



UniSA News

October 2005

A newspaper of the University of South Australia



Deconstructing the rumour mill

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Deconstructing the rumour mill

by **Rebecca Gill**

Rumours are all around us – in the office tearoom, tabloid newspapers and celebrity gossip websites. While some people dismiss rumours as idle talk, UniSA Associate Professor Prashant Bordia, along with his American co-investigators, have just received a US\$750,000 grant to research this hot topic.

Awarded by the American National Science Foundation, the grant will help Prof Bordia and a team of interdisciplinary researchers study the ramifications of rumours in social networks.

Professor Bordia, who teaches in the human resource management program through the School of Management, was excited that UniSA and its students would have an opportunity to be involved in cutting-edge international research.

“The purpose of this study is to try to understand how rumours propagate, and what role motivations play in which rumours get selected and which ones get filtered out,” he said.

Prof Bordia has been researching rumours for nearly a decade – exploring them in a variety of contexts – particularly in business and management settings.

“Rumours are fascinating because they go to the heart of what it is to be a social animal. We encounter knowledge of an uncertain veracity all the time – through the media, Internet, personal networks – and that’s what rumours are.”

With a research subject that is commonly perceived as trivial, Prof Bordia is familiar with people querying the merits of his study.

“When I say I study rumours, people laugh and think it’s another one of those ridiculous topics that academics end up studying.

“But then you explain what consequences they have – for health behaviour, for financial markets, workplaces, organisations – and people begin to realise the important roles rumours play in everyday life.

“Rumours have damaging effects, particularly with intergroup discord. For example, ethnic riots are almost always preceded by rumours.”

Prof Bordia believes this is of major concern in contemporary society, where racial tensions and ethnic rivalries can be rife.

“Rumours also create panic, and this is what caused the recent stampede in Baghdad, where almost 1000 people died. Rumours of food contamination or carcinogens can also cause expensive product recalls.”

While some rumours can appear to have a positive impact, like rumours of corporate downsizing prompting a short-term productivity increase, Prof Bordia said, “because effects are based on unverified information, they can be shortlived – and they must be treated with caution.

“We want to prevent and manage the harmful effect of rumours. Research gives individuals a greater understanding of why people say what they say, and may allow them to become better consumers of



information.”

So has Prof Bordia ever heard rumours about himself?

“Ahh, yes – but I will not reveal what they were,” he laughed.

But the Professor believes his personal experience of rumours may almost prove an exception to the rule.

“It certainly brings the research to life. Often when you study a topic you approach it from a cold, rational perspective – so it can help you to better relate with your research topic and participants.”

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From the Chancellery

It is almost 12 years since I joined UniSA as Pro Vice Chancellor: Research, and, having turned 60 in March, it is time for a change. My retirement will be good for both of us.

It is coming up to 19 years since I became the Chair of the Research Committee at the University of Adelaide in 1987, and I am beginning to weary of the more bizarre machinations of the policy-makers. I was elected Chair of the Research Committee for two momentous years at the beginning of the Dawkins reforms, stayed in the position for almost four, and was persuaded by the Vice Chancellor to become the inaugural Dean of Graduate Studies at Adelaide from 1991 to 1993.

By then, my own research was slipping away. Urged on by good friends Roger Smart and Lyndall Ryan, I applied for the position at UniSA. Amazingly, I got the job.



I have never regretted it. I was asked to take on the International portfolio as well, on the basis of work I had done in Indonesia and Africa. The research part was easy, as I inherited an excellent research management plan put together by my predecessor, David Lee, and our current Vice Chancellor, Denise Bradley. The strategy emphasised selectivity, concentration, and collaboration with external partners, and we have built on this, while encouraging interdisciplinary research concentrations.

The International portfolio was more problematic. We had only 400 international students in 1994 when we decided to build on our strength in distance education to grow our transnational programs as well as recruit more students to study in Adelaide. This meant applying the same principles of selectivity, concentration, and collaboration with external partners that we employ in research.

We persuaded more schools to establish programs with key partners like Asia Pacific Management Institute in Singapore and Hong Kong Baptist University in Hong Kong, while continuing to develop other partnerships in the region. This strategy initially set us apart from other universities in Australia and allowed us to increase our international student numbers quickly. Transnational education remains a significant component of our international profile.

