Gen Y
Shaping the future workplace?

Spatial revolution
Science for the new generation

Elite athletes
Balancing their sporting and scholarly ambitions
Cite (sɪt) v. To put forward thought-provoking arguments; to offer insightful discussion and new perspectives on topics of social, political, economic or environmental relevance; to report on new thinking. Sight (sɪt) n. A feature or object in a particular place considered especially worth seeing. v. To frame or scrutinise community, research and business initiatives; to present points of view on current issues. Site (sɪt) n. The location of a building or an organisation, esp. as to its environment. v. To place or position in a physical and social context.

Contributors

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COVER STORY

4 Gen Y: it pays to understand them
Generation Y is sometimes derided as the ‘spoilt’ generation. Yet this group of 18 to 30 year-olds is the youngest segment of our workforce. New research sheds light on Gen Yers and explains why it pays to understand them.

FEATURES

10 Mapping the future
Spatial science plays an important role in our everyday lives, without many of us realising what it is and what it does. Western Australia is leading the nation in spatial technology, and its applications reach far and wide in this rapidly emerging science.

14 Driving the price of oil
Oil and petrol prices go up and down – mostly up. But does the high cost of petrol at the pump affect our driving habits? Professor of Energy Economics Tony Owen, from Curtin Business School, suggests it doesn’t.

17 Scene at the gallery
Cite goes behind the scenes at the John Curtin Gallery to show just what it takes to put together a major exhibition, like WA fashion designer Ruth Tarvydas’ 40th anniversary retrospective of her work.

24 Sport and study: a winning combination
Where to for elite athletes when their competition days are over? Collaboration between universities and sporting institutes provides assistance to athletes who wish to achieve academic excellence while pursuing their sport.

SNAPSHOTS

8 A much-needed boost
Medical microbiologist and immunologist Dr Trilochan Mukkur, from Curtin’s School of Biomedical Sciences, has developed a new vaccine to help eliminate a highly contagious and potentially fatal disease – whooping cough.

13 The rise of the graphic novel
Graphic novels are coming into their own, earning a place on shelves in mainstream book shops, and sometimes even on the silver screen.

16 Breathing easy
A new drug treatment for respiratory diseases aims to help sufferers better manage their condition, thanks to the work of researchers in Curtin’s School of Biomedical Sciences.

REGULARS

2 VC’S VIEW

3 NEWS IN BRIEF

7 ALUMNI
Keith Rowe talks about how he became involved in finding the HMAS Sydney II.

9 CAMPUS LIFE

28 PERSPECTIVE
Emeritus Professor David Black is a name synonymous with Australian history and politics – and he is vocal about Australia becoming a republic.
THE best measure of Curtin’s vision of being a leading university in education and research is its students. While the University continues to tailor courses and target research to improve the educational and research outcomes for students and the community, it is the students, by their commitment to scholarship, who embody the University’s vision.

Curtin strives to prepare its students for a future beyond tertiary studies because it is these students who will one day shape the future in business, industry, government and the wider community. A significant portion of our student cohort lies in the 18 to 30 demographic – otherwise known as Generation Y – and I’m pleased to see that this group weaves a common thread through this vibrant issue of Cite.

Learn more about the often-misunderstood Gen Y, particularly their workplace aspirations, in ‘Gen Y: it pays to understand them’. Gen Yers are highly educated and ambitious, with great expectations – characteristics they are sometimes derided for. But these are precisely the qualities Curtin encourages in its students.

The spatial sciences are revolutionising the technology that maps place, space and location, with applications ranging from the everyday GPS navigation systems in our cars to geographic information systems which help us better understand global warming and climate change. Generation Y, having grown up with technology and the internet, is at the forefront of this rapidly emerging science which you can learn more about in ‘Mapping the Future’.

Sport and Study: a winning combination’ provides an insight into the flexible program that brings balance to the lives of these gifted students, and offers a glimpse of the commitment required by them to achieve their dual goals.

Curtin’s scholarly offerings and cutting-edge research initiatives are made possible only by the dynamic academics and researchers who are at the vanguard of their discipline. Political commentator and historical consultant at the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library Emeritus Professor David Black engages in the Australian republic debate with an impassioned perspective on page 28.

Finally, you will notice the pages in this issue of Cite have switched from gloss to satin stock. The reason is twofold: non-reflective paper aids readability because it reduces light reflecting off the page and, in turn, complies with the University’s Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (DAIP). Curtin’s DAIP outlines the strategies we will undertake to provide an accessible and inclusive environment for our students, staff and visitors with disabilities, including vision impairment, and non-reflective paper is recommended in the Disability Services Commission’s guidelines for accessible printed information. So happy reading.

Curtin is proud of the more than 30 elite athletes – again, mainly Gen Yers – who study at the Bentley Campus, among them Olympians past and present, including several who attended the Beijing Games.

It’s been an exciting year at Curtin. As 2008 draws to a close, I wish you all a peaceful and prosperous holiday season, ahead of another year of opportunities and challenges in 2009.

Professor Jeanette Hacket
VICE-CHANCELLOR
CURTIN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
Academics at the top
Several of Curtin’s researchers from spatial sciences, engineering, health and geoscience have received prestigious recognition as leaders in their field.

Curtin has received its first Australian Research Council (ARC) Federation Fellowship, awarded to spatial scientist Professor Peter Teunissen. Teunissen’s application to examine the future potential of Global Navigation Satellite Systems (GNSS) in providing geospatial information earned him one of 14 ARC Federation Fellowships, which commenced in 2008.

Dean of Engineering Professor Moses Tadé has earned a place in the Top 100 Most Influential Engineers in 2008 for his outstanding leadership and advocacy for Curtin’s outreach scheme. The only Western Australian academic awarded such a place by Engineers Australia magazine, Tadé has secured a number of industry-sponsored scholarships for engineering students and says he is focused on attracting more high school students to engineering.

From Curtin’s Centre for International Health, Professor Michael Alpers has been elected a Fellow of the Royal Society, the world’s oldest scientific academy which has been in continuous existence since 1660. The rare honour recognises researchers who have made an outstanding contribution to science. Only a handful of Australians have received the award.

