REPORT TO DONORS

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

THE IMPACT OF GIVING
The beginning of 2016 marks a milestone for the University of Melbourne. After launching a major philanthropic initiative three years ago, we have reached our target of $500 million, two years ahead of schedule. With colleagues I am deeply grateful for the extraordinary generosity shown by more than 20,000 people who have donated to Believe — the Campaign for the University of Melbourne.

This generosity will help the University raise standards ever higher in each of the critical areas of its work – learning and teaching, research, and engagement with all our communities.

We now have a new goal in sight – one that will extend our commitment to life-changing research and provide more opportunities to allow students from all backgrounds to reach their potential.

This future vision includes an important role for donors and alumni, on such fronts as volunteering, engagement and mentoring our students. We aim to enrich and strengthen these community connections, as we become an ever better university.

In 2015, the University of Melbourne cemented its place at 44 in the Academic Ranking of World Universities and 33 in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings. This strengthening international reputation reflects the University’s commitment to an ever more engaging student culture, improved services and facilities for students and staff and a growing reputation for world-class research.

Philanthropically, highlights of 2015 include a major commitment from Jane Hansen and Paul Little AO and the Hansen Trust that will transform the teaching of history in our Faculty of Arts; the Bertalli Chair in Cancer Medicine at the new Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre; the Clifford Chair in Neural Engineering, which supports collaborative health research; and the Elizabeth and James Tatoulis Chair in Classics, which brings new emphasis to one of the University’s oldest academic disciplines.

Many challenges lie ahead for the University, as for every higher education institution today. Yet I hope the stories in these pages will highlight for you the power and impact of the contribution our work together makes. In learning, teaching, research and engagement, this work is increasingly empowered by support of donors, including the many who gave in 2015.

On behalf of the University, my thanks to each of you.

GLYN DAVIS AC
VICE-CHANCELLOR
A WORLDWIDE COMMUNITY OF SUPPORTERS

Thanks to more than 20,000 donors worldwide, Believe — the Campaign for the University of Melbourne has reached its $500 million target two years ahead of schedule. The impact of this incredible generosity is already being felt across the University, in affiliated colleges and institutions, and beyond. The transformative effects can be seen in the outcomes achieved by students, new research discoveries and thriving communities. Thank you!

CAMPAIGN IN NUMBERS 2008–2015*

- 226 Number of new Scholarships and Awards
- 20 Number of new fellowships
- 24 Number of new Professional Chairs
- Number of Indigenous student completions
- Alumni ambassadors, volunteers and donors

In 2015:
- 64 20,439 Total number of donors
- 1321 15,359 Total number of first-time donors
- 3182 59 Countries
- 18% Percentage of Campaign total funded by bequests

2008:
- $120 million ENRICHING COMMUNITIES
- $150 million EDUCATING FUTURE LEADERS
- $230 million FINDING ANSWERS TO THE WORLD’S GRAND CHALLENGES

WHAT YOU SUPPORTED**

CAMPAIGN PROFESSORIAL CHAIRS

- Apex Australia Foundation Chair in Developmental Medicine
  Transforming the health of children with disabilities
- Bertalli Chair in Cancer Medicine
  Leading the fight against one of society’s biggest killers
- Boulton/Oxley Founding Chair in Australian Literature
  Promoting Australia’s rich literary traditions and talent
- Chair in Cattle and Sheep Production Medicine
  Improving animal health and welfare for productive, sustainable farming
- Clifford Chair in Neural Engineering
  Combining science and engineering to drive advances in health
- Cripps Foundation Chair of Cultural Materials Conservation
  Conserving art for future generations
- Elizabeth and James Tatoulis Chair of Classics
  Promoting the ancient cultures that shaped our modern world
- Financial Markets Foundation Chair of Developmental Mental Health
  Improving the health and wellbeing of children vulnerable to mental illness
- Financial Markets Foundation Chair in Human Rights
  Advancing our understanding of the law to promote dignity and equality for all
- Frankline V McNif Chair in Human Rights
  Revolutionising the treatment of skin cancers
- Graeme Clark Chair in Audiology and Speech Science
  Pursuing biomedical, technological and educational advances in hearing and speech
- Hansen Chair in History
  Learning from the past to create a better future
- Harold Mitchell Chair of Indigenous Eye Health
  Eradicating trachoma from Australia
- Hugh Ramsay Chair in Australian Art History
  Increasing understanding of our nation’s artistic heritage
- Jack Brockhoff Chair of Child Public Health
  Promoting healthy and full lives for all children
- Jigsaw Foundation Chair of Paediatric Plastic and Maxillofacial Surgery
  Changing the lives of children with congenital deformities
- Lorenzo Galli Chair in Melanoma and Skin Cancers
  Revolutionising the treatment of skin cancers
- Lorenzo and Pamela Galli Chair in Developmental Medicine
  Leading research into the causes and treatment of childhood disability
- Sheila Handbury Chair of Maternal Fetal Medicine
  Ensuring mothers and their unborn babies stay healthy
- Thomas Baker Chair in Physical Biosciences
  Developing and applying quantum technology to biological problems
- Thomas H Laby Chair of Physics
  Pushing the boundaries of research and teaching in physics