My research highlights include the Wark Institute, winning an Australian Research Council Special Research Centre and our increasing involvement in cooperative research centres. In international, they include our rise to pre-eminence in transnational education and our long-term involvement with Fort Hare University and the Provincial Government of the Eastern Cape in South Africa, initiated by Basil Moore. This led to the honorary doctorate for Nelson Mandela.

I have also been pleased to play a part in the establishment of the Australian Technology Network as an innovative force in the Australian higher education system.

In my time at UniSA, I have worked with outstanding and dedicated people in both portfolios and in my office. They reined me in when necessary and swept up the administrative messes I left in my wake. They contributed as much to the building of UniSA as I have.

It is time for me to go. My successor, Professor Caroline McMillen, is absolutely right for the next stage of development of research at UniSA – with the advent of the Research Quality Framework exercise. She is

an outstanding researcher, with an international reputation, who will bring fresh ideas and clout to the national debates and (re)position the University to succeed in the new environment. As for me, the vineyard beckons...

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In brief

Drawing out kids' feelings and ideas

An international drawing conference, Drawing is Everything, hosted a group local junior primary students from Gilles Street Primary this month in what was possibly the most active part of the conference. Scores of children transformed UniSA's Kuarna Building studios into a hive of expressive activities using everything from wool, sparkles, glue, paint, and textas to communicate in big pictures something about their day. The Drawing your Day event, where children were asked to focus on special and everyday activities in their lives, was designed to let kids know how drawing can become a vibrant form of communication and creative expression.



Words on Words

When was the last time you really thought about the language most of us use: English? Many of us take it for granted, but students of Dr Mia Stephens and Dr Ioana Petrescu have delved into what we say and write and come up with *Fuse or Fracture: English as a world lingua franca, a collection of essays about English*. For the students involved – Karen Bath, Ann Reu, Christopher Franks, Gabrielle Gutsche, Amie Horner, Michael Noble, Benjamin Pitman, EL Benn, Robert Bloomfield, Jodie Duffield, Terry Glouftsis, Andrew Graue, Linda Jarrett, Fleur Lewis, Joanna Morandin, Justin Meldrum, Amanda Murphy, Mark O'Grady, John Pike, Karl Quaas, Gill Ratcliff, Iain Spalding, and Mary-Anne Virgara – the exercise covered the entire publishing process including research and writing, editing, collaboration and joint production. *Fuse or Fracture* is an internal UniSA publication used as a reader in Dr Mia Stephens's linguistics courses.

Work recovery – more than a rest on the couch

With figures just out that indicate Australians now work the second longest hours in the OECD, PhD researcher in psychology, Dr Peter Winwood, could not have picked a better time to study the effects of work stress and which factors may help our recovery and avoid burn-out. Dr Winwood is taking a closer look at work, recovery from work fatigue between shifts, and which behavioural factors may help people to minimise work stress. He says work fatigue can lead people to give up some activities that could be much more valuable to them in the long term than they realise. Dr Winwood believes hobbies, exercise, or any activity that is personally satisfying may help people to relax much more than TV and a lie on the couch.

You can contribute to his study by completing this survey at www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/TellUS2/SurveyForm.asp?ID=2344.

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Classifieds

For sale

1999 Daihatsu Pyzar, small 5 seater family wagon, great fuel economy, dual airbags, tinted windows, 1.6 litre, 4 speed auto, very low k's, in very good condition, registered until December, 2005. \$11,500 ono. Call (08) 8251 1085 (h), (08) 8302 4799 (w) or email lyndall.lush@unisa.edu.au

1977 Holden HX Kingswood, Tri-matic, 1+ months rego, new tyres, runs well, fair condition, \$600 ono. Call Piet 0413 417 457 after 5pm weekdays or anytime weekends.

2000 Toyota Camry, light blue 2.2L auto, 96,000kms, excellent condition, \$11,000 ono. Call 0408 806 469

Accommodation

For rent, Encounter Bay, new beach house, sleeps 13, sea views, available for holiday bookings (minimum 2 nights). Good availability from January. Call Kate or Richard on 0400 292 875.

