



University
of Otago
ŌTĀKOU WHAKAIHU WAKA



Celebrating 21 years
of the Leading Thinkers Initiative

Hon Grant Robertson

Vice-Chancellor

AgResearch Chair in Reproduction and Genomics
Alexander McMillan Chair in Childhood Studies
Baier Chair in Early Modern Philosophy
Carney Centre for Pharmacogenomics
Centre for Molecular Research in Infectious Diseases
Centre for Trace Element Analysis
Chair in Peace and Conflict Studies
Cure Kids Chair in Child Health Research
Cure Kids Chair of Paediatric Genetics
Dunedin City Chair in Entrepreneurship
Eamon Cleary Chair in Irish Studies
Edgar Chair in Diabetes Medicine
Gama Research Fellow in Bipolar Disorder
Howard Paterson Chair in Theology and Public Issues
Karitane Chair in Early Childhood Obesity
McAuley Chair of International Health
McKenzie Chair in Clinical Science
NZ Institute for Cancer Research Trust Chair in Cancer Pathology
NZ Law Foundation Chair in Emerging Technologies
Ron Lister Chair in Geography
Stuart Chair in Science Communication
Stuart Chair in Scottish Studies
TD Scott Chair in Urology
Webster Family Chair in Viral Pathogenesis

Professor Neil Gemmell
Professor Nicola Taylor
Professor Michael LeBuffe
Professor Martin Kennedy
Professor Kurt Krause
Professor Claudine Stirling
Professor Richard Jackson
Professor Stephen Robertson
Professor Andrew Day
Professor Nathan Berg
Professor Peter Kuch
Professor Jim Mann
Dr Maree Inder
Professor David Tombs
Professor Rachael Taylor
Professor Philip Hill
Vacant
Professor Mike Eccles
Vacant
Professor Tracey Skelton
Professor Lloyd Davis
Professor Liam McIlvanney
Recruitment for Chair underway
Professor Jemma Geoghegan

Kia ora

The Leading Thinkers Initiative is one of the flagship partnerships for the University of Otago. The breadth and depth of the work done by the Chairs created under this programme is extraordinary. It has been transformative research that is playing a part in changing the world for the better.

At the time it was created, the government's Partnerships for Excellence programme was looking to provide "step ups" in capability that wouldn't be possible without additional funding. The critical element to its success was that the government funding had to be matched by private contributions.

While many tertiary institutions looked to utilise the funding for capital projects, the University of Otago decided to invest in our people – the leaders in fields of research who had vision to take their work to the highest possible level.

That visionary approach to utilising the Partnerships for Excellence funding has been well and truly vindicated by what you see in this booklet.

I want to acknowledge all of those who have supported the Leading Thinkers Initiative. In particular those people and organisations who have generously funded Chairs. Your commitment and foresight has allowed progress that would simply not have otherwise been possible.

I also want to acknowledge those who have held the Chairs for their on-going commitment to the highest standards of research and scholarship. You make the University of Otago extremely proud.

As we celebrate this milestone, we also look to the future. We want to continue the work of Leading Thinkers and explore new possibilities. So much has been achieved, but now is the time to develop that further. We truly value your support and are committed to working with you into the future, so that we can take our programme and others like it in the University to the next level.

Here's to the next 21 years of thought leadership and research at the University of Otago!

Ngā mihi nui

Hon Grant Robertson
Vice Chancellor



Professor Nicola Taylor

Alexander McMillan Chair in Childhood Studies

Benefactor: Alexander McMillan Trust

The Deed of Gift establishing the Alexander McMillan Chair in Childhood Studies was signed in 2006, with Professor Gordon Harold's inaugural appointment taking effect from September 2008. Following his resignation, Professor Nicola Taylor was appointed to the Chair in March 2012. She was also appointed as Director of the Children's Issues Centre, where she had worked since its inception in 1995. Professor Taylor is based in the Faculty of Law. The Chair aims to make a difference in children's lives through advancing knowledge about their development, wellbeing and rights, and by improving law, policy and practice.



Research outcomes

An extensive programme of socio-legal research on a broad range of family law, welfare and parenting issues has been undertaken. Significant emphasis has been placed on ascertaining children's own perspectives on key aspects of their lives, particularly where these concern engagement with legal decision-making processes. The views of parents, family/whānau, family justice professionals (e.g. lawyers, judges, mediators, psychologists) and the general public have also been obtained on such profoundly personal issues as children's care arrangements following parental separation, relocation, international child abduction, relationship property division, and property entitlement on death. Much of this research has been directed towards law reform initiatives to update family law statutes, evaluate the 2014 family law reforms, and aid NZ's compliance with international law instruments like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1980 Hague Convention on International Child Abduction. Professor Taylor has also co-led a collaborative project to develop a website childethics.com/ providing ethical guidance to support researchers globally when conducting research involving children. This highly successful resource is available in six languages and accessed from 185 countries.

Impact

Providing an evidence base on which to improve the law and equip family justice professionals to more effectively engage with children is central to the Chair's work. Research findings are widely disseminated through publications, presentations and submissions and incorporated within Professor Taylor's LLB teaching and postgraduate student supervision. She regularly contributes to legal/judicial professional development programmes and law reform initiatives within NZ and internationally.

Aspirations

Greater emphasis is being placed on children's legal literacy so they can make better sense of events within their family/whānau and how the law might best respond. A website available in seven languages findinghome.world/ was recently launched to help children understand international child abduction and the 1980 Hague Convention. A new co-edited book on children's identity, selfhood and international family law is forthcoming. Professor Taylor is also significantly involved in regional children's rights and family justice initiatives across Australasia, Asia and the Pacific.