*These figures show donations to main University funds and do not include gifts to affiliated colleges or institutions.

**Total campaign funds include more than $72,000,000 given to affiliated colleges and institutions.
ENTREPRENEURS
Creative thinkers with exciting ideas are getting a boost from new entrepreneurship programs.

IT BEGINS WITH AN IDEA, AND IN BINDI RAJA’S CASE, A VERY BIG IDEA:

Bindi Raja’s vision is to create a self-sustaining social enterprise that acts as a pathway for underprivileged young women and girls in India to take control of their lives through education and work. By facilitating education and training, her nascent enterprise would enable girls and young women to work their way out of poverty and create new lives for themselves.

Ms Raja was born in the UK and came to Australia as a six-year-old, but has visited India many times to see relatives and attend family milestones such as weddings. That has enabled her to build a network including the Global Vaddo Charitable Trust (GVC), which provides education for underprivileged children in Goa, and with schools with international affiliations.

When she describes the work of the trust, Ms Raja’s passion is palpable. “I was in India a year-and-a-half ago and at that time it brought home the huge prevalence of poverty.”

“That wasn’t news, but I felt a sense of hurt and of passion to do something. GVC has been able to take children out of that cycle and begin to educate them. I found that so inspiring, and it motivated me to further my passion and cause.”

Ms Raja works as a sonographer and sees the medical field as a powerful pathway for Indian women to find employment and to contribute to their own communities. She is supported by the Naomi Milgrom Scholarship while undertaking the Master of Entrepreneurship at the Wade Institute at Ormond College.

“I want to affiliate with various organisations in India to provide women with the same educational services as Australia, and create new lives for themselves.”

The scholarship has given me the opportunity, but also the belief that I can make it happen and I am eager to start this incredible journey.

THREATL OF A BIG IDEA

PHYSIOTHERAPIST PHIL GOEBEL’S PROJECT ALSO BEGAN WITH A FLICK OF INSPIRATION.

The spark that led Phil Goebel to the Melbourne Accelerator Program (MAP) came as he was trying to advise a young woman, who had suffered a partial spinal cord injury in a horse-riding accident, how to prepare to live the rest of her life. His insight led to the development of a walking frame that can prevent catastrophic falls among the elderly.

“She was at the point where she needed to make decisions about what kind of impact this is going to have on her career: Do I need to buy a $20,000 powered wheelchair? What sort of home modifications will I need?” he recalls. “It was hard to advise her. That’s when I realised having the ability to record gait would be really useful to answer these questions.”

His insight was that it would be best to gather information about gait passively and regularly. The result, reached with the support of MAP, is a “smart” walking frame equipped with sensors to note walking patterns in real time. MAP offers a range of workshops, programs and events for entrepreneurs at all stages of development, through a scheme of fellowships including office space, mentoring and $20,000 funding.

Mr Goebel says that once widely deployed, the walking frame could create a database that would enable clinicians to understand how fully an individual, such as the young woman who inspired his idea, might recover over time.

More immediate application, however, is to reveal changes in gait that are likely to precede a fall among people in aged care. “Falls are a lagging indicator that something is going wrong that can result in a hip fracture,” he says. The walking frame, which employs technology from the robotics industry, is a leading indicator enabling clinical interventions before an injury occurs.

Its advantage is that it gathers information continuously while the frame is used, with no need for its user to change their behaviour. A prototype, called the Footprints walking frame, has already been field tested by Mr Goebel’s start-up, Quanticare.