For rent, Mawson Lakes, new five Bedroom house, one room with ensuite and others with built in robes, reverse cycle heating/cooling, solar hot water, home management system, gas appliances, dish washer, lockup garage with remote operation. Separate key locks for each room. Available from mid October. Price is negotiable. Call (08) 8302 3094, 0422 346 420 or email sirig66@yahoo.com.au

For rent, Cudlee Creek, 4 bedroom house unfurnished, set in the hills, beautiful shaded gardens, seclusion, and only 32 minutes to Mawson Lakes. Available for rental from November 1. \$215 a week. Call (08) 8302 3874 or email cobbler@bigpond.net.au

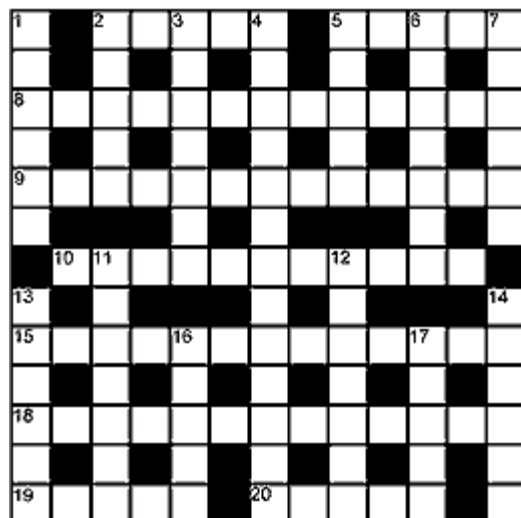
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Colgan's Cryptic Crossword



Across

2. Punishes with restraint (5)
5. Make amends immediately! (5)
8. Brief seizure gives specimens able to be dissected (6,7)
9. Rivalry of journalists in games like this (7,6)
10. Nominated for Oscar, Tom uses subtlety to get postponement (11)
15. Apologise and leave to fight fellow (3,4,6)
18. Not acting seriously in cutting piece of leather hide (6,2,5)
19. Union supporters back turmoil (5)
20. True metallic compound has 60% upgrade (5)

Down

1. Schismatic louse (6)
2. Adornment's small part (5)
3. Photographically prepare for printing movie scene (7)
4. Relative lists plough as being "non-progressive" (8,5)
5. To make further cuts requires a worker's mediation (5)
6. Mr Kelly leading Mr Harris's not hard, but not to be branded (7)
7. Repeatedly set out to fly (6)
11. Fabric and heart, perhaps --- heart of the Anzacs (7)
12. Principal invites some around, more than 19 (7)
13. A motel proprietor's slacks (6)
14. Apply swab primarily to undressed wound (6)
16. Palindromic native from here (5)
17. Maintain attention to succeed, ignoring nothing (5)

Wine to win

For your chance to win a bottle of fine wine, fax your completed crossword to (08) 8302 5785 by Friday October 21

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Our people – Kathryn Bowd

UniSA's undergraduate journalism program is one of the most highly regarded in the country, and I intend to keep it that way.

I worked as a journalist for 17 years both here and overseas before I took the helm of the undergraduate journalism program in 2001. I'm a graduate of the UniSA journalism program myself and use my experience and contacts to balance the academic and applied aspects of the program.

The program has a strong professional focus - we use a lot of industry guest speakers and many of the tutors we have are from the industry. These links are extremely beneficial for students because they are exposed to up-to-date skills, knowledge and perspectives, while at the same time obtaining an excellent academic grounding in journalism.



In the mid-90s I decided I wanted to extend my skills and pass on what I knew. I was working in the industry at the time, and put up my hand for some tutoring. I got a call a few weeks later, and things moved on from there ... I've always been keen to pass on what I know about journalism to other people and to develop my own knowledge of the field.

As well as being program director, I'm working towards my PhD, focusing on the relationship between country newspapers and communities. Like many journalists, I started my working life at a country paper and I have had a long-term interest in exploring the way smaller newspapers and communities interact.

The undergrad journalism program has changed a great deal since I first began studying in the 1980s, and is now complemented by an excellent postgraduate program under the leadership of Associate Professor Ian Richards. In recent years a number of specialist courses have been introduced covering areas such as sports journalism, computer-assisted reporting and news design for both print and online media.

Many graduates go into mainstream media, but jobs in journalism are increasingly being found in niche areas as well, and these changes are reflected in the curriculum. Graduates of the program have ended up all over the world, from small local newspapers to *The Times* in London, and from commercial radio to foreign correspondent postings for the ABC and SBS.

Kathryn Bowd is journalism program director in the School of Communication, Information and New Media.

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Academic board

June 2005
by Peter Cardwell

Improving assessment practices

Academic Board approved a detailed proposal for both short and long-term strategies for improving approaches to assessment across the University. They are designed to improve teaching and learning, and in particular the Course Evaluation Instrument (CEI) and Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) scores related to assessment.