Professor Michael LeBuffe

Baier Chair in Early Modern Philosophy

Benefactors: Kurt and Annette Baier

The Baier Chair in Early Modern Philosophy was established in 2004 as part of the University's Leading Thinkers Advancement Programme. The intention was to appoint an eminent scholar in Early Modern Philosophy to enhance the existing tradition in this area at Otago, and to exploit the De Beer collections in Early Modern Philosophy in the University Library. The first holder of the Baier Chair, Peter Anstey, focused on Boyle, Locke and scientific experimental. With Anstey's return to his native Sydney, Michael LeBuffe assumed the Baier Chair in 2014. Professor LeBuffe is a specialist on Spinoza and Hobbes. In the Philosophy Programme, he teaches courses on philosophers of the Early Modern period, roughly 1640–1800, as well as Critical Thinking and the Philosophy of Science.



Research outcomes

In his time at Otago, Professor LeBuffe has written two books. *Spinoza on Reason* (Oxford University Press, 2018) offers accounts of Spinoza's metaphysics, epistemology, moral theory, and politics based upon related conceptions of reason that inform those views. *Spinoza's Ethics: A Guide* (Oxford University Press, 2022) is a generalist's introduction to Spinoza's masterpiece. Major articles include "Citizens and States in Spinoza's Political Treatise" in the leading philosophy journal, *Mind* (2021), a study of Spinoza's assertion that the state is like a human being; "Laws and Nature in Spinoza's Ethics," forthcoming in the *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, an interpretation of the way in which Spinoza combines ancient Aristotelian explanation in terms of a thing's nature or essence and modern explanation in terms of law; and two articles on Hobbes's theory of motivation – that is, desire, passion, deliberation, and will – in the Cambridge University Press Critical Guides to Hobbes's *On the Citizen* (2019) and *Leviathan* (forthcoming).

Aspirations

Early Modern philosophy is the source of powerful ideas that remain central to philosophy today. LeBuffe aims to produce definitive interpretations of the great systematic accounts of these ideas, including the Principle of Sufficient Reason, the notion of a Law of Nature, Virtue, Beauty, and the Social Contract.

Professor Martin Kennedy

Carney Centre for Pharmacogenomics

Benefactor: Jim and Mary Carney Charitable Trust

The Carney Centre for Pharmacogenomics was established in 2005 with a major donation from the Jim and Mary Carney Charitable Trust (Whangarei). Our mission was to carry out research on the role of genetics in responses to drugs, with the dual goals of optimising treatments and limiting adverse drug reactions. Professor Martin Kennedy (University of Otago, Christchurch) has led the Centre since that time, with the funds providing long term support for scientific officer Allison Miller, and salaries or stipends for early career researchers and postgraduate students, as well as laboratory consumables to facilitate many research projects. This core funding has allowed sustained continuity of expertise, and the ability to rapidly initiate many collaborative studies between genetics researchers and clinician/researchers across several medical disciplines and all Otago campuses (as well as further afield).



Research outcomes

The Centre has published widely, with over 100 papers in peer-reviewed international journals and many international and national presentations of work. We have won over \$6 million of external research funds and trained over 30 postgraduate students, with many of our graduates now working in Aotearoa and overseas. Our research has helped to clarify the value of pharmacogenetics in understanding drug responses and adverse drug reactions, particularly in psychiatry, respiratory medicine, general practice and gastroenterology. We established and have run New Zealand's only DNA bank for adverse drug reactions and have developed many new approaches to examine key pharmacogenes, including pioneering the application of nanopore DNA sequencing in this field. Very few of these research achievements would have been possible without the support of the Carney Trust, and Mrs Mary Carney herself, including generous regular support over the years subsequent to establishment of the Centre.

Impact

For our first 10 years, we ran an Annual Carney Pharmacogenomics Symposium, which brought together speakers from across NZ and Australia, with occasional visitors from further afield. This really helped propel collaboration, growth and awareness of pharmacogenomics research in Aotearoa. Prof Kennedy and colleagues have given numerous presentations nationally and internationally, including many to GP conferences and other professional groups, secondary school teacher workshops, and to public groups such as U3A.

Aspirations

The Centre has been a leading force in pharmacogenomics and genetics research in Aotearoa New Zealand over the past two decades, and has ensured we're well represented within the international pharmacogenomics research community. Much of our research is now focused on ensuring the equitable translation and application of pharmacogenetic knowledge, working with Māori and Pacific partners to achieve these goals. We also see possibilities for commercial development of simple pharmacogenetic tests that may improve access and implementation of pharmacogenetics in clinical settings, and we are actively pursuing these ideas.

Professor Kurt Krause

Centre for Molecular Research in Infectious Diseases

Benefactor: Dr John and Becca Cason Thrash

At its inception at the University of Otago in 2006, the Centre for Molecular Research in Infectious Diseases (CMRID) pursued research aimed at advancing the worldwide fight against infectious diseases. Headed by Professor Kurt Krause, a trained infectious diseases clinician and scientist specialising in the atomic structure of protein molecules, the Centre was initially housed within Otago Biochemistry but then grew to be part of the Webster Centre for Infectious Diseases.



Centre development

Professor Krause facilitated the affiliation of infectious disease researchers at Otago campuses in Dunedin, Christchurch and Wellington into CMRID, which was subsequently named as an official University of Otago Research Centre. This group conducted molecular research in infectious diseases aimed at developing new vaccines, diagnostics and antimicrobials. The Centre fronted a nationwide application to become a Centre of Research Excellence and was rebranded as the Webster Centre for Infectious Diseases (WCID), after the family of notable influenza researcher, Robert Webster.

Research outcomes

At its peak, the WCID comprised more than 60 researchers, experts in both human and animal diseases from four universities and key Crown Research Institutes, including AgResearch, ESR and IRL. The Centre also expanded its mission to include clinical and population health research. In its first ten years, it had a major role in obtaining a PC3 facility for the Otago campus, facilitating numerous joint Marsden, MBIE and HRC grants, holding NZ-wide symposia and fronting one CORE bid. At the end of this ten-year period, the Webster Centre and CMRID stepped back from University Centre status and many of its molecular researchers became Principal Investigators of the Maurice Wilkins Centre (MWC) headed by Greg Cook, Otago Microbiology. Kurt Krause went on to successfully lead the Infectious Diseases theme of the MWC, and Greg Cook became its first Director outside the University of Auckland.