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The way start-ups are, we are by nature pretty tenacious,” says Mr Goebel. “I think the effect of MAP has been to accelerate the process and save me from a lot of mistakes that would have slowed things down.” Networking and pitch coaching had also been helpful. “MAP was the first external validation we got on this idea. They have been helping us right from the start.”

The Wade Institute at Ormond College, home to the new Master of Entrepreneurship, was established through the generosity of entrepreneur Peter Wade. The Wade Institute and the Melbourne Accelerator Program have received philanthropic support from many donors interested in supporting entrepreneurship and innovation.
Researchers are using neural engineering to tackle conditions such as autism and epilepsy.

**NEW PATHS TO SUCCESS**

**ENGINEERING**

Researchers are using neural engineering to tackle conditions such as autism and epilepsy.

**CENTRE FOR NEURAL ENGINEERING**

Some very human problem, but with multiple paths to a solution being sought under one roof.

That is the driving concept of the University of Melbourne’s Centre for Neural Engineering. Supported by a generous donation from Qantas Chairman Leigh Clifford gest — an engineering alumnus — and his family, the centre sprang from the realisation that if different disciplines and their disparate skills were brought together, progress in understanding the brain would come faster.

Six laboratories utilise the ideas and skills of multiple disciplines to investigate the causes, and possible solutions, for conditions such as autism spectrum disorder, epilepsy and schizophrenia.

The centre’s Integrative Biological Psychiatry Laboratory is seeking to understand the underlying causes of these disorders from a biological perspective. “Next of kin of patients have kindly donated real brains or brain tissue for study, or in the case of epilepsy, we have access to real patients,” says the centre’s director, Professor Stan Skafidas. Those working with post-mortem brain material are creating new imaging techniques to see how the neurons and synapses are different in sufferers of the disorders.

Meanwhile, the centre’s Stem Cells and Disease Models Laboratory is reprogramming skin cells into stem cells to study the same disorders, along with the actual background genetic make-up of sufferers, creating what is colloquially called a “brain in a dish” — a lentil-sized collection of cells with the same brain pattern as the individual from whom the skin cell was taken.

One problem, two laboratories using different methods to seek an answer.

Professor Skafidas is the inaugural holder of the Clifford Chair at the centre. Its other laboratories involve bionics, computational biology, computational neurobiology and sensors and imaging.

The centre’s focus is human health. Much is being done for conditions such as autism spectrum disorder, epilepsy and schizophrenia.

The best thing is, the sensor disappears. That’s a flavour of where engineering meets medicine. A iso under development is an improved bionic ear delivering higher fidelity than existing cochlear implants, and sensors which, set in the brain of someone with epilepsy, can detect an imminent seizure and apply a stimulus to prevent it.

“The Clifford family donation is critical, enabling the researchers to go down paths not well trodden. “It allows us to pursue a long-term strategy that, if it’s right, will lead to a major breakthrough.”

Professor Skafidas says the Clifford family donation is critical, enabling the researchers to go down paths not well trodden. “It allows us to pursue a long-term strategy that, if it’s right, will lead to a major breakthrough.”

A s leader of the centre’s stem cell laboratory, a associate Professor Mirella Dottori is working towards just such a breakthrough in treatment of the genetic disorder Friedreich’s ataxia, which causes progressive damage to the nervous system.

Professor Skafidas and a US company, with positive results in lifting frataxin levels in nerve cells and heart cells. The team’s work in testing the compounds in more cell types is critical to whether the compounds proceed to clinical trials. “Patients only need a little more of this frataxin protein to have a very significant impact. It’s a disease where small steps can have a big impact.”

Professor Skafidas says the Clifford family donation is critical, enabling the researchers to go down paths not well trodden. “It allows us to pursue a long-term strategy that, if it’s right, will lead to a major breakthrough.”
The arts world is familiar with making do — creators are used to the proverbial smell of the oily rag. So what happens, then, when the facilities and support are made available?

“It brings us to the next level,” says Dr Tim Edwards, Teaching Workshop Manager at the Victorian College of the Arts. The remarkable 2015 transformation of a basic industrial workshop into a cutting-edge research facility has, in its first year alone, enabled collaboration between 700 students from visual arts, production, and film and television. “We have had many ‘magic’ moments of cross-discipline and collaboration between our students and staff with visiting artists and groups,” Dr Edwards says.

