



Introducing UniSA's 2017 Alumni Award recipients

UniSA honoured four of its outstanding graduates at a special event in Adelaide in November – acknowledging the power education gives individuals to shape their world. [more...](#)

 Share

 Share



Chief of Viral Diseases in New York

As Chief of Viral Diseases for New York State Department of Health, Dr Kirsten St. George is responsible for detecting, researching and informing the relevant authorities on viral diseases, including Zika and influenza. [more...](#)

 Share

 Share



Revealing the key to acute myeloid leukaemia

UniSA researchers are working to achieve a greater understanding of the genetic diversity of acute myeloid leukaemia to improve treatment outcomes for this often difficult to treat cancer. [more...](#)

 Share

 Share



Ahmad proves the power of education

Since Ahmad Hakim fled Iran, he has gone from a dish washer, to the first Ahwazian Arab man to graduate from UniSA, to securing a role with the UN Refugee Agency – the same organisation that helped him register as a refugee and move to Australia. He shares his story and why he believes communicating is an important step towards healing. [more...](#)

 Share

 Share



Creative Leadership: a driver for change

Executive Director, MBA and Executive Education for UniSA Business School, Peter Stevens, shares his insights on creativity, innovation and agility and how they contribute to business growth. [more...](#)

 Share

 Share



>> Image gallery: UniSA alumni events

Alumni events

- 03
NOV-
01
DEC

The Power of Illustration: A Legacy for the Future - Adelaide
This exhibition celebrates the contribution and legacy of UniSA alumni and staff to the practice of Illustration. Spanning forty years, it documents the diverse impact of their work to innovation, culture and commerce - demonstrating the connect between illustration teaching and practice on a national and international scale.
- 4
DEC

Britain after Brexit: Reasons to be Cheerful – Adelaide
Join Her Excellency Menna Rawlings CMG, British High Commissioner to Australia, who will explore the vision of Britain after Brexit.
- 4
DEC

UniSA Hong Kong MBA Alumni Charity Christmas Ball – Hong Kong
UniSA MBA alumni are invited to join us for the University of South Australia Hong Kong MBA Club Charity Christmas Ball on 4 December 2017 at the at Crown Plaza Hong Kong.
- 5
DEC

2017 Amnesty International Oration – Adelaide
The Bob Hawke Prime Ministerial Centre presents the *Second Information Revolution* with author, novelist, journalist, broadcaster and social media commentator **Jane Caro**. *Almost booked so you may need to go on a waitlist.*
- 7
DEC

Building Nuclear Peace – Adelaide
An initiative from United Nations Association of Australia, South Australia and co-presented with The Bob Hawke Prime Ministerial Centre and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, this event will examine the recently adopted UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.
- 06-
19
DEC

2017 Industrial Design Graduate Exhibition – Adelaide
Showcasing the creative talent of UniSA's Industrial Design students
- 03
MAR-
03
JUN

2018 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: Divided Worlds – Adelaide
Titled *Divided Worlds*, the 2018 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art presents an allegory of human society. Curated by Samstag Museum of Art Director Erica Green and held across Samstag Museum of Art, Art Gallery of South Australia, JamFactory and the Santos Museum of Economic Botany in the Adelaide Botanic Garden.



[Your alumni network](#) | [Alumni Giving](#) | [Postgraduate Study](#) | [Alumni in the news](#) | [Contact us](#)

>>**Stay Connected** The best way to reap the benefits of being an Alumnus of the University of South Australia is to keep us up to date with your changes of address or workplace.



Introducing UniSA’s 2017 Alumni Award recipients

The University of South Australia honoured four of its outstanding graduates at a special event in Adelaide in November – acknowledging the power education gives individuals to shape their world.

This year’s recipients include **Glenn Cooper AM**, business leader and Chairman of Coopers Brewery, one of Australia’s iconic brands; CEO of the Ngaanyatarrra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women’s Council, **Andrea Mason**; President of Kaplan, one of Singapore’s most successful education providers, **Leon Choong**; and advocate for children’s nutrition and education in Kenya, **Wawira Njiru**.