Impact and aspirations

WCID had a significant role in public education and student support in infectious diseases. This was accomplished through nationwide research symposia, summer studentships and student travel support, and through engagement with television, radio and other media. For example, Prof Krause has given over 100 infectious disease related interviews since joining WCID. In the years since CMRID and WCID were founded, the global threats from infectious diseases have increased, and it is apparent just how vulnerable our way of life is to these kinds of threats. New Zealand continues to need a well-trained, and actively maintained core of researchers who are able to identify and develop diagnostics, vaccines and antimicrobials. The Webster Centre and CMRID were pleased to have a role to play in this regard and are grateful to its benefactors for their vision and generosity.

Professor Claudine Stirling

Centre for Trace Element Analysis

Benefactor: Community Trust of Otago

The Centre for Trace Element Analysis is a modern plasma source mass spectrometry facility at Otago that provides compositional analyses of trace element concentrations and trace element isotopes to a wide range of users. The utility of trace element analysis stems from the unique elemental 'fingerprints' that characterise different environments. Tracking how these signatures change as they move through the surroundings, whether in the early Solar System, ancient oceans or human body, provides a wealth of information on the underlying processes at work. The Centre for Trace Element Analysis is primarily a research-based facility that supports the trace element requirements of Otago researchers and their collaborators, and external organisations within and outside of New Zealand. An important feature of the Centre is its multidisciplinary nature, and the research conducted spans a wide range of departments across the Divisions of Sciences, Health Sciences and Humanities of the University of Otago.



Scientific team

Professor Claudine Stirling is the scientific director of the Centre for Trace Element Analysis, and additional technical expertise is provided by Dr Malcolm Reid and Mr David Barr. Our scientific team, supported by many other Otago staff and students, has overseen the activities of the Centre since 2007 – from initial start-up and the development of the trace element toolbox of techniques, to more recent advances in capability through the upgrade of clean laboratory infrastructure and instrumentation.

Research outcomes

The research conducted within the Centre for Trace Element Analysis spans fields as diverse as heavy metal environmental contamination, forensic tracing of human and animal migration patterns – including of invasive species, authentication of import and export products, human biochemistry and health, past and present ocean dynamics, climate change and carbon storage, and the evolution of Earth and its natural hazards. Research outcomes from the Centre include more than 270 articles published in international journals, 100 funded research grants, and 200 completed postgraduate students. As the Centre's director, Professor Stirling has a strong international profile in isotope geochemistry research, and she was recently elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand Te Apārangi.

Aspirations

Current and future research activities of the Centre for Trace Element Analysis aim to continue to complement, enhance, and provide new dimensions in research capability across the University of Otago. The Centre will continue to emphasise interdisciplinary research and will extend applications into areas where capability is not yet applied or realised.

Professor Richard Jackson

Chair in Peace and Conflict Studies

Benefactor: The Aotearoa New Zealand Peace and Conflict Studies Trust

The Leading Thinker Chair in Peace and Conflict Studies was established in 2009 through a Memorandum of Understanding between the Aotearoa New Zealand Peace and Conflict Studies Trust and the University of Otago. The role of the Chair is to lead and support Te Ao o Rongomaraeroa | National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (TAOR), a postgraduate research, teaching and practice centre based in the Division of Humanities. The Centre has an active postgraduate teaching programme and conducts original research in a wide variety of peace, conflict and justice-related issues. The inaugural Chair in Peace and Conflict Studies was held by Professor Kevin Clements. Following Professor Clements' retirement in 2017, Professor Richard Jackson took over the Chair which he has held since then. In 2024, in order to strengthen its original bicultural aspirations, Dr Liana MacDonald was appointed to the first Chair in Māori, Moriori and Indigenous Peace Studies and as Co-Director of TAOR.



Research outcomes

Staff and students at TAOR have conducted high-level academic research across a large number of subjects in peace and conflict studies, broadly defined. A number of major research grants have been awarded since 2009, including a Marsden Grant, and research has been published on topics such as pacifism and the success of nonviolent movements, indigenous peace traditions in Aotearoa and the Asia-Pacific, reconciliation in the Pacific context, refugee resettlement in Aotearoa, peace education, local peacebuilding, disarmament, arts-based approaches to peacebuilding, post-civil war peace agreements, the resolution of water conflicts, international mediation and conflict resolution, and many more. The geographical focus of research in the Centre has included, among others, Aotearoa, the Pacific, the Philippines, Indonesia, East Africa, Colombia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, South Korea, and more.

Impact

TAOR has ongoing collaborative and supportive relationships with peace communities at Parihaka and Rekohu, as well as local and national groups such as the Quakers, the Red Cross and community mediation. Staff and students are active in a variety of advocacy campaigns and local initiatives and play an active role in public education through engagement with the national and international media. Staff have been involved in the provision of expert advice to a variety of governmental and non-governmental bodies working in areas related to peace and conflict studies.

Aspirations

TAOR aspires to continue as a centre of excellence for peace-related teaching, research and practice with a renewed strategic emphasis on indigenous, Māori and Moriori peace practices and bicultural principles and processes in New Zealand. It seeks to attract students and funding which will contribute to a just peace and social reconciliation rooted in Te Tiriti in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Professor Stephen Robertson

Cure Kids Chair of Paediatric Genetics

Benefactor: Cure Kids

Curekids has developed a network of University-based Chairs to advance child health research. The Dunedin Chair was established in 2002, funded substantially from philanthropic sources from the Otago, Southland and Central Lakes District. The integration of this Chair into the Leading Thinkers programme in 2005 cemented its existence. The intent of the Chair was to establish a leading Child Health researcher and support them in building a team that focuses on impactful and clinically convertible research to improve the health of children. Professor Stephen Robertson, a clinical and molecular geneticist, was appointed to the Chair in 2002. A graduate of the University of Otago Medical School, he was recruited from Oxford University where he was a Nuffield Dominion Scholar.