The new workshop is part of an overall redevelopment of the Southbank campus, made possible through joint funding by The Ian Potter Foundation, The Myer Foundation, Martyn Myer AO and Louise Myer, the University and the State Government. In 2016, another major transformation begins as the Police Stables are converted into an innovative, multipurpose space for visual arts students. The redevelopment enhances opportunities for students and academics, and also enables collaborations with the wider community.

Secondary schools, the Melbourne International Arts Festival and Indigenous artists from the Northern Territory, among other organisations and groups, have recently used the Teaching Workshop. Music festivals including the Sugar Mountain Festival and the Melbourne Music Week also regularly use the Southbank campus.

In 2014, early in the Southbank renovations, the Grant Street Theatre was revamped into one of Melbourne’s premier music theatre venues. By day, the theatre is a multi-purpose teaching and rehearsal venue, and an exceptional black-box performance space by night.

New lighting equipment and retractable seats mean the theatre can be transformed from a teaching area into a performance space in under an hour.

Grant Street Theatre offers an additional venue for special evening performances: Lionel’s Lounge, which was named to commemorate the support of the Lionel Gell Foundation, showcases jazz and cabaret concerts by students and teachers.

“The Grant Street transformation has given us a home,” says Margot Fenley, the VCA’s Head of Music Theatre. It is home to the annual graduating Showcase, the most important performance for the students over their three years of study, launching them into their professions.

Grant Street can be used for most performing arts activities and has hosted public master classes and special performances by visiting artists. Earlier this year, Fern Sloan and Ted Pugh from the Actor’s Ensemble in New York offered public performances while visiting the VCA for a master teaching week. The renovations make it a drawcard for artists and the local community alike.

For the University of Melbourne Orchestra, the support of the Sidney Myer Melbourne Symphony Orchestra Trust has meant being able to take its music to the community, staging several free concerts a year. Last October, in a first from the orchestra, it performed in Sydney at the City Recital Hall. Within hours of the tickets being made available, the seats were fully booked.

“It’s a terrific testament to the reputation of the University and the quality of the Orchestra that the concert attracted so much interest,” says James Hutchinson, Program Manager — Music, Faculty of the VCA and MCM. Mr Hutchinson says the funding is making a real difference. Support from the Trust has enabled the Orchestra to showcase its emerging talent and attract high quality artists to hone student skills, including conductors Hansjörg Schellenberger, one-time principal oboist at the Berlin Philharmonic, and Benjamin Northey, a University of Melbourne alumnus.
CLOAK OF MANY MAKERS

INDIGENOUS

Ancient skills are being reborn, and a career in the law has been launched, thanks to support for Indigenous programs.

TIRIKI ONUS POSSUM SKIN CLOAK

The Hutchinson Indigenous Fellowship enabled his community research, his experimentation with tools and materials, and the workshop. Among the beneficiaries of his recovery of ancient skills is his daughter, Ninda, born during his fellowship and gifted with her own possum skin cloak in seven generations.

As far as I know, Ninda is the first person in our family to have received a possum skin cloak. It started out with me wanting a possum skin cloak, but it turned into a journey that’s a lot bigger than me. It’s incredibly exciting that I have been part of that ongoing journey, how the tradition of those cloaks is not lost.

Mr Onus donated to the centre.

Mr Onus, inaugural recipient of the Hutchinson Indigenous Fellowship 2015, learned of the importance of the cloaks from his father, “Lin”, and grandfather, Bill. Tiriki O’Nu’s pursuit of the skills needed to craft a cloak in the traditional manner was an odyssey into culture and identity.

Once, everyone received a cloak at birth, with skins added through their life. “If it was a skill everyone had, but as we were moved off our land those skills were lost,” Mr Onus says.

He gathered stories of different techniques. He learned of ochre inscriptions made fast with emu fat. He tracked down a game meat supplier for possum skins and experimented with methods of stretching and preparing them. He learned the skill of extracting the soft, silken tail sinews – “like heavy-gauge fishing line” – with his own wooden tools before splitting them into fine threads for sewing.

It is fellowship included an open workshop in September at the Wilin Centre, where his skills were applied and shared in stitching the first traditionally made cloak in many years, which Mr Onus donated to the centre.