UniSA Vice Chancellor **Professor David Lloyd** says it is at the annual alumni awards that the world sees the real value of education.



“At these awards we mark our graduates’ outstanding contributions to society and to our local and global communities,” Prof Lloyd says.

“In every recipient we see how education opens doors, widens understanding and challenges the norm.

“Those who have been privileged find ways to share their wealth and talent or those who have had to overcome disadvantage or adversities, they have gone on to make it their goal to change the world for the better, and their UniSA education gave them the tools to succeed.

“It is a night to acknowledge our greatest assets - our enterprising graduates – people who change the world,

improve lives, promote equality and foster success. I am so proud that they are UniSA Alumni, reflecting all the qualities of our institution in all that they do.”

UniSA inducted its founding members to The Hetzel Group, named in honour of former UniSA Chancellor, the late Dr Basil Hetzel.

The Group acknowledges and celebrates the contributions of donors who have made philanthropic gifts to the University of \$100,000 or more.

Director of Advancement at UniSA, Deborah Heithersay, says the generous contributions made by members of the Hetzel Group and other donors continue to support scholarship opportunities for students, and the provision of state-of-the-art infrastructure that enhances learning at UniSA.

“Donations to support education have a long and extensive legacy – they support generational improvements,” Ms Heithersay says.



“Education in a general sense is related to better life and health outcomes, but the contribution made by our graduates to society can be everything from curing previously devastating diseases, or teaching and inspiring a student to choose the right path, right through leading better governments and or saving the environment.

“Each gift we receive is an investment in the future.”



[Back to Alumni News](#)

[Postgraduate Study](#) | [Research Degrees](#) | [Alumni Giving](#) | [Career Services](#) | [Events](#) | [Contact Us](#)

© 2017 University of South Australia | [CRICOS Provider Number: 00121B](#) | [View our privacy statement](#)

DISCLAIMER OF LIABILITY: While every effort is made by the University to ensure that accurate information is disseminated through this medium the University of South Australia makes no representation about the content and suitability of this information for any purpose. It is provided ‘as is’ without express or implied warranty.

Chief of Viral Diseases in New York

Dr Kirsten St. George

Bachelor of Applied Science in Medical Technology

Masters of Applied Science (Medical Laboratory Science)

Doctor of Philosophy (Infectious Diseases and Microbiology)

Chief, Viral Diseases, Wadsworth Center, New York State Department of Health

As the Chief of Viral Diseases for the biggest state public health lab in the United States, Dr Kirsten St. George is responsible for detecting, researching and informing the relevant authorities on viral diseases, including Zika and influenza.

Dr St. George has made a prominent and positive impact in science during her career spanning more than 35 years and has worked in laboratories in multiple countries. From basic research, to clinical laboratory medicine, to reducing the fatality rate of high-risk transplant patients, to now leading a public health virology laboratory and regulatory authority on 300 clinical labs.



Her career achievements were recently recognised at the Clinical Virology Symposium in Georgia, US, where Dr St. George was presented with the 2017 Diagnostic Virology Award – an international honour which acknowledges an individual whose contributions to viral diagnosis have had a major impact on the discipline.

The Wadsworth Center's Virology Laboratory conducts surveillance, outbreak investigations and reference testing, develops new testing methods, performs viral evolution and genomic research and trains post-graduate students and fellows. The Laboratory also holds several national reference center contracts, for example providing weekly influenza surveillance data, including full viral genomic sequence, to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, on samples from 22 of the US states. The laboratory holds similar federal contracts for measles, mumps, gastroenteric and other viruses.

Additionally, they play a key role in response efforts when there are major new pathogen events, such as Zika. The lab developed Zika tests in 2015, tested more than 11,000 suspected Zika cases in 2016, and has published several papers on the virus.

"When Zika emerged in Central and South America, it initially was a matter of responding to an outbreak situation. But it's gone on so long that it's no longer an outbreak response – this is the new normal, this is dealing with a new huge disease situation as we have dealt with dengue fever," says Dr St George.