Research team

Professor Robertson has assembled a team of researchers focused on investigating the cause, pathogenesis and treatment of genetic conditions that affect children. The team, including research fellows, postdoctoral scientists, PhD scholars, technicians and undergraduate students, collaborate extensively at national and international levels with academic units and clinicians. Professor Robertson's team have published over 200 papers and were awarded the HRC Liley Medal and the Royal Society of New Zealand Hercus Medal for progressing genomic biomedicine.

Research outcomes

Initially the Laboratory for Genomic Medicine (LGM) was very active in defining the cause and clinical presentations of numerous genetic disorders. Over its lifetime, it has contributed to the definition of over 50 separate genetic conditions, being the lead or prime mover in over 30 of those studies. More recently, the focus has moved to genetically complex conditions including those that have joint genetic and environmental determinants, such as malformations, intellectual disability and metabolic disorders. A strong emphasis throughout these two decades has been a focus on equity and helping lead projects that provision resources to enable accurate and timely use of genomics for Māori and Pacific peoples.

Impact and aspirations

As an active clinician, Professor Robertson has contributed strongly to the growth of clinical genetics and genomics in New Zealand, including the provision of datasets to establish capability in clinical laboratories across the nation. The work with Māori communities has enabled the development of research programmes with protocols informed by indigenous ethical frameworks. Genomics is poised to impact medicine very strongly over the next few decades. The LGM aims to underpin this practice with evidence and local knowledge that ensures all New Zealanders benefit from this revolutionary medical technology.

Professor Nathan Berg

Dunedin City Chair of Entrepreneurship

Benefactor: The Dunedin City Council

In 1953, New Zealand (NZ) enjoyed the 3rd-highest real GDP per capita in the world, but currently sits in 46th place (below 50th adjusting for purchasing power). To afford the social, environmental and other investments the country is committed to, more entrepreneurial behaviour is needed if standards of living are to maintain or improve. The Dunedin City Chair of Entrepreneurship was established in 2004 for "research and education in relation to entrepreneurship" and "to foster successful entrepreneurial behaviour in Dunedin and New Zealand", acknowledging the "important role the University plays in the economic and cultural development of the city".



Professor Nathan Berg began in this role in 2019. Berg's research applies econometrics, data science, and randomised control trial (RCT) experimental design to enable business collaborators to make high-stake decisions based on rigorously measured "hard" evidence: Which new product to develop? Which overseas market to enter? Which price? Which ad? How to compensate staff? Is my new software or other planned change improving productivity? Which innovation strategies align with my values?

Berg helped to establish New Zealand's first and only Bachelor of Entrepreneurship at Otago Business School. Berg's research and teaching emphasise pluralistic definitions of what constitutes value and, thus, what defines entrepreneurial behaviour. Value comes in many forms, and like biodiversity, the heterogeneity of entrepreneurs' values, beliefs and actions is itself a fundamental social good and driver of productivity.

Research outcomes

Research collaboration with NZ businesses has led to measurable productivity gains and contributed to tens of millions in additional top-line revenue, and similarly significant capital raises and job creation. New evidence bases have been created to rigorously measure the multiple ways that people benefit from entrepreneurship training. As part of a \$13 million MBIE-funded project, Berg is currently running RCTs in Southland, measuring factors that influence farm entrepreneurship, in general, and voluntary investments in pro-environmental land-management practices in particular.

Impact

Berg is a member of the Te Māea Māori and Indigenous Economy and Enterprise Network. He is a Research Network member of the New Zealand Product Accelerator (NZPA). He served on the Ministry of Justice's Behavioural Science Advisory Board.

Aspirations

To a significant extent not widely appreciated, the city of Dunedin and greater Otago and Southland regions have already produced world-leading entrepreneurs, exporters and creatives of many kinds. We are positioned to attract and produce many more, thereby increasing productivity growth, export growth, job creation, and new value flows. Apropos to this research portfolio's aspiration is the whakatauki: Tūwhitia te hopo, mairangatia te angitū – feel the fear, and do it anyway.

Professor Peter Kuch

Eamon Cleary Chair in Irish Studies

Benefactor: Eamon Cleary Charitable Trust

The Eamon Cleary Chair of Irish Studies was established in 2006 after Eamon Cleary, a local Irish entrepreneur, expressed a desire to promote the study of Ireland in New Zealand. Following an international search, Peter Kuch was appointed. An Associate Professor from the University of New South Wales (UNSW), Kuch had developed a major in Irish Studies at UNSW. To honour the relations between Ireland and New Zealand and to celebrate the establishment of the Cleary Chair, Mary McAleese, President of Ireland, visited Otago in October 2007.



When the Stuart Chair of Scottish Studies was appointed in 2008, Kuch and McIlvanney became co-directors of the Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies housed at 99 Albany Street. Since his retirement in December 2019, Kuch has maintained close links with Otago, where he is an Emeritus Professor, and UNSW, where he is an Honorary Visiting Professor.

Research team

In 2007, a notice was sent to all schools within the Department of Humanities seeking expressions of interest for teaching and researching topics relevant to Ireland. History, English and Theatre responded with the result that second- and third-level subjects with an Irish emphasis were added to the Bachelor of Arts. A Post-Doctoral Fellow, Dr William Martin, was appointed. Meanwhile, Kuch utilised international research teams, such as ITDP (Irish Theatrical Diaspora Project), as did the Centre's associates from History, English and Theatre.

Research outcomes

The Cleary Chair was lead/co-supervisor in graduating 9 PhDs and 4 MAs in the 13 years of Kuch's tenure. These 13 postgraduates and the Post Doctoral Fellow produced 2 monographs; some 30 refereed chapters, articles and reviews; and 24 national and international conference presentations. During the same period, the Chair produced 3 monographs; some 20 refereed chapters, articles and reviews; and 30 international conference presentations. Kuch's major publication during this period, *Irish Divorce/Joyce's Ulysses* (Palgrave 2017), launched by Mary McAleese at the National Library in Dublin and widely reviewed, is authoritatively credited with "changing the whole history of marriage in Ireland".