Geoscientist Professor Zheng-Xiang Li sits in the top one per cent of scientists in his field for receiving one of the highest average citation rates of a published paper over a 10-year period to 2007. His outstanding record in the geosciences includes 68 published papers cited 1,231 times over that period. Li’s achievement was recognised with a Thomson Scientific Research Citation Award, naming him one of the 10 most pre-eminent researchers in Australia. His work focuses on understanding the Earth’s evolution over the last 1,000 million years, and the tectonic processes responsible for this evolution.

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons Medal has been awarded to Professor James Semmens, Director of the Safety and Quality of Surgical Care Project. Semmens was recognised for his project’s peer-review processes, designed to independently review deaths in surgical patients in Western Australia (the Western Australian Audit of Surgical Mortality) and New South Wales (the Collaborating Hospitals Audit of Surgical Mortality).

Curtin Singapore
Curtin has ratified a 20-year relationship with Singapore by establishing a comprehensive teaching facility which will receive its first intake of students in December 2008. Professor John Neilson has been appointed Pro Vice-Chancellor of Curtin Singapore to provide academic leadership and ensure the quality of the programs on offer. Education services company Navitas Singapore, with whom Curtin has a long-standing relationship through its operations of Curtin Sydney and the Curtin International College, will manage the facility.

Currently, Curtin has between 750 and 800 students enrolled through the Marketing Institute of Singapore, the Singapore Human Resources Institute and the Singapore Institute of Materials Management. Curtin Business School courses will continue to be offered through Curtin Singapore, while programs from other faculties will be developed according to student demand.

It is anticipated the new facility will increase the attractiveness of Curtin’s programs in Singapore and deliver long-term benefits for students. Curtin Singapore will be the University’s second teaching facility in Asia, following the establishment in Miri, Malaysia, of Curtin Sarawak, in 1999.

Gallery on Show
In celebration of the John Curtin Gallery’s (JCG) 10th anniversary, Gallery Director and Dean of Art Professor Ted Snell has compiled Gallery – a tribute to the JCG and those connected with it since its establishment in February 1998.

“Not only does it showcase our major exhibitions, the artists, and those exhibitions of our campus partners across the University, but also gallery staff who have been involved in the installations,” Snell says.

“I am confident Gallery will demonstrate that our exhibitions are internationally relevant and that the John Curtin Gallery is regarded as an international best practice gallery.”

Snell describes the book as a “bit like a corporate end-of-year report, with lots of images of installations accompanied by succinct text and comments from the artists themselves”.

“For instance, Tracey Moffat commented that her work has never looked better than when shown at the JCG – and this is an artist who has shown at every major art gallery in the world and at every major Biennale,” he says.

Gallery includes stunning images from House of Tarvydas, the retrospective of Western Australian fashion designer Ruth Tarydas’ work. The book will be launched in early 2009.
Known to many as the ‘spoilt’ generation, Gen Y is the youngest segment of our workforce. They’re highly educated, optimistic and vital to the labour market. But do we really understand them?
If you’ve heard anything about Gen Y by way of the mainstream media, it’s probably been largely negative. Characteristics such as disloyalty, over-confidence and short attention spans are well documented in standard portrayals of the 18 to 30 year-olds who make up this demographic.

In sharp contrast to baby boomers, known for their lifelong commitment to a place of employment, Gen Y is often seen to be fickle and flighty, moving from job to job in search of instant gratification.

Well-known demographer Bernard Salt has pointed to the immature and self-indulgent tendencies of Gen Y, who are blissfully ignorant of economic recession and happy to access the ‘boomer bank’ well into their 20s.

But is this a fair representation? And what are the implications of not adequately understanding this group?

The demographic is such a powerful presence in the workplace and so vital to the labour market that working with them rather than against them, researchers say, is the key to effective management strategies, positive organisational development and a strong labour force.

Researchers with the Women in Social and Economic Research (WiSER) unit at Curtin’s Graduate School of Business (GSB) are helping facilitate this process through a number of research projects aimed at building a more accurate profile of Gen Y, which may help organisations adapt to the change they are being compelled to face.

Postgraduate student Rebecca McCabe is helping to build this profile in what will be her master’s thesis, entitled Career and Working Life Expectations of Generation Y Graduates.

While much work has been done on marketing to Gen Y, McCabe says that little scholarly research exists in mapping their working-life expectations. She will do just that, using data from a 2003 survey of first-year students from all Western Australian universities – public and private, metropolitan and regional – with a sample size of about 1,000.

Her analysis will consider how this group sees themselves as graduates as well as how they see themselves in the workforce over the longer term. The study will also identify differences in expectations between young women and men, and differences between Gen Yers based on their areas of occupational interest.

Results will help create a clearer picture of Gen Y, in terms of their working-life expectations and behaviours, which can then be used by employers.

“What we do know,” says McCabe, “is that they are the most highly educated generation that Australia has seen. They’re optimistic and they’re confident about their ability and their future.”

“They have been parenting differently from previous generations and have high levels of self-esteem.”

However, much of their savvy is portrayed in the media as disloyalty and disrespect.

“But you have to remember that they have witnessed the impact on their families of destabilising trends, like severe corporate downsizing, which they’ve factored into their workplace expectations,” McCabe says.

“Trust for long-term security in an organisation just isn’t there like it was for the veteran generation and baby boomers. From what my research tells me, they are loyal and they are very hardworking – many of them working while studying full-time – but they are dedicated in a different way.”

McCabe points out that Gen Y is remarkably relationship-focused and they want mutual and constructive communication. And it is on relationships that they will build commitment to teams, managers and networks – rather than to corporations.

“They want to have meaningful work and are very open to being mentored,” she says.

“If conditions aren’t right, they’ll move on because, particularly in periods of economic prosperity, they can.”

Organisations have no choice but to deal with the changes that Gen Y employees bring with them. They’re obviously indispensable in a tight labour market, and have desirable traits that suggest huge leadership potential.

While McCabe’s work will help organisations to better understand Gen Y so they can change to integrate them effectively into their organisational culture, the process may not be easy.

“This can be confronting because companies may have to adapt their management philosophies and practices,” she says.

“They will have to develop flexible systems to accommodate the requirements of different employees. I think companies can benefit significantly from recent graduates.

“In a sense, Gen Y is forcing the issue of change in corporate culture to an extent that Gen X couldn’t. Gen X didn’t have the numbers, economic circumstances and confidence that we see with Gen Y.”