"However, the disease incidence is decreasing. Whether there is going to be another wave - we are yet to see. Or if we [the United States] get more local transmission – they're the things we are now watching closely.

"The Wadsworth Lab has always been pretty famous for developing lab methods and detection techniques, and with the assistance of funding we have been able to develop a large panel of viral detection methods.

"In my field, the speed of diagnosis has been one of the biggest changes as well as the volume of data that we are able to quickly collect.

"Previously, it would take months to see genetic changes in viruses – we would have to grow the virus and then biologically test them. Now, with rapid advances in technology, we perform 'next generation sequencing' which means we collect genomic sequence data and we can get the virus information in days, a week at most, and sent to the CDC the following day.

"When my Assistant Director for Research was starting to use next generation sequencing, I said to him that the speed of the technology is now so powerful that he generates more virus sequence data in a week than I generated during my entire PhD."

Among the changes she has seen in Virology, Dr St. George commented on two that she expects to continue:

1. "With the new sequencing technology and the associated data, there are some important decisions that we need to make. Having the ability to generate huge databases of sequence data, there is a temptation to keep doing it and yet it is vastly exceeding the capability to analyse it properly. So to just keep generating more and more data starts to become pointless. We have to sit back and think about what we are going to do with it, and not just dump more data into the database – especially if it's not curated, it's not annotated, it's not edited properly – and there is a lot of that going on. This is a powerful area that has the potential to be very useful.
2. "On the other end of the scale we have increased miniaturisation of diagnostic tools. With these powerful field deployable devices, we are moving away from big labs and big core facilities. People can go out into the field and to the bedside with equipment that can do highly sophisticated things and spit out a lot of test results very rapidly. The middle has gone - it's instantaneous. There are new sequencing devices that are as small as a mouse trap, and you can carry one in your pocket and record the data on a computer immediately. These are incredible."

Dr St. George's career started at UniSA where she graduated with a Master's Degree in Applied Science and worked in basic science and research in Adelaide before moving to Tasmania to work in diagnostic medicine.

"That was a fabulous experience, I had a wonderful director, Dr Richard Tucker, who I still correspond with from time to time. He was a wonderful clinical mentor and I learnt a lot from him."

After five years, she was awarded a Fellowship by the Abbott Company to work at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, the biggest transplant centre in the world at the time.

"They were performing more than 800 transplants a year.

"Transplant recipients experience major problems with viral infections, and as a virologist it was the perfect place to explore virology studies.

"With paediatric haematology transplant cases, and infections such as cytomegalovirus, we had fatality rates as high as 30% in the high-risk groups. With new treatment regimens and trials, the fatality rates were down to 5%. Some of those trials took years, but when you get Drops of 25% in fatality rates – that's incredibly rewarding."

While Dr St. George was assisting the Director of the Virology Department in overseeing all of the applied research programs – in collaboration with the infectious disease physicians, the transplant surgeons, and industry scientists - she completed her PhD on the side. The Director, Dr Charles Rinaldo, is, she says, "a brilliant immunologist and virologist, as well as a great research mentor."

However, "By the time I had finished my PhD, I was at the extreme end of tired. I needed a good rest. I was well into my 40s, I thought, I could just give up science and grow flowers instead.

"I was very fortunate to be able to take two months off and come back to Australia to think about my options. I decided to leave academic medicine and go into public health. The opportunity of Director of Virology at Wadsworth was a big attraction. I went there in 2004 and in 2008 I was promoted to Lab Chief."

Yet despite her indisputably impressive career, Dr St. George remains humble and continually credits her successes to the teams she works closely with.

"Nobody works as an individual. My achievements are the collective work of many collaborators and teams over the years.

"It has been very rewarding building a really solid team at the Wadsworth Centre, and mentoring young scientists and seeing them grow and develop and achieving in their own right. I take pride in their work, it is tremendously rewarding."

Her best piece of advice for mentoring and leading such a large and dynamic team is to provide them with opportunities and trust her staff.

"Provide them with opportunities to let them grow and develop and trust them. Let them do it. Once you give them a project, don't micromanage it. Be there to support them and come to you but don't get in their way. Let them go with it and trust them to take care of it."