The short-term strategies are designed to revise the University's practice by the beginning of study period 2, 2006. The vehicle for the implementation and communication of these changes to students will be the Course Information Booklet, and they will also involve amendments to the Code of Good Practice: Principles of Student Assessment.

The changes will involve specifying general assessment requirements for undergraduate courses and programs, mapping assessment tasks across programs, use of standard assessment feedback proformas and improving turnaround times for assignments.

Long-term strategies are designed to support the short-term strategies and will involve the use of e-submission to significantly improve turnaround times and therefore improve the usefulness of feedback provided to students. For example, from study period 2, 2007, all schools will require students to submit all text-based assignments electronically using AssignIT.

External moderation of assessment

Academic Board noted that Divisional Pro Vice Chancellors believed that there needed to be some assurance that the quality of assessment was comparable with other universities. The existing approach has worked well in some instances and not in others, with difficulties including costs, availability of moderators and the time taken for moderated assessment to be returned.

In relation to ensuring that the University's assessment standards are comparable with other institutions, this is something which necessarily involves some form of external moderation, but not necessarily at every level. Traditionally, external assessment or moderation has focused at honours level work, both because this sets a standard for all undergraduate levels, and because comparability of standards between universities is necessary to ensure fairness in the allocation of higher degree scholarships between graduates of different universities.

Academic Board agreed that amendments to University policy should require that the external point of reference be honours theses (both honours and with honours) which should have an external marker, and that all other processes will in future be undertaken internally.

International double degrees and jointly badged doctoral programs

Academic Board approved the principle of joint badging of coursework degree programs undertaken collaboratively with other providers. Current policies and procedures will be amended to allow for double degree proposals involving other universities.

The Board agreed that from the University's perspective, there is a need to ensure that our academic policies and procedures can accommodate a range of new models and scenarios. The marketing and positioning issues need to be taken into account as the University must ensure consistency in what is required to complete a UniSA degree. This will guarantee our academic standards and reputation in the

long term.

It was noted that recent changes to the University of South Australia Act will specifically allow for joint awards with overseas universities and other providers. It was further noted that the Australian National University and the University of Western Australia are two examples of universities that offer joint programs with other providers that are jointly badged.

Following a lengthy discussion, the Board also gave in principle support to the University's participation in jointly badged PhD programs. Research Degrees Committee (RDC) will now develop a policy for these jointly badged awards.

Indigenous content in undergraduate degree programs

An Indigenous Content in Undergraduate Programs Development Plan 2005 was approved. Under the plan Indigenous content will be a compulsory and assessable component of all the University's undergraduate programs by January 1 2010.

There will be a preference for individual programs to develop their own specific content. However, in the event that programs do not develop their own specific content, programs must collaborate with the Unaipon School to develop a compulsory course using Broadening Undergraduate Education curriculum space, which combines general Indigenous studies with profession or discipline specific references.

The Dean of the College of Indigenous Education and Research will ensure the development of an online exemplar covering what might be considered core knowledge of Indigenous issues relevant to all undergraduates. The Indigenous College will also provide leadership and guidance to the schools in planning and implementation of the proposal, while implementation will be monitored by Academic Policy and Program Review Committee (APPRC) and Division Boards as part of the program development and review process.

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Ale and hearty

by **Andrew Lees**

For a state of dedicated beer lovers, few of us brew our own. But Mark Hopps, Coordinator, Transnational Quality Projects, is a true brewmeister and his creations have a microbiologist's seal of approval.

Hopps has been brewing for five years, in styles ranging from bitters to pilsners and hefeweizens. A love of cooking first attracted him to the process of beer-making, and the lure of creating beers with "more flavour" than the mass produced product sealed the deal. Now he has half tonne deliveries of malt directly to his home, a move that raised a few female eyebrows.

"Our brewing group sometimes do bulk orders because the ingredients are hard to get," Hopps said. "I had a half tonne of malt delivered about a month ago and that raised the eyebrows of my girlfriend a little bit. She was asking 'whose is this?' and 'when are they coming to get it?'"

Hopps is a beer artisan rather than a beer guzzler. "I don't drink a lot myself," he said. "It's not a case of making cheap beer; it's all about making a quality product with good flavour."

Hopps has regular meetings with a small group of fellow brewers including professional brewers and a microbiologist.