Aspirations

The Chair will continue to promote the study of Ireland locally, regionally, nationally and globally; continue to produce internationally validated published research which contributes to Otago's research quantum; continue to invite internationally renowned Irish writers and commentators on Irish affairs, such as Fintan O'Toole (2018), to enhance Irish self-understanding; continue to enrich the Irish experience in New Zealand and New Zealand's knowledge of Ireland.

*Professor Maebh Long has been appointed as the new Eamon Cleary Chair in Irish Studies, commencing 2025.

Professor Jim Mann

Edgar Chair in Diabetes Medicine

Benefactor: Sir Eion and Jan Lady Edgar

The Chair in Diabetes Medicine was the first of the Leading Thinkers Chairs to be established. The recipient, Professor Jim Mann, held an existing Chair at the University of Otago so the funding enabled the establishment of the Edgar National Centre for Diabetes Research to "make a significant contribution to reducing the global burden of diabetes through research and the dissemination of knowledge". Following the appointment of Centre researcher, Professor Rachael Taylor, to the Leading Thinkers Karitane Senior Research Fellowship in Early Childhood Obesity, the Centre became the Edgar Diabetes and Obesity Research Centre (EDOR).



Research team

Professor Mann was the inaugural director of EDOR, and is now Co-Director along with Associate Professor Justine Camp and Dr Andrew Reynolds. The Centre, currently led by Professor Rachael Taylor, comprises 24 research groups spread amongst 15 University of Otago Departments on the Dunedin, Christchurch and Wellington campuses, and at the University of Glasgow. Over \$200 million of research funding has been raised by EDOR members and more than 2,000 articles have been published in international journals.

Research outcomes

Numerous EDOR studies have explored the role of diet and exercise in the prevention and management of diabetes and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs). For example, EDOR research on the protective effects of dietary fibre has underpinned World Health Organisation nutritional recommendations aimed at reducing the global risk of NCDs and informed international guidelines for the treatment of diabetes. EDOR's community-based interventions revealed the potential to reduce the risk of excessive weight gain in childhood, and of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease amongst Māori in adult life.

Impact

EDOR has played an important role in drawing public and political attention to the importance of diabetes as a major contributor to the burden of disease in Aotearoa – Māori and Pacific rates for type 2 diabetes are amongst the highest worldwide. EDOR has collaborated with Diabetes New Zealand, the Healthier Lives National Science Challenge, philanthropists and PwC in the production of a widely promoted report on the Economic and Social Cost of Type 2 Diabetes. EDOR members serve on a wide range of relevant expert advisory groups in Aotearoa and internationally.

Aspirations

Over the next twenty years, EDOR will focus its research and advocacy on striving for health equity, in partnership with the communities most impacted by these conditions. An emphasis on implementation research will ensure that valuable research findings change health delivery, for the benefit of all in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Photo Credit: Otago Daily Times

Dr Maree Inder

Gama Research Fellow in Bipolar Disorder

Benefactor: Gama Foundation (Grant and Marilyn Nelson)

The Gama Research Fellow in Bipolar Disorder position, held within the Department of Psychological Medicine at the University of Otago, Christchurch was established under the Leading Thinkers Bipolar Fellowship Trust. The prime function is to support research that focuses on improved management of bipolar disorder to reduce the impact on the individual and their family, and focuses on the families' role in early recognition and intervention to reduce episodes. Dr Maree Inder is the current Gama Research Fellow.



Research activities

As the Gama Research Fellow, Dr Inder has been part of a team investigating adjunctive psychological treatments for bipolar disorders (and recurrent mood disorders) to reduce the negative impact on individuals and their families by improving symptomatic, functional and personal recovery in individuals with mood disorders. The primary intervention under investigation has been a bipolar specific psychotherapy, interpersonal and social rhythm therapy (IPSRT) and its derivative social rhythm therapy (SRT). These therapies are based on the growing body of evidence suggesting that dysregulation of circadian rhythms is a central mechanism in the pathophysiology of bipolar disorder. Our studies delivering IPSRT and SRT have addressed cognition (memory and thinking) issues which impact on functional recovery and potentially increase potential for relapse; translation for use in usual clinical care (Specialist Mental Health Services); delivery of therapy using video-conferencing; addressing treatment resistant bipolar disorder; and specific group intervention for family members.

Impact

Our research has made significant contributions to the evidence supporting IPSRT and SRT as important interventions that can improve a range of outcomes for people with bipolar disorder, and is cited in International Mood Disorder Treatment Guidelines.

As the Gama Fellow, Dr Inder contributes internationally as a member of the International Society of Bipolar Disorder and their taskforce on chronotherapy and chronobiology. This has involved co-authoring a paper on practice recommendation on chronotherapeutic treatment for bipolar disorder, and developing chronobiology resources for people with bipolar disorder and their families. Additionally, as a member of the IPSRT Special Interest Group (International Society of Interpersonal Psychotherapy), Dr Inder is co-leading a systematic review and meta-analysis of IPSRT and SRT, and focusing on increasing dissemination through training and education. Dr Inder is also undertaking a systematic review of family involvement in psychological intervention for bipolar disorder.

Professor David Tombs

Howard Paterson Chair in Theology and Public Issues

Benefactor: Paterson Charitable Trust, with support from Presbyterian Synod of Otago & Southland, and Ian and Annette Tulloch

The Howard Paterson Chair in Theology and Public Issues was established in 2008, and the Centre for Theology and Public Issues (CTPI) was established at the same time.



Research team

Professor Andrew Bradstock was appointed Chair and Director of the Centre from 2008 until 2013, and Professor David Tombs took up the position in January 2015. Since 2016, the Centre has had a staff presence in Wellington, initially through Dr Derek Woodard-Lehman, and subsequently through Dr Andrew Shepherd. There are currently six research affiliates appointed to three year terms: Dr Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, Dr Miryam Clough, Dr Greg Marcar, Dr Alistair Reese, Dr Jonathan Robinson, and Dr Steve Taylor.