After a fulfilling career, Dr St. George plans on retiring back in Adelaide where her family lives.

"I've missed my friends, family and Cornish pasties. No one knows what a pasty is in New York!"



[Back to Alumni News](#)

Cancer biology revealing the key to acute myeloid leukaemia

**Professor Richard D’Andrea - Head, Acute Leukaemia Lab
Centre for Cancer Biology, SA Pathology and University of South Australia**

Dr Saumya Samaraweera

Postdoctoral Research Scientist, Acute Leukaemia Lab, Centre for Cancer Biology, SA Pathology and University of South Australia.

Professor Richard D’Andrea and his team in the Acute Leukaemia Lab are widening the molecular and genetic understanding of acute myeloid leukaemia (AML) to improve outcomes for patients with this often difficult to treat cancer.

AML is a rare cancer of the blood and bone marrow which often has dismal treatment outcomes, with only 30% of patients successfully cured by current treatment, and high rates of relapse and median survival rates of as little as just 10 months for some subtypes.

Once thought to be a single form of leukaemia, AML is now considered to be a group of diverse cancers that share some genetic and molecular characteristics, but respond very differently to treatments. This has made finding alternatives to intensive chemotherapy particularly difficult.

“Despite the complexity we have some promising leads to improve treatment strategies for AML,” says Professor Richard D’Andrea.

One such approach underway in the Acute Leukaemia Lab is exploring the link between DNA methylation and the tumour suppressor gene GADD45A, both of which are altered in AML cells.

Dr Saumya Samaraweera is exploring why the DNA methylation process is upregulated (increased) in AML patient cells and how this interacts with GADD45A, which plays a key role in normal blood stem cell growth and survival.

“Methylation is a normal chemical process of DNA modification within cells that changes the way genes are expressed,” says Dr Samaraweera, Postdoctoral Research Scientist.

“But altered methylation in AML affects GADD45A in different ways, depending on the genetic profile of the disease, and our analysis shows that this is linked to the risk of relapse of the AML after chemotherapy treatment.

“We are working to understand why these changes take place and what they tell us about how AML is initiated from normal blood stem cells, and we are also investigating whether we can use the profiles of altered DNA methylation to help identify which patients are less likely to respond well to traditional chemotherapy treatment.”

The team is also currently exploring promising leads for therapy. For this, novel drugs are being tested on patient samples to find more effective treatment for AML patients with disease that is difficult to treat.

“Our studies of AML cellular metabolism, the process by which cells create the energy they need to replicate and survive, have shown that similar to methylation patient, AML cells show many different metabolic profiles,” says Prof D’Andrea.

“If we can find the metabolic pathways that different forms of AML rely on to grow, then we can essentially target these and starve the cancer of energy, potentially creating a new effective treatment for the disease.”

To donate to help support important cancer research at UniSA, as well as a long list of other areas of medical research, please visit: <https://donate.unisa.edu.au/donate-to-the-centre-for-cancer-biology>.



Back to Alumni News

[Postgraduate Study](#) | [Research Degrees](#) | [Alumni Giving](#) | [Career Services](#) | [Events](#) | [Contact Us](#)

© 2017 University of South Australia | [CRICOS Provider Number: 00121B](#) | [View our privacy statement](#)

DISCLAIMER OF LIABILITY: While every effort is made by the University to ensure that accurate information is disseminated through this medium the University of South Australia makes no representation about the content and suitability of this information for any purpose. It is provided 'as is' without express or implied warranty.

From refugee to UniSA to UN Refugee Agency Employee

Ahmad Hakim

Bachelor of International Relations

Fundraiser at the UN Refugee Agency

In 2008, Ahmad Hakim first arrived in Australia after surviving and escaping Iran in the midst of political unrest. In the years since he initially fled with nothing more than a blanket and the clothes on his back, Ahmad has gone from a dish washer, to the first **Ahwazian Arab man** in South Australia to graduate from university, to securing a role with the UN Refugee Agency – the same organisation that helped him register as a refugee and move to Australia.

Ahmad shares his story and why he believes communication is an important step towards healing.