Given the current skills shortage, most sectors cannot afford not to embrace this generation, especially because the future of many companies lies with its younger, well-groomed talent.
WiSER researchers argue that with regard to Gen Y, a particularly under-utilised subset is young professional women. A staggering 50 per cent of working women are employed on a part-time basis, with these jobs tending to be in low-paid, less secure positions. It’s not that Gen Y women aren’t educated. They are – as much as or more than their male counterparts. But the issue of raising a family and the limiting prospects of returning to stable, professional work means that many shy away from attempting to continue their professional careers. Besides the deflation of personal career goals and potential, in a tight labour market this is bad news.

Nursing is one area that’s had a particularly difficult time getting young women to choose to stay in the profession. In 2005, the WA Department of Health funded research at Curtin’s GSB to understand the relationship between changing gender roles and women’s participation in the profession. The research – led by Professors Margaret Nowak and Alison Preston, also Director of WiSER – found that many young women avoid nursing because of its low status and its economic devaluation; perceptions that would not have existed even for Gen X.

Research fellow Dr Angela Barns, in related research, conducted a qualitative study of Year 12 TEE female students intending to pursue a professional career. A major finding was that while Gen Y women were experiencing unprecedented access to educational and career opportunities, they were still caught in the bind of wanting both a family and a career. “Aspiration is huge among this group,” says Barns. “But this is severely limited by the lack of flexible working arrangements in many sectors. “For systemic change to happen, social policy must confront the gendered nature of our employment culture.”

With colleague Dr Linley Lord, Preston has also undertaken research for that part of the Australian economy most affected by skills shortage – the resources sector. For obvious reasons, the sector has a lot to gain by capturing segments of the population not historically drawn to it. Funded by the Minerals Council of Australia and the Australian Office for Women, the research resulted in the report Unearthing New Resources: Attracting and Retaining Women in the Australian Minerals Industry which shows clearly that young women represent a much-needed cohort in the Australian minerals sector. But the research also found that women in their 20s wanted meaningful work, the desire for an integrated work-life balance, the need for flexibility to sustain relationships and a context free from sexism and harassment. “While prepared to consider careers in the resources sector, they were well aware of its drawbacks,” Preston says.

“Gen Y women are, therefore, less likely to choose a career path if, once they’ve had a family, they are faced with returning to a system that doesn’t accommodate their personal aspirations.”

The WiSER research was followed by a series of workshops, facilitated by Lord, with resources companies, which focused on strategies by which they could adjust culture and develop tactics that might entice Gen Y graduates to the sector. The general message underpinning the WiSER workshops and the GSB research in general is that in dealing with Gen Y, you’re dealing with a diverse set of needs that require a reorientation of traditional workplace culture. Says McCabe: “It’s not about indulging a spoilt generation; it’s about listening to the needs of a new generation who have a different set of experiences and who simply think differently about the world. “And if we can capture and work with that, Gen Y has an enormous contribution to make, both socially and economically.”
A Curtin graduate played an instrumental role in locating the HMAS Sydney II in early 2008 and, in doing so, helped the nation understand its biggest naval disaster.

“My mother had given me a book about the HMAS Sydney II and I remember being fascinated by the story,” he says.

“The German raider Kormoran and the Sydney had met off the coast between Geraldton and Carnarvon in November 1941. After an intense battle, both ships sank and the Sydney was lost, with all 645 men on board.

“To think that this happened just off the coast of Carnarvon was what struck me. I had fished off that coastline so many times. I just wanted to know what happened.”

In 2000, a casual conversation with his neighbour, Ted Graham, provided the opportunity to find out. Graham, with a couple of friends, had a great interest in locating the Sydney.

The small group of neighbourhood acquaintances met at a local restaurant early in 2001 and began to formulate a business plan to spearhead a search for the ship. The not-for-profit Finding Sydney Foundation (FSF) was established and weekly meetings began.

In 2003, 2004 and 2005, the group got serious about lobbying and fundraising to conduct the search, but soon realised they couldn’t realise their quest without the Federal Government’s financial support. And so began the task of convincing the government – in particular, the then Prime Minister John Howard, his key cabinet ministers and the Royal Australian Navy – that they were competent and were searching an area that had a good chance of success.

By 2007, the FSF had raised $5.3 million from the Federal and State Governments and from private donors. The funding was sufficient to mount a 42-day search using side scan sonar equipment in depths from 2,500 to 5,000 metres, in an area totalling 1,800 square nautical miles. Tenders were accepted for a Singapore-based vessel and sonar equipment from Seattle, in the US.

Information from the Bureau of Meteorology and the CSIRO on the eddying fields within the Leeuwin current helped indicate more precisely where the ships might have finally settled. It was decided to search the shallower half of the identified search box.

“And that’s where we found both vessels, 207 kilometres west of Steep Point, in 2,500 metres of water,” Rowe says.

Using remotely-operated-vehicle equipment, with cameras flown in from Norway, the FSF took 60 hours of video footage and 1,400 photographs. A documentary on the search was aired on ABC TV, in June 2008.

For Rowe, one of the highlights of his journey to locate the Sydney was being invited on board HMAS Anzac for three days to conduct commemorative ceremonies over each vessel. He was accompanied by his four fellow volunteer directors, Ted Graham, Bob Trotter, Don Pridmore and Glenys MacDonald.

The Chief of Navy, Minister for Defence Services and the German Ambassador also attended, as did five family representatives, including Rory Burnett, son of the Sydney’s captain.

“We could see how important this was to all the family members we met,” Rowe says. “The time with Rory Burnett was especially moving, as I could see his relief in finally having more answers about what happened to his father and the men on board.

“A great silence had existed during the war about what happened to the Sydney. The Official Secrets Act continued after the war ended, and various conspiracy theories fuelled confusion.”

All of the FSF’s archives have gone to the Federal Government and the WA Maritime Museum, with full public access available. The Federal Government’s Commission of Inquiry into the Loss of the Sydney is now investigating what happened.

Rowe says he will leave the interpretation to the historians.

“Our job was to locate and to commemorate,” he says. “We weren’t in it for the glory or for financial gain. It was just a good thing to do.”