Research outcomes

Research carried out in the Centre focuses on a theological and ethical analysis of national and global challenges facing Aotearoa New Zealand. Working at the interface of theology, public issues and lived experience, the Centre engages with the academic community, the churches and wider society. The Centre's research seeks to bring insights from theology into a critical encounter with current debates and public policy in a mutually enriching exchange. Areas of particular interest include sexual and spiritual abuse; social justice, poverty, and social welfare; Christian faith and public life; the environment and sustainability; and Te Tiriti and reconciliation. The Centre has a commitment to publishing in open access formats – this allows many of the reports, articles, and books written with support from the Centre to be freely available both locally and internationally.

Impact

The Centre's events and publications provide a public forum for transformative conversations on topical questions concerning society, culture, politics, economics, and the environment in New Zealand and beyond. The Centre is committed to addressing public issues in creative and constructive ways informed by clear analysis. It seeks to provide deeper understanding of the 'signs of the times' in wider society and support churches in faithful responses to the challenges that these raise.

Aspirations

We are currently exploring opportunities to promote further work on 'creation care' as a focus that is both deeply theological and a pressing concern for all in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Professor Rachael Taylor

Karitane Chair in Early Childhood Obesity

Benefactor: KPS Society Limited

The Karitane Chair in Early Childhood Obesity was established in 2008, in light of concern worldwide about the prevalence of excess weight in childhood and the consequences of this for health and wellbeing in Aotearoa New Zealand. Professor Rachael Taylor was awarded the Karitane Chair and now also leads the Edgar Diabetes and Obesity Research Centre. The vision of KPS was for the Leading Thinker role to “provide academic and professional leadership in promotion of optimal child health through research into childhood obesity”.



Research outcomes

A wide range of topical, novel and exciting research has been undertaken in this role including studies showing that early promotion of sleep health can lead to sustained improvements in weight management in children. Other research findings from Professor Taylor’s group showed that community-based initiatives can drive long-term benefits; introducing more risk and challenge in the school playground reduced bullying and increased resilience in children; and parents are receptive to feedback about their child’s weight status when undertaken in an empathetic and appropriate manner. More recently, the research focus has been on determining how ensuring good sleep may drive broader improvements in diet, weight and wellbeing in children – paying particular attention to the development and utilisation of advanced techniques for accurate measurement of sleep, physical activity and screen use.

Impact

The Karitane Chair has played an important role in shaping public health recommendations regarding sleep and physical activity in children, including a world first project using police body cameras which demonstrated that use of digital devices before bed does not impair sleep. This is both contrary to expectation and to the current New Zealand sleep guidelines. Professor Taylor has a strong international profile in obesity research, as evidenced by her recent election as a Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand Te Apārangi, and serves on a number of advisory boards.

Aspirations

Current and future research activities aim to reduce childhood obesity and increase health equity by taking a strengths-based approach to healthy weight management. Such an approach removes the focus on weight and concentrates on behaviours and environments that allow tamariki and whānau to sleep well, eat well, be active and enjoy life.

Photo credit: Sharron Bennett.

Professor Philip Hill

McAuley Chair of International Health

Benefactor: The Sisters of Mercy, through Mercy Hospital, Dunedin

The McAuley Chair in International Health was established in 2007 to advance research in the field of International Health. It was named after the inspirational founder of the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine McAuley. The Foundation Professor is Philip Hill who established the Centre for International Health. Through a donation from the McKinlay family, Professor John Crump was appointed in 2010.



In 2008, Professor Hill established the Otago Global Health Institute, which is now a flagship University Research Centre connecting over 140 researchers across the whole University to stimulate and support transdisciplinary Global Health research initiatives.

Research team

The Centre for International Health has two professorial research groups under Professors Hill and Crump, plus a relatively new non-communicable diseases research group under Dr Sherly Parackal. There are a variable number of research fellows and post-docs. In addition, masters and PhD students engage in research activities across Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Twelve senior academics from across the University lead the Otago Global Health Institute. From the Centre for International Health alone there have been over 400 publications, and the researchers have led or collaborated on projects that have attracted over \$100 million in funding.

Research outcomes

The two professorial groups in the Centre for International Health have led and participated in major advances in infectious diseases research, especially in the areas of tuberculosis and non-malaria fever. New initiatives in non-communicable diseases are focusing on prevention of diabetes and on nutrition in Asia-Pacific. Over 40 postgraduate students have completed their degrees, with many now having taken up leadership roles in New Zealand, Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

Impact

Otago Global Health researchers have played significant roles on major local and international decision-making committees and bodies. During the pandemic, they led webinar and op-ed series to educate the public – displaying a wide array of disciplinary expertise and capabilities, with tens of thousands of views worldwide. We also published a perspective piece on health nationalism in New Zealand’s pandemic response. Researchers have influenced national and global policymaking.

Aspirations

Professor Hill and colleagues are working with the University’s Advancement Office to build the case for ‘second wave’ investment in Otago’s Global Health initiative to facilitate strategic expansion. This will also be accompanied by, subject to approvals, a world-first University-wide transdisciplinary Master in Global Health initiative. The vision is to realise the University’s full potential to work with collaborators in low resource settings to help them solve their most pressing health problems.

Professor Mike Eccles

New Zealand Institute for Cancer Research Trust Chair in Cancer Pathology

Benefactor: New Zealand Institute for Cancer Research Trust

The New Zealand Institute for Cancer Research Trust (NZICRT) Chair in Cancer Pathology was established in 2006, and Professor Michael Eccles was appointed to the Chair. This has allowed Professor Eccles to carry out ground-breaking cancer research in the Department of Pathology at the University of Otago on the involvement of genes in cancer, and in cancer-like disorders. The benefactor has also provided additional postdoctoral funding support for the Chair which has led to dozens of published papers from Professor Eccles' laboratory, determining important roles that genes play in cancer onset and progression, and in polycystic kidney disease (PKD). The postdoctoral fellows who have been supported by the NZICRT in Professor Eccles laboratory include Dr Aniruddha Chatterjee (now Associate Professor), Dr Magda Ratajska, and Dr Mehbuba Hossain.