“It is really hard to be a refugee. Sharing my story is really important for educating non-refugees about just how hard our lives are and the constant struggle we go through each day,” says Ahmad.

When Ahmad first arrived in Adelaide, he chose to fully immerse himself in English and Australian culture as much as possible. A mainstay of integration into his Australian life consisted of paying regular visits to the local shops, hoping to pick up as much English as he could.

“It was a very important and significant stage of my life in Australia because I saw myself like a new born baby, with no understanding of the language or culture. Learning about a new culture that I am going to live with for the rest of my life was vital.

“I am in Australia now, that’s where I am going to have my children and they are some of the values I’m going to teach my children.”

Ahmad’s goal to submerge himself in Australian culture proved worthwhile, within that first six months he secured a job working as a dish washer.

“When I started working in the Adelaide Convention Centre in 2009 with little English, my behaviour in dealing with the environment around me was different to other people - sometimes I would make mistakes and it was hard for me to explain why I did something that way.”

But Ahmad continued to do what he had always done, work hard. He rose through the ranks from dish washer to cook while studying Commercial Cookery at Regency TAFE, as well as working the evening shift at the Royal Adelaide Hospital. In total Ahmad was working 15 hours a day, six days a week.

After marrying and beginning his family, Ahmad decided at 35 that he would pursue the tertiary education he had always sought after by enrolling in a Bachelor of International Relations, knowing it was the right choice to help provide for his family.

“I always dreamt of going to university and this came at a time when we had our first young child and I knew I needed to establish a stable future for our family.

“It is very inspiring because people in Australia are very positive and forward thinking. Studying in Australia is very different from my country where education is limited to the elite and is not open to just anybody. In Australia, education is very inclusive and they don’t discriminate.”

Towards the end of his time studying at UniSA, Ahmad secured a role as Multilingual Liaison Officer for Senator Alex Gallacher, an experience he holds in high regard.

“It was great. They were very supportive and friendly. I was able to get involved from day one and learn a little about how the system works.

“I grew up in Iran where politics affected our lives on a daily basis - it is a popular topic although taboo. If I can get a job in politics in Australia I could provide valuable insight and analysis into Iran’s politics, possibly helping to support better relationships between the two countries.”

More recently, Ahmad moved to Brisbane and secured a job with the UN Refugee Agency, the same organisation that originally helped him move to Australia. Ahmad says the job is important to him because he is able to work with people, engage in dialogue, and share his story with others.

“I know first-hand what a difference this work makes to the lives of refugees, as do many of my work colleagues.

“A safe place to sleep, clean water, food and health care are like gold when you are living under the conditions that refugee status places you under.”

Since arriving in Australia, Ahmad has tirelessly put everything into his work to ensure he can create the best possible future for his family. Along the way he has formed an invaluable skillset. When asked what he ultimately wants to do with these skills, Ahmad said the most important thing he could do is hear the stories of others like himself.

“If I could use my skills to do anything, it would be to listen to the stories of refugees and immigrants and learn from them.

“When we listen to one another we do two things: we make comparisons to our own lives and we challenge our preconceived ideas and judgements about another person, changing the way we first thought about them (maybe we develop some empathy too).

“Secondly, to speak to someone who is listening allows us to offload the things that are on our mind, the things that upset us, anger us, make us laugh etc.

“When you have already been through a series of traumas, then placed in a city very different to what you know and you don’t speak the language, you feel very isolated and even more displaced.

“When you acquire the ability to ‘fit in’ more and communicate with the new society you find yourself in, having someone listen to you and your journey is healing.”

 Share  Share



[Back to Alumni News](#)

[Postgraduate Study](#) | [Research Degrees](#) | [Alumni Giving](#) | [Career Services](#) | [Events](#) | [Contact Us](#)

© 2017 University of South Australia | [CRICOS Provider Number: 00121B](#) | [View our privacy statement](#)

DISCLAIMER OF LIABILITY: While every effort is made by the University to ensure that accurate information is disseminated through this medium the University of South Australia makes no representation about the content and suitability of this information for any purpose. It is provided ‘as is’ without express or implied warranty.