For more information: findingsydney.com
A much-needed boost

Whooping cough is highly contagious and has potentially fatal consequences. But a new vaccine will help to eliminate the disease worldwide, with fewer boosters and potentially fewer side effects.

**WHOOPING** cough is high on the list of the world’s most contagious diseases. The toxic bacteria (*Bordetella pertussis*) has plagued global communities for centuries, and large numbers of humans – from infants to the elderly – have been infected with the debilitating respiratory illness.

Children are more likely to develop serious complications from the disease, with nearly 40 million infants worldwide catching whooping cough each year, and 300,000 dying from it.

Anyone who has been with a child affected by whooping cough finds it hard to erase from their memory the distress of a young patient who gasps for breath and ‘whoops’ between violent and prolonged coughing fits.

In adolescents and adults the ‘whoop’ is less identifiable, but the continuous coughing that can lead to pneumonia and other complications is equally serious. Infected adults lose about 10 working days a year, and those who recover from it are not necessarily immune to a second attack. On top of it all, they are responsible for infecting about 55 per cent of infants.

One vaccine called killed pertussis vaccine, which contains whole killed cells, was introduced 40 years ago to help build up immunity to the bacteria that causes whooping cough.

The vaccine quite effectively stopped whooping cough epidemics, but it had a few shortcomings. These included serious side effects such as high fever, persistent crying at a high pitch in children, febrile seizures and, occasionally, brain damage.

A subsequent vaccine consisting of selected fractions of the disease-causing bacterium mixed with an immune response-enhancing chemical (adjuvant) was introduced in the developed world, including Australia. However, although it provides medium-term protection at best, adverse side effects, including a large swelling at the injection site, can occur in a significant percentage of vaccinated children who are allergic.

Because of the side effects particularly following the third booster, there has been a lack of compliance by some families with the recommended vaccination schedule. And without these vital boosters, opportunities emerge for the bacterial pathogen to cause whooping cough again not only in infants, but also in adults vaccinated during their childhood because of waning immunity against the disease.

However, a biomedical breakthrough at Curtin will now help to eliminate the disease worldwide, with the development of an intranasal vaccine that is destined to offer longer-lasting immunity, fewer boosters and potentially fewer side effects.

**DEVELOPED** by medical microbiologist and immunologist Dr Thilochan Mukkur, from the School of Biomedical Sciences, the intranasal vaccine will be cheaper to produce than the existing vaccine, and provide significant benefits to developed as well as developing countries.

“Whooping cough has persisted as a serious health threat to world populations because long-term immunity requires numerous booster injections over a person’s lifetime,” Mukkur says.

“**My intranasal vaccine produces a more effective stimulation of the immune system that will provide long-lasting immunity and fewer, if any, booster shots.**”

The difference between Mukkur’s intranasal vaccine and the existing one is significant. The current vaccine given by injection only partially stimulates the immune response because the injection confines immune responses to the blood. Lung secretions may have some antibodies, but they are not necessarily of the most desired type.

Also, the current vaccine does not stimulate the cell-mediated immunity necessary for long-term protection against whooping cough.

Adults wanting to remain immune to the disease need up to six boosters over their lifetime. Most fail to follow up the boosters after primary school.

The Federal Government provides the vaccine free to all Australian children from two months old to age six. However, the high cost of vaccine production excludes it from two-thirds of the world’s population, who miss out on any protection at all.

The method of dispensing the vaccine is also significant. Administered intranasally, either as a spray or nasal drop, Mukkur’s vaccine has been found to stimulate immune response in the lung secretions and in the blood. The vaccine also arms the cells of the immune system to perform better, and it will be cheaper to make.

The potential benefits of Mukkur’s vaccine have attracted interest worldwide, and the medical scientist recently received Curtin’s prestigious 2008 New Inventor Award for his effort.

Curtin is currently approaching pharmaceutical companies for investment in further development and human trials of the vaccine.

In the meantime, Mukkur stresses the importance of vaccination against the disease.

“This particular pathogen only affects humans and it creates very damaging toxic symptoms that can be deadly for children who are not vaccinated,” he says.

“Vaccination of young children with one of the currently marketed vaccines is very important.”

For more information:
healthsciences.curtin.edu.au
Gone are the queues at Curtin Library’s Information Desk – replaced instead by a band of ever-helpful, ever-smiling student Rovers, who are at the beck and call of students, staff and the broader community. Easy to find in their colourful t-shirts, they can be called on for help with finding material in the catalogue or a book on the shelves. They are especially adept at handling IT queries, including where best to access the wireless network and how to use OASIS – the student and staff portal to information about Curtin. Armed with walkie-talkies, the Rovers also answer calls received through Help phones on every floor of the library. It’s all in a day’s work for these trained and motivated young students, who go a long way to help meet the needs of Curtin Library’s 1.5 million visitors a year.
Spatial sciences play an important role in our lives, so it is surprising that most of us use technologies from this rapidly emerging science in one form or another each day, without recognising it by name.
Spatial Sciences Senior Lecturer Tony Snow agrees. He is equally perplexed because he sees the science developing rapidly to meet a huge variety of needs.

“As people in the front line of the technology, we feel we are really riding a wave that is advancing at an extraordinary rate,” he says.

“The driving force of this revolution is that the technology, hardware and data come together at the right time. You can just press a button and download it. It’s a real breakthrough for government departments, commerce and industry, where good planning is crucial.”

Snow believes Gen Y students are born for spatial technology because they are the first generation to do most of their social networking in cyberspace.

With these new-generation students in mind, Curtin recently launched a state-of-the-art Spatial Sciences Studio. The facility is a focal point for geographic information science, surveying and cartography in WA, and serves as an industry resource to support education and research initiatives.

Landgate has committed $430,000 over the next five years to develop the studio which combines high-tech computer systems with the latest teaching resources, specifically targeted at today’s generation of technology-savvy students.

Veenendaal says GIS and the spatial sciences are tailored to government and industry needs, and the department has a range of bursaries, sponsorships and cadetships available that are industry-supported.

“Industry and government are struggling to get good people now, so the future for young people and jobs in the spatial sciences is only going to get better,” he says.