Research outcomes

In their current studies, Professor Eccles and his team have been investigating how cancer cells cunningly avoid anti-tumour immunotherapy treatment and cell death, and how genes and epigenetic signatures are involved in regulating this. For example, Professor Eccles' team is investigating several key PAX genes (such as PAX2) in renal cell carcinoma, and as a possible treatment target for PKD. PAX genes are centrally involved in multiple cancer types, and Professor Eccles and his team have shown, for example, that one PAX gene called PAX8 regulates the entry of cancer cells into the cell division cycle, so is one of the ways that cancer cells often use to keep growing and dividing.

Impact

Melanoma is a significant cancer in New Zealand as it has among the highest incidence rates per capita in the world. Professor Eccles and his team have identified genetic signatures of metastatic melanoma cells, which they also noted occurs alongside resistance to immunotherapy treatment and could distinguish non-responsive tumours from tumours that are somewhat less aggressive and are treatment responsive. Working alongside Otago Innovation Limited, the team is now aiming towards a clinically adoptable biomarker panel of prediction of treatment response for patients before they start treatment to allow for choice of the best treatment options available.

Aspirations

Most recently, Professor Eccles and his team are following up the above observations in melanoma, as well as New Zealand's most common cancer type – lung cancer – with the future aim of identifying new ways of diagnosing and treating these, as well as other types of cancer. These exciting developments have been made possible through the generosity of the New Zealand Institute for Cancer Research Trust.

Professor Tracey Skelton

Ron Lister Chair in Geography

Benefactor: Ron Lister Trust

The first Ron Lister Chair in Geography was held by Professor Tony Binns from October 2004 until 2022, when he retired. Professor Tracey Skelton became the Ron Lister Chair in Geography in February 2023.

Research interests

As a geographer, Professor Skelton has worked with marginalised, vulnerable and neglected people who should be rendered visible and included. She has had a distinguished career, having worked in the UK, Singapore and now Aotearoa NZ. She was a visiting fellow in the prestigious All Souls College, University of Oxford, and has held visiting positions at universities in Asia, Australia, the Caribbean, and Nordic countries.

Professor Skelton's teaching, research and publications focus on young people and children, gender, sexualities, politics and urban studies. She has published over 130 books, articles and chapters.



Ron Lister Trust

Ronald George Lister, known as 'Ron', was appointed Lecturer-in-Charge of Geography at the University of Otago in 1951. He was promoted to Foundation Professor of Geography in 1965 and retired in 1981.

Lister grew up in Surrey, UK. He gained county and state scholarships to the University College, London, and graduated in 1939 with joint first-class honours in Geography and Economics. He was committed to ideas around social justice and rational resource allocation, and his economics tutor was Hugh Gaitskell who became leader of the U.K. Parliamentary Labour Party in 1955.

When the Second World War began, Lister was a commissioned officer in the Royal Engineers and saw active service in India, Burma, and Indonesia. As a geographer in service, he developed surveying, field-sketching, and detailed landscape analysis skills.

After the war, Lister settled in Aotearoa New Zealand and worked to establish a viable Geography Department, attracting many students to the subject. His leadership brought in new interpretations of Geography as a university discipline for all levels of study. He fought hard to get Geography accepted as a science degree as well as arts. Lister's major academic achievement was a postgraduate programme in Regional and Resource Planning. Lister's commitment to geography was designed to be applied for the benefit of the community.

Professor Lister held office of the New Zealand Geographical Society for 30 years and was awarded Life Membership in 1979. Passionate about geographic education, he worked to combine the academic resources of the *New Zealand Geographer* and appropriate source materials for teachers. Lister conveyed the significance of geography to a wider accessible audience. He balanced pragmatic, realistic approaches to conservation and development and was respected and trusted. He worked tirelessly for the Tairaroa Head Project and the Otago Peninsula Trust.

Professor Lloyd Davis

Stuart Chair in Science Communication

Benefactor: Stuart Residence Halls Council

The Stuart Chair in Science Communication was established in 2007. The recipient, Professor Lloyd Davis, was charged with setting up and directing the Centre for Science Communication – New Zealand’s first tertiary-based programme devoted to teaching and research in science communication. The Centre opened in February 2008 and within two years it had 55 students enrolled in its newly established MSciComm degree, making it one of the two largest postgraduate facilities in the world for science communication. The programme later expanded to include PhDs, with the first graduating in 2014 – by which time, 83 masters students had also graduated. Prof Davis stepped down as the Centre’s Director in 2017, after 10 years at its helm, to concentrate on the other aspects of his brief – research in science communication and outreach.



Research outcomes

A wide variety of research has been undertaken, all driven with the same underlying aim of understanding how best to communicate science effectively. He has investigated the use of storytelling, entertainment, online videos, documentaries, photography, websites, citizen science, teaching and social media for communicating science. Much has involved collaborations with research groups in Australia and Spain to create better public understanding of the big issues facing the world, such as climate change and biodiversity loss. Innovations have included the use of national parks and wine as vehicles for communicating science. Prof Davis co-edited the first major book in the newly emerging field of science diplomacy – the intersection of science communication and politics that is so important for solving the world’s problems. He has also continued to pursue his scientific research, especially on penguins, much of which is also focused on issues arising from climate change and biodiversity loss.

Impact

Numerous successful public outreach initiatives were established to promote science in the community. These included the Distinguished Communicator Lecture Series, the WildSouth Film Festivals, the ScienceTeller Festivals, Literature and Lager, and the premieres of the Centre’s student-produced films held at the Regent Theatre. Prof Davis has been personally active in popularising science too, so far producing six popular books during his tenure as the Stuart Chair and two award-winning documentaries. For 10 years, he has been an elected representative of the PCST Network, the international organisation of science communicators, and was its Vice President for four years.