"There's a group of about ten of us who meet every six weeks. There's friendly competition; sometimes we'll set a certain style of beer and everyone has to come back with a sample. We'll then have blind tastings and everyone will judge," he said.

"We're fortunate enough to have a couple of professional brewers who come along. There's a microbiologist from Adelaide University who comes along as well, and if we have questions about malt or hops they can generally help us out."

But it's not all beer and skittles. Hopps recalled an incident involving faulty taps, a dark ale and a roof. "Sometimes I'll attach a connection to a keg and I'll forget to turn the tap off. I've sprayed dark beer all over a white roof before. My partner didn't mind too much because I had to clean it up."

So now that he's an established beer connoisseur, which pub brew would Hopps most like to emulate?

"Little Creatures Pale Ale is my favourite Australian beer. In terms of imports, I really like the beers from a certain brewery in the north of England called Black Sheep."

So it looks like the Cooper's brothers could have some quality competition in the near future. With a name like Hopps the marketing opportunities are endless.

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The evolution of SMS

by Geraldine Hinder

A UniSA study has found Short Message Services place a different kind of literacy in the hands of individuals, defying classroom rules in favour of a unique, culturally created language.

While some have embraced SMS as a positive revolution in communication, others have condemned it as step toward the destruction of human civilisation, beginning with written language, says researcher Collette Snowden from UniSA's School of Communication, Information and New Media.

Snowden accepts that text messaging is changing the way people communicate, but not all the changes can be attributed to SMS use.

"We can trace SMS styles back to the introduction of telegraphy, when messages had to be brief because this form of communication was expensive," she said

"Before then, journalists were paid by the word, giving them an incentive to write as much as possible. When they started using telegraphy, writing styles changed from comprehensive to succinct.

"We then graft to that writing styles for radio that are very brief, and email, which uses shortcuts even in spelling to save time.

"Because SMS and emails are often sent without editing, there is an assumption that literacy standards are dropping – they are not polished pieces of writing, they are quick textbased communications."

While traditionalists worry that SMS is having a damaging effect on the English language skills of the younger generation, Snowden's research shows this is not necessarily the case.

"If SMS encourages kids to play with text and language, it is a good thing.

"Users have to be able to spell to know how to abbreviate words. SMS consolidates language so that users learn to be brief, which is a skill in itself, but the colour of language is lost when condensed," she said.

Half a century ago literacy rates were lower, but due to the widespread use of the Internet – there has been more emphasis on text than ever before. However, Snowden believes this focus might shift as visual emphasis increases.

Her research shows that most professionals shun SMS, with younger people using it for personal communication because it's cheap and discreet.

From the mundane messages of teenagers passing SMS notes in class – the seeming limitation of the SMS system has become one of its major strengths, with dramatic rescues from remote and isolated places made possible by SMS.

Add to this the transmission of news headlines, sports results, traffic updates, interactive television voting and health monitoring, this simple communications technology has far surpassed the applications envisaged by its inventors and has become a multi-billion dollar income earner for telecommunications



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Ethics of a sympathetic ear

by **Geraldine Hinter**

A UniSA study that explored the characteristics of 317 people who advertise as counsellors in the Australian Yellow Pages revealed that 10 per cent of them did not follow an ethical code of practice.

Dr Nadine Pelling from UniSA's Centre for Applied Psychological Research, Counselling Group, conducted the study of psychologists and counsellors from the advertised listing along with Doctor of Counselling students Pamela Brear and Margaret Lau.

In comparing counsellors and psychologists who advertise counselling services, the research showed that counsellors charged an average of \$80 per session, while psychologists charged an average of \$96. Only 2.9 per cent of psychologists said they did not adhere to an ethical code of practice.



In general, those advertising counselling services were university-trained professionals, with two-thirds of counsellors and 73 per cent of psychologists reportedly holding either a bachelor or masters degree, and all reported regularly engaging in professional development activities and professional supervision.

The personal characteristics of counsellors and psychologists were similar. They tended to be female, mature, Caucasian, married or partnered, heterosexual, had families and held Christian beliefs, with the majority living in urban areas.

Dr Pelling also studied counsellors who were members of the Australian Counselling Association, one of the main national counselling associations in Australia. The survey produced results from 289 ACA counsellors, and showed they had similar personal characteristics to the advertised counsellors, however, a lower percentage held bachelor or masters degrees and 8.7 per cent reported not specifically following an ethical code in their practice. They charged an average fee of \$58 per hour.