Western Australia is leading the nation in spatial technology. For many years the State has been a centre of spatial innovation excellence. Our State’s spatial technology has much to offer developing nations in the Asia-Pacific region, from mapping rising sea levels to tsunami and earthquake modelling, disaster recovery and satellite monitoring for illegal forest burn-offs in Indonesia’s remnant jungle.

On the Indonesian island of Banda Aceh, for example, NOIS, a WA consulting firm which employs Curtin spatial sciences graduates, has been working for the past few years to help the community to map the recovery of their town.

Landgate recently pushed the WA spatial technology platform a whole lot further, with the official launch of its Shared Land Information Platform (SLIP).
In Western Australia, more than 1,900 people a month now log on to SLIP to access more than 20 gigabytes of spatial information maintained by many government departments. The result is that users have access to the most up-to-date information from the authoritative source by going to a single point of access. Nineteen government agencies and two private organisations are currently connected to the SLIP network, bringing together and making available some 200 vector spatial datasets and more than 1,000 imagery datasets that in the past resided in isolated systems.

SLIP’s objective is to simplify access to land and geographic data for the general community and business. Four lead agencies – Fire and Emergency Services, the Department of Agriculture and Food, the Department for Planning and Infrastructure, and Landgate – share responsibility for SLIP’s implementation. Each of the government departments is responsible for updating its own data each night.

“Spatial technology allows people to share information in a way that has not been possible before,” says Landgate Acting Chief Executive Mike Bradford.

“At the end of the day, everything happens at a place, so location is so important, whether it is around health information, demographics or incidence of disease.

“To be able to view and analyse information spatially can provide really powerful answers that can lead to better decision-making and infrastructure planning.”

Bradford says Landgate took the lead in SLIP when in 2003 it identified there were 5,000 State Government employees from about 26 different government agencies making use of land information. The difficulties they had to access the required information were enormous.

“Landgate looked for a new way to share this information and came up with a concept that was probably not technically feasible at the time,” Bradford says.

“Landgate is also looking into the future for more innovative applications serving information out to mobile devices. Crowd sourcing, which gives people in the community the ability to submit information to the site, is also under consideration.”

So what does the future hold for the spatial sciences and technology?

One of the major areas of spatial growth in the US is location-specific advertising, and there is a big demand for people who are working in advertising and marketing with some spatial expertise to apply it to their industry.

Spatially enabled mobile phone technology is already the next move forward, according to Veenendaal. Built-in GPS systems and links to sites like Google’s Maps, Streets and Search and Facebook will enable businesses to tailor individual marketing strategies for consumers.

So don’t be surprised when the local café owner ‘sees’ you approaching and targets you virtually through your phone, suggesting it’s time for a coffee break.
IF we’ve learnt anything from prehistoric cave paintings or ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, it’s that graphics are just as legitimate a narrative device as prose. In a society propelled by images, theatre, the internet, film and television make up a substantial part of our cultural diet.

Many think of graphic novels as fast food. Yet, despite the publishing industry’s fastidious standards, they’ve made their way into the mainstream market. Whereas traditional comic books comprise graphic strips which narrate short stories over a series of books, graphic novels employ a narrative structure similar to that of a traditional novel but with the emphasis on images rather than words. For this reason they’re at home on bookshelves alongside their wordier counterparts, with their own sections in public libraries and commercial book stores. And they are, of course, regular tenants of the faithful comic book shop.

For some people, graphic novels are a regression to the childish nature of the picture book – the culprit being their association with spandex-clad superheroes. After all, there’s not much more between those pages than muscle-bound men in tights – or is there?

For graphic novel artist and writer Ben Templesmith this question would be deserving of a slow, sarcastic handclap. Like many graphic novelists, he walks a gauntlet of cultural ignorance, rooted for the most part in the idea that the graphic novel is a literary genre, when it is, he argues, an individual medium, separate some ‘comics’ as more than just fodder for young go-getters that are looking for quick, easy, superficial reading.

“I remember in my early days looking for gigs,” says Templesmith, “asking someone who worked for HarperCollins if they’d be interested in doing some graphic novels – for example, historical-based novels, rather than the superhero subgenre. I could virtually see the sneer at the words ‘graphic novel’ and ‘comic’ down the phone line. What a pity.

“Graphic novels have been the only real growth area in the book market for years now, and seem to have gained some popularity or at least awareness. “Graphic novel and comic book publishers have gradually been able to convince book stores to carry more and more graphic novels. My publisher, IDW Publishing, now makes more than 50 per cent of its sales outside of traditional comic stores.”

A graduate of Curtin’s Bachelor of Design degree, Templesmith now lives in San Diego, in the US. He is best known for his work in the American comic book industry and has received multiple nominations for the industry’s top prize, the Eisner Award.

The award is named after Will Eisner, creator of the first graphic novel A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories (1978) which explored working-class Jewish life in New York during the Great Depression. The novel found comic book writers reassessing the potential of their art form, as Eisner’s readership suddenly expanded to a new adult audience. It also paved the way for Art Spiegelman’s Maus: A Survivor’s Tale which won a Pulitzer Prize Special Award in 1992. The work was based on the survival of the author’s father, a Polish Jew during the Holocaust.

While Templesmith’s work doesn’t deal with such serious, historical subject matter, it steers noticeably clear of superhero territory, instead operating in horror, humour and sci-fi realms.

“Graphic novels are the last bastion of creativity,” he says. “There is very little external control to the books compared to most other mediums. It’s the one industry you can really do anything crazy and daring, and still put it out in the marketplace to see what people think. That’s the freedom the big movie studios don’t have, and why they’re hovering like vultures over the industry right now.”

IRONICALLY. 30 Days of Night, arguably Templesmith’s most popular work, joined a list of graphic novels such as History of Violence, The Crow and Sin City to have been translated onto the big screen. During 30 Days of Night’s opening credits, special mention is made about the film being based on a graphic novel rather than a comic book.

Justin Randall, commercial illustrator, graphic novelist and digital illustration lecturer at Curtin, says it’s “actually a big step in attempting to separate some ‘comics’ as more than just fodder for 13-year-old boys”.

“It’s only a slight change in the wording but just the very word ‘comic’ in Western culture brings forth images of anti-social, freckle-faced nerds, and I think some people are just tired of that generalisation.”