I was bequeathed a great amount of knowledge from my father and from my father and now I have been able to bring it to another level for myself and others,” he says.

He started out with me wanting a possum skin cloak, but it turned into a journey that’s a lot bigger than me. It’s incredibly exciting that I have been part of that ongoing journey, how the tradition of those cloaks is not lost.

The Hutchinson Indigenous Fellowship was established with a $1 million endowment from the Helen M Macpherson Smith Trust, and was named after Darvell Hutchinson AM upon his retirement after 25 years with the Trust.

The Harold Mackrell Indigenous Student Scholarship was established through the bequest of Harold Mackrell, a long-time campaigner for social justice.
Born with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, Savant Thakur is working on ways to improve the quality of life for people with the debilitating condition.

SCHOLARSHIPS

In medical research and education, scholarship recipients are already contributing to the community in inspiring ways.

SAVANT THAKUR RESEARCHER

In the countless hours he spent at the Royal Children’s Hospital as a patient, Savant Thakur would watch the doctors and researchers go about their work.

His GP had sent him for tests when he was four, concerned about the way the boy was walking, and regular falls. Mr Thakur was diagnosed with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, or DMD, a disorder that progressively wastes the body’s muscle tissue, affecting one in 3500 boys.

In those long days at the Children’s, an ambition began to form. “With all the exposure at that age, I felt like I wanted to do something, contribute in some way,” he says.

Mr Thakur, now 24, is working to find a cure for the very disorder that has confined him to a wheelchair since he was 10, and which at times makes it hard for him to breathe without assistance.

The focus of his PhD research at the Basic and Clinical Myology Laboratory, within the Department of Physiology, is how to enhance muscle regeneration in people with DMD and other muscle-wasting conditions. Experiments are conducted under his supervision by a research assistant.

Mr Thakur explains that with DMD, muscle degenerates and regenerates in a continuous cycle. But at some stage, the muscle will lose its ability to regenerate.

Mr Thakur was the recipient of the R D Wright Studentship in 2013-14, and he also received the bequest-funded Frances Elizabeth Thomson Scholarship in 2014 (awarded to the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences’ highest-ranked students engaged in the Honours Program) when he did Honours in Biomedicine prior to commencing his PhD last year.

The studentship and scholarships he has been awarded since he started studying at the University in 2010 have allowed Mr Thakur to pursue his studies.

“Because of my condition, I can’t work part-time and there is a lot of pressure because of ever-increasing living expenses,” Mr Thakur says. “By getting the scholarship, I can focus solely on my studies without having to worry about all the other issues.”

He also says he can’t imagine doing his research without the support of the University’s Disability Liaison Unit.

Mr Thakur says, “I just see myself as trying to contribute, to improve the lives of others who have got the condition.”

EVE BATCHELDER TEACHER

Standing before her class on the first day of school, newly minted teacher Eve Batchelder is understandably both nervous and excited. Her school placements as a Master of Teaching student have helped her prepare, but this is the real thing.

“The nerves soon dissipate. “The best part was getting to know the students,” Ms Batchelder recalls. “In my head I was - and am - anxious about doing this job well, but on my feet it makes a lot more sense.”

That should come as no surprise — there has been a growing realisation that teaching is her calling.

During her undergrad years at Sydney’s Macquarie University, she enjoyed working as a tutor. On graduation, she took a year off and headed to Siberia where she home schooled an English family’s daughter. They were in Novosibirsk, where temperatures can drop to minus 40 degrees. “It was probably the best year and the hardest year of my life so far,” she says.

Beyond the culture shock, it was a further realisation that education was for her.

Ms Batchelder has a strong motivation to help others and had been considering social work. Teaching was a way to combine both.

So she headed to the University of Melbourne and a Master of Teaching. She was awarded a Future Generations Scholarship, established by many donations to the Annual Appeal to help graduate students meet their costs. “It just took away that financial pressure so I could focus on my study and not have that extra stress or burden.”

It placed her in good stead for the challenges she’ll face.

Her first teaching job is at a school that is part of a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre, in north-eastern NSW.

“I love teaching and that’s why I chose it,” she says. “But it’s also a way that I can serve others.”

The R D Wright Studentship was established through generous gifts from the Melbourne medical community to enable undergraduates to undertake research in the University’s Department of Physiology during the summer vacation.
Stephanie Lin has been both a recipient and donor of the Student Appeal, which helps students struggling financially.