Aspirations

The Stuart Chair is currently involved with helping transition the Centre’s programme to an online one, with the aim of making it more international in its reach. Prof Davis is continuing research on how best to communicate science in what has fast become a video- and social media-centric world, while also working on two major projects: the production of a framework for the discipline of science communication, and a project examining sexual selection and what it means to be human.

Professor Liam McIlvanney

Stuart Chair in Scottish Studies

Benefactor: Stuart Residence Halls Council

The Stuart Chair in Scottish Studies was established in 2006 with the aim of promoting research into the literature, culture and history of Scotland and the Scottish diaspora. Professor Liam McIlvanney, the inaugural holder, took up the role in 2009, and now also co-directs the Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies (CISS), the only Irish and Scottish Studies centre in the Asia-Pacific region.



Research outcomes

Professor McIlvanney has published widely on various aspects of modern Scottish and Scottish diaspora literature, including the global impact of Robert Burns’s poetry and the tradition of Scots-language writing in Aotearoa. On the creative side, Professor McIlvanney has explored issues of violence, industrial decline and social change in the West of Scotland through a series of bestselling crime novels. These novels have won several prizes (including the Ngaio Marsh Award and the McIlvanney Prize for Scottish Crime Book of the Year) and are published in French, German, Spanish and Catalan translation. Professor McIlvanney has developed the postgraduate teaching of creative writing at Otago and a number of his students are now published novelists. He co-edits the Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies’ ‘Celtic Peoples/Tangata Kereti’ series of pamphlets, whose authors include Val McDermid FRSL and Dame Fiona Kidman.

Impact

Public outreach has been a priority of the Stuart Chair and CISS via extensive programmes of public lectures and seminars, events with visiting writers (including our Celtic Noir Crime Writing Festival), and engagement with local community groups. The annual CISS Writers Fellowship has brought distinguished overseas writers, including Janice Galloway, Damian Barr, and Kathleen Jamie (the Makar, or Scottish National Poet) to Otago to mentor students and give public readings. Professor McIlvanney maintains a high international profile, with appearances and masterclasses at literary festivals (the Edinburgh International Book Festival, the Melbourne Writers Festival, the Toronto Writers Festival). He comments regularly on Scottish matters in NZ and overseas broadcast media, and has written on Scottish subjects for the *Guardian*, *Irish Times* and *NZ Listener*.

Aspirations

Professor McIlvanney aims to extend and integrate his twin foci on literary research and creative writing, while developing CISS as a hub for writing and research on the literature, history and culture of Scotland, Ireland, and their diasporas. He looks forward to working closely with fellow Leading Thinker, Professor Maebh Long, the newly appointed Eamon Cleary Chair in Irish Studies.

Professor Jemma Geoghegan

Webster Family Chair in Viral Pathogenesis

Benefactor: Robert and Marjorie Webster

The Webster Family Chair in Viral Pathogenesis was established in 2005 in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology at the University of Otago. Professor Robert Webster made major discoveries relating to influenza virus, including that birds were the culprit of human flu outbreaks. In recognition of Webster's own New Zealand farming background and the potential impact of zoonotic threats to human health, this Chair was established to provide high-quality research in the field of viral pathogenesis. Professor Jemma Geoghegan was appointed to this Chair in 2023.



Research team

Professor Geoghegan leads a world-leading research team focusing on the evolution, emergence and ecology of viruses. Her research involves using metagenomics to reveal the diversity, structure and evolution of the virosphere – examining the evolution of major viral infections in both humans and animals, and developing new analytical and computational approaches to analyse aspects of virus evolution. In addition to this Chair, Geoghegan holds a prestigious Rutherford Discovery Fellowship and has been the recipient of many awards including the Prime Minister's MacDiarmid Emerging Scientist Prize.

Research outcomes

The work led by Professor Geoghegan's team has deepened our understanding of how and why viruses jump to new hosts in the first place, and expanded our knowledge of the viruses that exist in nature. This work has helped to pioneer bioinformatic methods for the discovery of novel viruses, which is beginning to revolutionise the study of virology. As a consequence, she has built a network of collaborators in New Zealand and works closely with various agencies on the rapid, genomics-informed detection and diagnostics of infectious diseases impacting human and animal health, including Aotearoa's taonga species.

Impact

Professor Geoghegan's research has played an important role in drawing public and political attention to the importance of viral infectious diseases – particularly those affecting human and animal health – and has been a strong proponent of increasing New Zealand's capability and capacity for pandemic preparedness.

Aspirations

Over the next twenty years, the Webster Family Chair will focus on broadening our understanding of viral evolutionary processes, including elucidating how and why viruses emerge in new host populations. Professor Geoghegan will continue her long-standing collaboration with the Institute of Environmental Science and Research where she helped to establish genomic sequencing of human viral pathogens, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The overall aim of this work is to establish Aotearoa's inaugural framework for genomic pathogen diagnostics and surveillance, helping to better prepare us for new pandemic threats.

Further Leading Thinkers Initiatives

AgResearch Chair in Reproduction and Genomics

Benefactor: AgResearch

Professor Neil Gemmell currently holds the AgResearch Chair in Reproduction and Genomics.

Cure Kids Chair of Paediatric Research

Benefactor: Cure Kids

Professor Andrew Day currently holds the Cure Kids Chair of Paediatric Research.

McKenzie Chair in Clinical Science

Benefactor F & J McKenzie Charitable Trust

Chair is vacant.

NZ Law Foundation Chair in Emerging Technologies

Benefactor: NZ Law Foundation

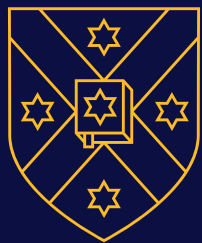
Chair is vacant.

TD Scott Chair in Urology

Benefactor: Trevor and Diana Scott

Recruitment for Chair is currently underway.

For further information or to discuss support of any initiatives, please contact the Director of Development and Alumni Relations.
Email: director_development_alumni@otago.ac.nz



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