The success of a graphic novel is not dependent on its transition to the big screen, nor does the transition spell instant success. And, Randall says, both graphic novelist and filmmaker need to adhere to guidelines similar to those deployed in blockbusters to avoid a flop. He has taken his own advice, having worked on the critically acclaimed Silent Hill, Waldo’s Hawaiian Holiday and new additions to the 30 Days of Night series.

“Like any film you need a great concept, narrative and dialogue,” he says. “Making it pretty helps, too. But the greatest illustrator in the world can’t keep a story afloat if the language of a graphic novel is not treated with respect.”
Pumping petrol into our cars is a costly exercise these days, but evidently not high enough to dent our desire to drive.

Driving the price of oil
drivers for most people are convenience and time. For many people, the convenience of cars is enough to keep them paying for petrol, whatever the price.

According to economist Tony Owen, many people are likely to choose to cut back on other expenses first, such as dining at a restaurant.

Owen is Professor of Energy Economics at Curtin Business School, the first position of its kind in Australia. He is also co-director of Oil and Gas Management, an area of research excellence for the school.

In effect, he’s an expert at crunching the numbers when it comes to assessing our energy options involving fuels such as oil, gas and coal, and their effects on electricity prices. With rising petrol prices, he says it’s a matter of choice and simply working out what we’d prefer not to do without.

“With something like increased interest rates, for instance, you can’t avoid paying more on your mortgage,” he says.

“With petrol, if you want to keep driving, you can look at other areas to cut back on. And most people have enough discretionary income to allow them this choice. The cost of not driving can be high, in terms of your lifestyle.

“The car is so convenient. So people will give up other luxuries before they give up their car. For example, meals out are more likely to be given up first.”

With cars, the two big economic drivers for most people are convenience and time.

“I think the fundamental message is that if you buy a car, it offers so many lifestyle benefits you will be reluctant to do without,” Owen says.

“Driving a car saves time, and time is very valuable to most people. For many people, that’s quite a big issue; why spend two hours on the bus – an hour each way to and from work – when you can do it in 15 or 20 minutes?”

He says if oil and petrol prices stay high in the long term, people are likely to get a smaller or more fuel-efficient vehicle the next time they buy a car.

TO understand why oil and petrol prices fluctuate, we need to look at the bigger picture of energy economics for an explanation.

Owen says speculation on the futures market is quite a big issue; why spend two hours on the bus – an hour each way to and from work – when you can do it in 15 or 20 minutes?”

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Curtin researchers are hoping to encourage Australia’s many asthma sufferers to better manage their condition with a new drug treatment.

This is not surprising, given that drug treatment is still the cornerstone of asthma management. What may surprise some people, however, is that despite this significant pharmaceutical outlay, health professionals believe not enough drugs are being taken by asthma sufferers to manage their condition.

While a few quick bursts of short-acting beta-agonists, or ‘reliever’ drugs, may help to relieve symptoms such as wheezing, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, people with persistent asthma should be more regularly inhaling corticosteroid ‘preventer’ drugs to reduce the risk of severe attacks and help prevent long-term lung damage.

This suspected drug under-use was verified by the AIHW’s 2007 report Patterns of Asthma Medication Use in Australia which found that most asthma sufferers who used inhaled corticosteroids were going against national and international health guidelines by using them only intermittently.

It’s an issue that researchers from Curtin’s School of Biomedical Sciences have been concerned with for some time. According to Associate Professor Deirdre Coombe, head of the school’s Molecular Immunology Group, the corticosteroids have gained a bad reputation because of their perceived side effects.

“The risks associated with taking these drugs, such as increased chance of glaucoma and thinning skin, are often more perceived than real, but it stops people from taking the drugs they need,” she says.

Alongside colleague Dr Warren Kett, Coombe has been developing new carbohydrate-based drugs to treat asthma and allergic rhinitis (hay fever), a common and often related allergic condition frequently treated with corticosteroid nasal sprays.

“We’re using natural products as our inspiration, mimicking essential carbohydrate structures in the body known as glycosaminoglycans, or GAGs,” Coombe says.

“These are a class of carbohydrate that binds to and interferes with key proteins that stimulate the growth of eosinophils, white blood cells that cause the tissue damage associated with an allergic reaction.

“Because they are based on carbohydrate structures that occur naturally within the body, they have fewer side effects than the steroid-based drugs, so we anticipate people will be more willing to use them to control their asthma and hay fever.”

The new drugs will also be able to be inhaled in a solution form. In the past, carbohydrate-based drugs have been too difficult to synthesise and manufacture in bulk, but Kett has developed a novel chemistry platform that will enable the drugs to be produced in a cost-effective way.

Says Coombe: “Ultimately, our goal is to offer people an alternative drug that they feel more comfortable with taking so that they are better able to manage their condition.”

“And we want to offer it at a price that is comparable to current therapies.”
SCENE AT THE GALLERY

The John Curtin Gallery, at Curtin’s Bentley Campus, has staged more than 120 exhibitions since it opened in 1998. Exhibitions involve many months of planning, as was the case recently for House of Tarvydas and Looking Out. A survey celebrating 40 years of Western Australian fashion designer Ruth Tarvydas’ eponymous creations, complemented by the work of other key WA fashion designers in Looking Out, the exhibitions took two years to plan. The results were dazzling – as was the action behind the scenes.
Props appear minimal, but purpose-built partitions reconfigure the entire gallery space, just as life-like mannequins are positioned to accentuate the garments, and lights hung to create ambience.
A virtual ‘fashion catwalk’ featuring models filmed on a makeshift runway forms a backdrop to the haute couture in the multimedia component of the exhibitions.
House of Tarvydas and Looking Out were opened at an exclusive launch by Perth Fashion Festival ambassador Annmarie Carpenter. The exhibitions were the first thorough examination of WA fashion at a major gallery.
OPENING NIGHT
SPORT & STUDY

A WINNING COMBINATION

Collaboration between universities and sporting institutes brings balance to the busy lives of elite athletes, and fosters their ambitions to perform well in both the sports and academic arenas.

Olympian Kiel Brown
As a signatory to the national Elite Athlete Friendly University (EAFU) Network since 2004, Curtin has given a firm commitment to providing assistance to elite athletes who also want to achieve academic excellence, and to help them build a life after sport.