Dr Pelling and Dr Michael Proeve from UniSA's School of Psychology are conducting another study examining the continued engagement of academic, clinical and counselling psychologists in applied areas of psychology. Results are expected later this year.

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Putting viruses to work in vaccines

by **Geraldine Hinter**

Researchers at the University of South Australia are developing novel vaccines by using a chicken virus to either stimulate or suppress the body's immune system.

Dr John Hayball, a biomedical researcher from UniSA's Sansom Institute, is particularly interested in improving vaccines for use in the treatment of infections, autoimmune diseases, and cancer.

Dr Hayball, Dr Michael Brown (Royal Adelaide Hospital) and Dr Paul Howley (Virax Holdings) were recently successful in winning a three year Australian Research Council Linkage Project grant with industry partner Virax Holdings Limited to develop the fowlpox virus vector technology.

A biotechnology company based in Melbourne, Virax, is developing some of the world's most promising immune-based therapies for HIV/AIDS, other infectious diseases, autoimmune diseases, and cancer.

"The fowlpox virus is an ideal vaccine vector because it does not cause disease when used in humans," Dr Hayball said.

Working under the supervision of this research team is UniSA medical and pharmaceutical biotechnology graduate and Adelaide University PhD student Emma Beukema, who has been constructing the viruses for the project.

Virax has proven results using the virus technology to develop an HIV vaccine which is already in clinical use, demonstrating that immune-based therapies are a rapidly emerging form of medical treatment.

Virax is also funding the development of a novel fowlpox virus-based vaccine for the treatment of advanced prostate cancer.

Dr Michael Brown, a medical oncologist and head of the Tumour Immunotherapy Laboratory, is developing this vaccine at the Royal Adelaide Hospital's Hanson Institute. The RAH Cancer Centre is the major centre for cancer clinical trials conducted in the state.

Dr Hayball is also a member of the Hanson Institute and already works with Dr Brown on an NH&MRC project grant. Together, they supervise UniSA PhD student Kerri Diener, who has been establishing model systems of prostate cancer.

"It is this collaborative framework which has allowed us to test novel immunotherapeutic approaches to prostate cancer and other important diseases," Dr Hayball said.

"Effective treatment of some diseases such as cancer requires the body's immune system to be triggered into action. On the other hand, autoimmune diseases are better treated if the immune system can be dampened. We can select genes that work against a disease and insert them into a virus, in our case the fowlpox virus. If we inject the modified virus into a patient where it targets certain immune cells, then we might be able to switch the immune system on or off and so help the body to treat itself," Dr Hayball said.



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Targeting stress in farming

UniSA Psychology PhD student Alison Wallis knows what can drive a dairy farmer to cry over spilt milk. Emma Masters reports.



For the past four years Wallis has been investigating the work stress of South Australia's dairy farmers.

At the time of the research she said the group had one of the highest incidences of work-related stress in the nation.

"There hasn't been a lot of research done on the stress levels of those who are self-employed, but we found that dairy farming produced some of the highest distress scores of many Australian occupations," Wallis said.

The research, supported by DairySA and an industry and farmer advisory committee, was prompted by the deregulation of the national dairy industry in mid-2000 when free market principles replaced a part-price regulated system.

While deregulation played its part in feelings of stress and uncertainty in farmers, the research showed there were many other factors at play.

"Farming can be a very stressful occupation, and research shows that work high in demand and low in control will result in strain and anxiety.

"There are factors that directly affect a farmer's livelihood that are beyond their control, such as global markets, exchange rates and the weather.

"So levels of uncertainty contribute to higher stress."

This was shown through the study's two surveys, conducted during the national drought in the summers of 2002-03 and 2003-04.

Dairy farmer Ken Smith said while the drought affected other states more than SA, there were still repercussions.

"We were affected by the drought we weren't actually having," Smith said.

"Because other states were in a worse situation than us, they needed to get grain feed from South Australia. We were used to paying \$170 per tonne world price, then it went up to around \$303 per tonne. That happened across two seasons."

Wallis also found dairy farmers had added work pressures, such as the long work hours they endure.

"Dairy cows need to be milked twice a day, every day. That puts enormous pressure on farming families because it never stops."

Smith, who was part of the research project's advisory committee, agrees.

