Dr Ben van Stormbroek, who won the Dowie Dunn Memorial Prize for the top final year student in Paediatrics and the Nestlé Prize for best final year MBChB student in the Paediatrics oral and clinical examinations.

## Another A-rating for FHS

Professor Eric Bateman's significant contribution to asthma management has earned him an A2-rating from the National Research Foundation.

Professor of Respiratory Medicine at UCT and chairperson of the Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA), Bateman has played a leading role in changing the objectives of asthma treatment, which were

not clearly defined, and definitions that were not patient-friendly. This



Prof Eric Bateman.

was while he was chairing GINA's Science Committee and serving as an executive committee member of the Global Alliance Against Chronic Respiratory Diseases. Prof Bateman is a founder of the UCT Lung Institute and head of the Division of Pulmonology in the Department of Medicine. (MP)

## Raj Ramesar wins Alan Pifer Award

Prof Raj Ramesar, of the Dept. of Clinical Laboratory Sciences, recently received the prestigious Alan Pifer Award, which recognised his breakthrough research on colon cancer and particularly how this work contributes to the welfare of South Africa's most disadvantaged communities in the Northern and Western



Prof Raj Ramesar.

Cape Provinces.

Accepting the award, Ramesar said the honour belonged to the team of surgeons and nurses who had painstakingly furthered this pioneering work. He also dedicated the award to the families and communities affected by colon cancer, particularly those the team has worked with in rural areas. (MP)

## Monthly Quiz

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has just announced the winners of 81 grants of \$100,000 each to explore bold and largely unproven ways to improve global health. How many South Africans are among the winners and what are their names? Send your answers to: kit.vaughan@uct.ac.za.

Answer to last month's

quiz: the two photographs of Ralph Kirsch in the book *At the Heart of Healing* were taken in 1979 and 1993. They differ in that they illustrate the changing racial and gender composition of the student groups.

First with the correct answer was **Mary Shelton**, who wins the book voucher.