Ms Lin, the daughter of Chinese immigrants, is the first in her family to go to university. Raised in Adelaide, she shifted to Melbourne to study for a Bachelor of Commerce in accounting and finance in 2009. For the first year she lived at Trinity College and says she initially “existed in my own little bubble” in the college community.

But moving out the following year, she went looking for an extra-curricular activity with meaning and found the Student Appeal. “Which, six years later, I’m still passionate about.”

Initially Ms Lin became one of the Appeal’s white T-shirted volunteers, but was also a recipient of its financial assistance via a housing grant from Student Financial Aid. Housing grants are a specific focus of the Student Appeal.

Soon she found herself on the committee, organising the volunteers who go out and engage with fellow students, as well as awareness and fund raising events such as sleep-outs on the South Lawn, sumo wreking afternoons and jumping castles. “Essentially it was about encouraging students to donate and beginning a conversation about the need,” she says.

Ms Lin was awarded a Commerce Alumni Scholarship in her final year, recognising her service to the University community, and also became chair of the Young Alumni Council for the Faculty of Business and Economics. She has remained a donor, making a monthly contribution to the First In The Family scholarships. “I’m not donating massive amounts,” she says, “but it’s the small things that count.”

That, she says, is the added benefit of the Student Appeal – inspiring an awareness and interest in philanthropy among the next generation. “I suppose that’s what it is – it’s about leaving a legacy behind. At the end of the day you hope to sprinkle a bit of magic.”

Stephanie Lin, Melbourne commerce alumna Stephanie Lin, that’s not a New Age slogan but the essence – and the two-way reward – of the University’s Student Appeal.

Ms Lin, now working as a consultant at Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu – fittingly, in the area of human capital – has been a recipient, a raiser of funds and awareness, a committee member and a donor for the Student Appeal, the magic of which she sums up in another perfectly economical phrase: students for students.

The Student Appeal, she explains, is a student-led fundraising effort that aims to help other students on campus who are financially struggling and to raise awareness among the student body of the University’s wider need for philanthropic support.

M ost students face a constant challenge balancing study with part-time work to keep pace with rent and living expenses. “Everyone jokes about things like Cheap Tuesdays: ‘let’s get a cheap pizza,’” says Ms Lin. “It’s ‘uni student lifestyle’, and no one takes it seriously.”

But for some students the balance becomes difficult and tips into financial stress, which seriously impacts a student’s wellbeing, studies and ability to live a normal life.

Becoming involved in the Student Appeal as a volunteer in 2010 opened Ms Lin’s eye to this reality. “We heard stories of students who basically lived couch to couch – technically they are homeless,” she says.

In the extreme case, such financial hardship can lead to students abandoning studies altogether. The Student Appeal – directly supporting those in need – can be a lifeline.

“I was surprised at the need when I first got involved – hundreds and hundreds of applications,” Ms Lin says. Last year, 1963 students applied for financial aid. Only 459 were able to receive a grant.

The impact and reach of the Student Appeal is growing. First held in 2006, the Student Appeal has raised more than $95,000 to help students and has received donations from over 4000 members of the University community – students, staff, alumni and friends. In 2015, the Student Appeal reached a significant milestone of over 1000 student donors, a 47 per cent increase from 2014.

Jenny Taing is giving back to the University that gave her opportunities, while Ashwyn Perera is mentoring young students.

Jenny Taing remembers sitting in the emergency department of the Royal Eye and Ear Hospital. Her mother had an inflamed eye, and she had taken her in for treatment.

The situation, she remembers a four-night stay, was confronting enough. A further layer of complication was that her mother, a Vietnamese refugee, did not speak English.

That experience in the emergency ward was a pivotal moment for Ms Taing, who decided that the best way to improve a situation was to get involved.

In 2012, the University of Melbourne law graduate and senior lawyer at ASIC joined the Eye and Ear Hospital’s board – at 29, the youngest-ever director.

Her attitude of getting involved and making a difference is now bringing benefits to the University and its students. “There was a time when I thought it’s time to give back to the University,” says Ms Taing. “The University has given me so many opportunities in life. Tertiary education has really been empowering for me and has been an opportunity for me to have a platform to speak, and to have a voice.”