"Dairy farming is a seven-day-a-week, all-year-round job. It takes detailed organisation and discipline to even go on a holiday," he said.

"It is not easy for dairy farmers to take holidays in the same way wage-workers can. Not being able to take a break then adds to stress."

Wallis' research also identified that key local factors affect a farmers' sense of well-being.

"There were local issues affecting dairy farmers, such as their working conditions and increasing environmental pressures," Wallis said.

"At the time the farmers were facing an uncertain future, they were also under immense community pressure to reduce the impact of cow dung and farm nutrients leeching into the environment.

"Many felt strong pressure to make their farms cleaner and greener. And while they had a desire to reach that goal, it's an extremely costly exercise – in time and money."

Primary Industries and Resources SA dairy representative on the research committee Tony Morbey says that while confidence was down during the time of the UniSA study, there was still a bright future for the state's dairy industry.

"Farm numbers have dropped from 700 to 400 over the last five years, but the number of cows and the volume of milk produced have stayed relatively steady," he said.

"Despite higher costs, farm-gate prices for milk are now the highest they've been since before deregulation. We have some of the best farmers and dairying areas in the world and there are opportunities for production growth and value-adding through a large range of dairy products.

"What is so great about Alison's research is that it is giving us really strong, objective data that tells us what is happening out there on farms.

"It is enabling us to look at issues that affect farmers and their families and really concentrate on the areas that government and industry groups together can help improve – like developing programs to increase farm profitability, reviewing work practices and conditions, providing training in new technology and supporting improved environmental practices.

"SA has developed a plan that shows the potential to increase the state's proportion of national milk production from seven to 10 per cent by 2013, taking production from 700 million to 1.2 billion litres.

"This UniSA research will provide very useful information that can be used during implementation of the plan."

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Added value

by Elizabeth Archer

Everyone wants answers and they want them straight away.

For a select group of small to medium food industry enterprises, those answers are available courtesy of some groundbreaking work by a team from UniSA's Centre for the Development of Entrepreneurs (CDE).

"The Food Innovation Pilot Program we're undertaking with Food SA will help companies innovate in the areas of their methods, systems, processes, and products," Program team leader Peter Balan said.

Using a model developed over two years by the CDE team, the participants will complete electronic diagnostic surveys during the sessions. These can very quickly be analysed, giving each participant comprehensive, specific data they can use immediately to improve their businesses.



The program has a strong planning and mentoring aspect with plenty of one-to-one support, particularly in the areas of global competition, functional food development, and value-adding.

"The beauty of this program is that it provides companies with valuable data immediately, and the mentoring will help companies use this data to improve their business. The program will also generate invaluable pilot research data for the CDE that will be used in undertaking a larger study," Balan said.

After the initial meeting last month with stakeholders, recruitment of suitable participants occurs this month, with the program to start in February 2006.

Balan envisages one or two staff from up to 12 food industry players will participate. The program's nine sessions are designed to help the businesses build their ability to innovate in all aspects of their business.

"As this is the pilot, we will be doing a lot of finetuning," Balan said.

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Teaching for the future

by **Andrew Lees**

As an international learning institution, it's not surprising that UniSA works collaboratively with many international partner institutions.

When that country is Papua New Guinea, and the task is the creation of a lower secondary schooling curriculum, even UniSA academics have their work cut out for them.

UniSA, in partnership with Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia and Department of Education and Children's Services, played host to nine visiting curriculum officers from Papua New Guinea (pictured left) for three weeks under the Curriculum Reform Implementation Project.

Together, the PNG curriculum officers, with support and advice from their South Australian counterparts, have almost finished drafting a new, and more culturally, economically and socially appropriate lower secondary schooling syllabus for PNG. Project coordinator Rosemary Badenoch said she was very impressed with the headway made.

"Many of the curriculum officers had no background in curriculum writing and more modern, child-centred teaching methodologies," she said.

"The notion of making the new PNG curriculum much more practically relevant for the majority of students who will return to their home villages after their schooling ends, as well as providing appropriate content and standards for those few who will continue their schooling to the tertiary level, has been a wonderful and exciting challenge for all involved."

Badenoch said it had been a very challenging project for a range of reasons.

"Many of the visiting officers don't have peers back home to bounce ideas off.

PNG delegation leader Kila Veli-Kila said PNG youth needed to be given practical skills relevant to their own communities.