The network was set up because of growing recognition that elite athletes required a great deal of flexibility from universities to create a supportive environment that fostered both their sporting and scholarly aims.

Curtin’s Associate Director of Community Life, Associate Professor Werner Soontiens, provides direct support to students from sporting institutes who have elected to study at Curtin. He says many athletes realise very early on that they need something to fall back on once they stop competing at the elite level or to complement their sporting achievements.

“As part of the program, we try to assist students to find that balance between being athletes and performing well, and being able to proceed in the academic sphere and get that qualification,” he says.

To be a part of the program, a university must give special consideration to student-athletes in many different ways, as their needs are unique. Students elect to take part through their sporting institutions, which provide a list of participants to universities to filter through to their staff.

“We flag those lists to the academic area at a senior management level, so the head of school would know that he or she has three or four athletes in the program,” Soontiens says.

“There is a lot of goodwill and understanding available from individual academics if students come and provide them with sufficient evidence of their involvement with sport.”

To accommodate the student-athlete, assignment deadlines may be renegotiated, based on sporting-related travel commitments; exams may be sat under exam conditions in hotels (sometimes in exotic locations); and requirements to attend every lecture or tutorial may be waived. Also, study loads can be tailored to accommodate erratic sporting schedules; the time to complete a course may be extended; and several leave-of-absence periods may be granted. Swapping on-campus study with distance education is also an option.

“If you look, for instance, at Super 14 rugby players, they’ve got 15 or 16 weeks which are completely mad, and then five months with a very predictable practice pattern; obviously that impacts on their presence on campus and their capability to do the assignments,” Soontiens says.

He stresses the concessions do not extend to students who are uninterested in meeting the academic standards of their course.

“Although we assist them in terms of the timing and intensity of their study, there is no concession in terms of academic rigour or of different assessments,” he says.

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Creating digital history

The recording of history is a thread that links the past to the present. In today’s digital era, this thread to the ‘future past’ is engendering considerable global interest and research.

Dr Paul Arthur is based in the School of Media, Culture and Creative Arts at Curtin, where he has been researching how new technologies are transforming the way history is recorded and studied.

“Some of the most useful, creative and enduring projects are large-scale digital database works by historians and involving IT experts, multimedia producers and information designers to provide access to information about the past in completely new ways,” he says.

At the start of 2009 he will take up a six-month research fellowship at the Center for Cultural Analysis, Rutgers University, New Jersey. Arthur’s project – History in Motion: Digital Approaches to the Past – will examine the impact of digital technologies on historical studies.

From September 2009 he will spend a year as a research fellow at HUMlab, a leading digital humanities lab in Sweden, working on a book about the digital future of biography which, he says, “is thriving online and reaching new audiences”.

“A trend has developed where people are increasingly exposing their history or life in the public domain,” Arthur says.

At the same time he acknowledges there are concerns about abuse as well as quality, relevance, status and authority of digital information.

“In response, major research and collecting institutions are engaging with the digital history field by starting their own projects and interlinking their resources,” he says.

In between the US and Sweden posts, Arthur will be presenting papers at four international conferences, and visiting a number of digital humanities centres in the US.

NEW RESEARCH ON OSTEOPOROSIS

A new technique to measure the variation in bone density within spinal bones could be the key to identifying patients at risk of spine fracture – one of the most common fracture types in osteoporosis. And it could be available in clinical practice within 10 years.

Dr Andrew Briggs, an Australian National Health and Medical Research Council Postdoctoral Research Fellow, from Curtin’s School of Physiotherapy, is developing the technique along with colleagues from the Department of Medicine at the University of Melbourne and the Institute for Medical and Veterinary Sciences in South Australia.

“The technique involves modifying the analysis of routine bone density (DXA) scans for bone thinning, or osteoporosis, to provide an assessment of bone density distribution in the back,” Briggs says.

The testing phase so far has shown the technique to be reliable, and Briggs says once it is completed, a large clinical study will be conducted to verify initial findings.

“If all goes well the new technique could be in clinical practice within 10 years,” he says.

“Measuring bone mineral density only provides us with an estimate of bone strength. We cannot use it to predict with confidence who is at risk of sustaining a broken back or a fracture cascade.”

An initial spinal fracture can lead to a four to seven-fold risk increase for further back fractures, known as a fracture cascade, which is devastating for the patient.

It is estimated that if the current trend continues, the number of osteoporosis sufferers in Australia by 2021 will be three million. Spinal fractures account for almost half of all osteoporosis-related breaks.

Changing worlds, changing lives

A unique international service delivery program at Curtin offers allied health students the opportunity to gain interdisciplinary skills as well as cross-cultural competency in a clinical environment, culturally different from their own.

The Director of International Relations at the School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work, Trevor Goddard, is enthusiastic about the Go Global program because it highlights the role of service in preparing graduates for global citizenship, reconnects universities with communities and helps them to be a driver of social change.

“What makes this program unique is that the professions we send to the host country are driven by the needs of the placement,” he says.

The program was initiated in China, in 2001, and has extended to India, South Africa and, in 2008, to the Ukraine, with students delivering about 9,000 hours of service internationally a year.

“In South Africa, we’re exploring the need for health promotion students; in India we may take mental health nurses because of the large population who have spent all their lives in orphanages,” Goddard says.

For the first time, pharmacy students have travelled to India to work alongside other allied health students, to assist them in understanding the impact of the pharmaceuticals their clients are using.

“One of the strengths of this arrangement is that the students are learning as much from each other as they are from the clients – and in real life situations,” Goddard says.

“Global citizenship transcends nationalism, and the health science professions are underpinned by social justice and a sense of service to the community. This program engages in a shared humanity and services communities the world over.”

And, according to Goddard, a vital component is the opportunity to have a sustainable influence with cultural relevance.
William Sykes died at 63, "the owner of a dog, a gun, some clothes and a kangaroo-skin pouch of letters". Those letters inspired Curtin's Professor Graham Seal AM to research Sykes' life, which revealed a powerful and moving story.

History's nobodies – as Seal calls them – became the backbone of These Few Lines: A Convict Story - The Lost Lives of Myra and William Sykes for which he shared the State Library of New South Wales Biography Award of $20,000.

He is the first WA-based author to win the prize. Seal says the award recognises the importance of research and writing that reveals the lives of those who are usually history's nobodies.