Creative Leadership: a driver for change

Peter Stevens

Executive Director, MBA and Executive Education for UniSA Business School
Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma of Management
Masters Degree of Business Administration (MBA)

Take a moment to appreciate that someone created the company you work for. Its survival is testament to a leadership that cast its vision outward, shifted its thinking, revised its processes and, potentially, re-invented itself.

Creativity, innovation and agility are now the common lexicon for business survival and growth, but what does this mean for business leaders?

Newly appointed Executive Director, MBA and Executive Education for UniSA Business School, Peter Stevens, has come from the global corporation, Hewlett Packard Enterprise, where he was responsible for a globally-matrixed team of thousands of staff, using his creative leadership skills to meet ever-increasing service targets.

"When people think of creativity, they typically think of artistic pursuits, but creativity extends far beyond this. Business needs creativity to solve problems and remain agile enough to stay in the race. It's all about innovative thought—new strategies, new perspectives and new ideas," says Peter Stevens.

"As an individual entrepreneur, getting creative is somewhat easier to manage. But in an organisation, it's more complex as you have to allow the teams, and the individuals, enough space to create.

"The challenge is that freedom and space go against many of the principles that have worked for industry for so long. And for business, looking at creativity in this way can be confronting."

The changing nature of competition means that businesses are faced with the challenge of weaving creativity into their culture, without losing the foundations on which they were built. According to Stevens, given the different skills involved, one approach is to separate idea generation from commercialisation.

"Idea generation needs maximum creativity and freedom. It's the five-year-old in the room. But for it to be relevant, it needs to respect the core values of the organisation. So you might say it also needs its parents in the room.

"Idea commercialisation is where the adults in the room figure out how the business can use the idea to derive value and benefit its ultimate aims. Here, the parameters close in tighter; there will always be the commercial realities of business."

Leading creativity is a nebulous pursuit that, ironically, requires some solid structure. People need an understanding of organisational direction, as well as safe psychological and behavioural spaces in which to create, test, fail, reset and test again.

"As a leader, your team needs to know that you've got their back and to feel secure enough to put forward an idea without being judged harshly."

Stevens has some clear ideas about taking UniSA's world-recognised MBA further on a global scale. "It's an exciting time at the UniSA Business School. We have some outstanding products and the future opportunities are exponential. There's always room to innovate and I will be encouraging my team to challenge, question and create at every opportunity."

Creative leaders are decisive; they have an intuitive understanding of the freedom-control spectrum, and are prepared to make the wrong decision in preference to making none at all. Their clarity of purpose, and experience with the parameters of business success, help them build confidence. And it's this combination that helps them judge just how far to take a creative idea.

10 TIPS FOR CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

1. Walk the talk – put yourself and your ideas out there
2. Team size – if your team is large, break it down into smaller villages
3. Communication – give your villages opportunity to cross-pollinate ideas
4. Safe to fail – create a behavioural space in which ideas can be launched
5. Environment – create the physical space that helps your team think differently
6. Leave the office – create opportunities to change your surroundings
7. Whole person – encourage your staff to bring their whole personality to work
8. Challenges – set creative challenges to start thinking a different way
9. Questions – encourage everything to be questioned
10. REMEMBER TO HAVE FUN!

To read more from UniSA's Business School, please view the [UniSA Business Magazine](#)



UniSA makes more five-star history with its MBA

UniSA has been awarded a five-star rating for its Master of Business Administration (MBA) for the tenth consecutive year by the Graduate Management Association of Australia (GMAA).

UniSA is the only institute to receive this recognition consecutively for so many years.

The Graduate Management Association of Australia (GMAA) ratings are one of the nation's most rigorous and highly-regarded MBA ranking schemes.

The success follows the release of the Australian Financial Review BOSS Survey, which placed UniSA's MBA program among the top 10 MBAs in Australia for the tenth year, ranking it seventh in Australia overall and fifth for value for money and research output.

UniSA has also been awarded five stars by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS).

For more information visit unisa.edu.au/mba.

[Back to Alumni News](#)