"We have had a similar curriculum from colonial times to PNG's independence," Veli-Kila said.

"It's served its purpose, but it is not serving the needs of the majority of the nation now.

Ms Veli-Kila said there was a clear need for secondary schooling to foster pride in PNG itself, and have tried to create a modern and adaptable teaching syllabus suited to an emerging PNG.

"Jobs are scarce, [so] we want to give student the skills and knowledge to be able to seek work in their communities to be productive and valued members of that community."

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A simulating workplace

by Emma Masters

UniSA students studying systems management or hotel and convention management at Le Cordon Bleu are set to benefit from new multimedia simulation programs developed by the University's online services team.

Described as interactive pick-a-path stories with all the bells and whistles, simulations are a new way of delivering course material that gives students the chance to put theory into practice.

Students using the three simulations developed at the Flexible Learning Centre (FLC) – System Sim, Convention Sim and Ramsden Hotel Sim – work in an office where they can receive and send emails, access and store important documents, and receive instructions from managers and clients via video or telephone calls.



Le Cordon Bleu's director of e-learning Peter Jacobs is the simulations' executive producer. He says the interactive programs ask students to make decisions in real-life office settings.

“Students are given a range of resources and information and are then given a scenario or a decision they need to make,” he said.

“What they decide then sends them down a path that presents more issues and problems they need to solve.

“In our 'sims' the students get instant feedback through the consequences of their decisions.”

The online services production team (pictured) at the Flexible Learning Centre (FLC) took more than 12 months to develop the sims, including designing the look and style of each interface, filming and producing the video clips and programming complex decision sequences and events.

The work has led to a new project that puts the power of sim teaching and learning into the hands of UniSA course coordinators and academics.

Two multimedia programmers at the FLC, Michael Lewis and Roger Noble, have been working on a simulation building tool.

“We hope to deliver a tool to allow course developers to manage the sequence of events within a simulation,” Online Services manager Mark Wittervan said.

“This would allow academics to build new simulations or reuse existing ones.”

The sim-builder project is in prototype stage with the release date set for 2006.

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Ethics and the bottom line

by Elizabeth Archer

While the business press might be wholly concerned with shareholder expectations and changes to industrial relations legislation, businesses themselves are quietly giving back to their communities.

Corporate social responsibility is a big issue. So big that a group of high-profile corporate identities has formed an association called Our Community, and with it a subscription-only publication, *Business Community Intelligence*, based around the concept.

Dr Howard Harris from UniSA's School of Management, and Master of Business student Christopher Wainwright, have contributed material for the October launch edition.

Wainwright is the publication's Adelaide correspondent, and Harris was commissioned to write: Are there some activities for an organisation that are always prohibited? The article looks at the extent to which it is reasonable for companies to ensure ethical standards in their production and business dealings.

"My article examines issues like how far down the supply chain do you have to check before you can decide if a company's practices are ethical," Harris said.

"It's easy to say that if a company has its products made in a sweatshop in China, those products are therefore an unethical investment, but if a company happens to purchase a few office chairs, for example, from a supplier who sourced them from a factory operating under horrific conditions in the third world, should that affect its reputation or its bottom line?"

Both Harris and Wainwright will contribute regularly to *Business Community Intelligence*.

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Strengthening SA's ICT industry

By Adrian Dezen

UniSA's School of Computer and Information Science has launched an Industry Affiliate Program that will strengthen relationships with the state's Information and Communications Technology industry.

SA's ICT industry movers and shakers backed the collaborative venture wholeheartedly, including the chair of the ICT Council for South Australia, David Raffan, who said the program would help industry, government and the University to work closely together.

Among proposed initiatives is an IT House for students. The house would give students valuable exposure to a real-world IT environment. It would be a commercial shopfront where students could learn from industry professionals and gain valuable experience about business operations while developing networking and other relevant skills.

IT House would also give industry partners a chance to benefit from a try-before-you employ scheme where they could see students at work and assess their potential.

"The ICT Council has real-world projects which would give students experience in planning, developing and implementing projects and benefit the greater ICT industry," Raffan said.

CIS Head of School Professor Andy Koronios, who was instrumental in establishing the program, is delighted with the industry response.

"There has been a constant stream of positive feedback on the program and lots of requests for more information on how individual organisations may participate," Prof Koronios said.

The IAP is open to any organisation that uses or has an interest in ICT.

For further details, please visit www.cis.unisa.edu.au/iap

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