William Sykes and five other poachers assaulted a gamekeeper who later died from his injuries. Sykes was then transported to WA for manslaughter, leaving behind his wife, Myra, in England.

He arrived in Fremantle in 1867 and, after working in Bunbury for seven years, was sent to Newcastle (now Toodyay). He was given his ticket of leave in 1877 and spent the last few years of his life working on the railway from Clackline to Newcastle. He died in 1891, and his letters were found in a crevice during the demolition of old police buildings in Toodyay.

"I really enjoy sharing what I have learnt with others, and for conservation purposes I feel that nature documentaries are the most effective way to do this to a wide audience," Cherriman says.

He grew up watching wildlife programs and dreamt of making his own nature documentaries, taking the first step towards his dream when he produced A King on Outstretched Wings. The documentary is a compilation of his filmed observations of the wedge-tailed eagle in the Perth region since 2005.

An environmental biology honours graduate from Curtin's Muresk Institute, Cherriman says he has been interested in birds since a child and "spent many weekends climbing trees, building hides, finding nests and learning all I could about birds".

"I monitored five eagle pairs over three breeding seasons and compiled a report on the number and type of mammal, bird and reptile species that the eagles preyed upon during this time period," he says.

Over the years the eagle observations added to a growing record of nest sites, which Simon used as the basis for his honours project.

"I found Myra's letters particularly poignant," Seal says. "She was a loyal woman, it emerges from the letters, and she remained committed to him, even though he was sentenced for life.

"Myra married again after William's death and I like to think enjoyed a few happy years before she, too, passed away."

Seal is Director of the Centre for Advanced Studies in Australia, Asia and the Pacific in the Faculty of Humanities. His other books have won awards in the UK and US as well as in Australia.
A historical consultant at the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library, Emeritus Professor David Black has a distinguished academic reputation for his contribution to Australian history and politics. To his great surprise, he was recently voted “Republican of the Year” for Western Australia by the Australian Republican Party. He explains why it’s not a matter of if Australia should become a republic, but when.

I believe Australia should be a republic. It’s completely out of date for us not to be a republic; the idea that the Queen should have any substantive or even symbolic role in our constitution is completely and totally anachronistic.

Our Constitution dates from a very different era. Indeed, the Australian Constitution which came into operation on 1 January 1901 was created as an act of the British Parliament, but even then it only became law after it had been ratified by referendum in each of the six original states. According to the Constitution, while the Queen is the head of state the powers within Australia are exercised by the Governor General. Until 1930 it was the British monarchy and government who determined who would be our Governor General, but since 1930 it has been accepted that the Queen will simply appoint whomever is nominated by the Australian Government – and since 1965 we have only had Australian-born Governors General.

It was during the 1930s, too, when Western Australia tried to secede from the Commonwealth, that the British affirmed they would not attempt to alter our Constitution Act without the express request of the Australian Government. In any case, in 1942 the Australian Parliament ratified the Statute of Westminster. Coupled with the Constitution, while the Queen is the head of state the powers within Australia are exercised by the Governor General. Until 1930 it was the British monarchy and government who determined who would be our Governor General, but since 1930 it has been accepted that the Queen will simply appoint whomever is nominated by the Australian Government – and since 1965 we have only had Australian-born Governors General.

Another strong British component of our system was the national anthem. Until the 1970s this was God Save the Queen. But in the 1970s, Malcolm Fraser held a national song poll and Australians voted between four possible anthems. Advance Australia Fair won clearly in every state. Now, God Save the Queen is played only when the monarchy is present.

Against this background, it can be asserted that the move to become a republic is the attempt to take the next step, a bigger step but a logical step, in this gradual emancipation from Britain. The most hardened opponents to this are those who feel our connection to the monarchy is part of our British heritage.

Arguably, there’s no practical reason why we need to become a republic – we can function independently without making that change – but I consider quite simply that the system should reflect who we are.

As it is, the public debate has focused on two separate issues. First, should we remove the references to the Queen altogether? And second, how should we then choose the Governor General or President? In my view, we need to deal with these questions separately.

I would contend that the Government should first hold a plebiscite – a question that people vote on between a set number of candidates – ideally two or three – nominated by two-thirds of the Parliament.

This would deal with one of the main reasons why the 1999 referendum failed, namely that the model proposed did not allow for popular election. However, perhaps equally important was the fact that John Howard, the prime minister who introduced the referendum, showed a distinct lack of enthusiasm for the idea.

For this reason, my political judgement is that so long as it is Kevin Rudd or any other Labor politician who sponsors the referendum, it will not pass. By contrast, if Peter Costello or Malcolm Turnbull initiated the question the prospects would be much better. Both men, while strong republicans, are also seen by the population as conservative politicians who would not sponsor rash change. The republican referendum, I believe, would pass if people were not suspicious of the motives of the sponsors.

At a time of increasing economic difficulties, the republican issue is seen by many as a distraction. But time is on the side of the republicans. As each decade goes by, the involvement of the monarchy in the political system of our multicultural society seems increasingly absurd, and in any case we can still maintain the link by recognising the Queen as the head of the British Commonwealth.

None of this may happen in my lifetime; it could take another 20 or 30 years, and I certainly don’t think we’ll get there by 2010. Becoming a republic would be the final stage, the crowning glory, so to speak, of our emancipation from the mother country and acceptance on the world stage.
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Curtin University of Technology is Western Australia’s largest and most diverse university. Curtin strives for excellence in teaching and offers a wide range of courses in business, engineering and science, resources and environment, health sciences and humanities.

The University is committed to building world-class research capability through partnerships with business, industry, government and community organisations. Curtin has a growing international presence, and an offshore campus in Sarawak, East Malaysia.

The University is named after John Curtin, Prime Minister of Australia from 1941-1945, and strives to honour his values of vision, leadership and community service.

curtin.edu.au

The great university... should look ever forward; for it the past should be but a preparation for the greater days to be.

John Curtin
PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA
(1941-1945)

Curtin aspires to be a leading-edge university of technology. To fulfil this vision, we strive to be innovative and forward-looking in everything we do. It’s in our approach to teaching and learning. It’s in our research. It’s in our staff, our students, and our graduates. It’s in the way we think and act. It’s what we call Curtinnovation.