Ms Taing is a deputy president of the Alumni Council and chairs the Alumni Council Giving working group, which has a focus on engaging alumni and encouraging new participation in giving. In 2015 the working group launched an initiative aimed at raising funds for students suffering financial disadvantage. It was peer-to-peer – Ms Taing, for example, wrote to former students from her time at the University.

And while the University benefits from very significant gifts, the focus was on the impact of smaller gifts: a donation of $10 would pay for a student’s telephone and internet costs during the busy exam period, $30 for a week’s transport, and $50 for a critical course textbook.

As a result of this initiative, alumni who feel passionate about supporting students have contributed $27,000 – benefiting hundreds of student who seek assistance each year.

Ashwyn Perera looks back appreciatively at the assistance from the University’s lecturers and department heads while studying for his Bachelor of Science and Diploma of Languages (German). By his second year, he had casual work in a laboratory, thanks to a lecturer who suggested he apply. That led to him getting a research paper published when he was just 21.

Mr Perera also credits that experience for helping secure his current position as a research assistant in multiple sclerosis research at the Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health.

Having benefited from the advice and experience of others, Mr Perera, now 24, has embraced the role of mentor, taking part in the University’s Melbourne Welcome and Access Connections Mentoring Program.

One mentee has been Ariel Simon, who grew up in a commune in Byron Bay and has had to adjust to university life as he studies a Bachelor of Science with a major in neuroscience.

Mr Perera became Ariel’s mentor through the Access Connections Mentoring Program. In their first meeting, the mentee explained that he was coming to terms with studying in the university context, but since then his grades have improved steadily.

Mr Perera also made a list of opportunities that Ariel could explore – similar to the advice the mentor received from his lecturers. They meet twice a month.

And the potential benefits of the relationship extend well beyond university life. The Access Connections Mentoring Program aims to provide insights into the professional world for students in their desired field.

“By talking to Ariel, I’ve been able to expand my knowledge of the career options and strategies after study,” he says.

Mr Perera likes to see his involvement as giving back, recognising the benefits of his own background. “I need to respect the fact that I’m in this position by providing this opportunity to others.”
Dr Catie Gressier is standing at a stall amid the hum and buzz of Melbourne’s Preston Market. The anthropologist’s fieldwork has taken her to remote and exotic parts of the world.

While this suburban location may be more familiar, her fieldwork here is just as fascinating. Dr Gressier is observing the stall owner selling wild meat – in this case, a whole deer. As a cultural anthropologist, she is researching the values, practices and beliefs surrounding our consumption – or avoidance – of native and feral meats.

She receives as the Thomas and Ruth McArthur Fellow allows her to investigate the stigma attached to wild meats, such as deer, kangaroo and rabbit. Her work is looking at this reluctance to embrace it, despite compelling reasons to do so.

With the world’s population projected to reach around 9.5 billion by 2050, it will also mean an ever-increasing appetite. “There’s just no way we can reconcile that amount of meat with our current production methods,” Dr Gressier says. “We ultimately need to start looking at eating less meat, but the intermediary is looking at alternatives.”

Dr Gressier sees herself in traditional anthropologist territory, looking at broad aspects of society through the lens of food. She embarked on the path to anthropology when she travelled to Namibia in southern Africa, where her mother was doing volunteer work. She fell in love with the continent.

Her PhD at the University of Western Australia researched emplacement and senses of belonging among the white citizens of the Okavango Delta, Botswana. But despite an impressive career, Dr Gressier was almost lost to anthropology. Unable to secure ongoing work, she was about to take a job in university administration. Then came the McArthur Fellowship.

“I got the phone call and was just ecstatic,” she says. “It is such a unique opportunity. Most junior scholars are swamped with teaching, so this fellowship is hugely coveted because it allows you to consolidate your PhD research, while also establishing a new area of focus.

“Particularly for early career women who want to have a family, a research-only fellowship gives you the edge to keep competitive in a pretty tough environment. I’m not exaggerating when I say I feel blessed every day in my role.”

The Thomas and Ruth McArthur Fellowships were established through the bequest of Dr Annie Margaret Ruth McArthur Oliver, a distinguished anthropologist and University alumna.
SKY’S THE LIMIT

Laby Fellow Jacinta den Besten is helping women to believe in themselves and succeed in science.

Jacinta den Besten’s favourite conversation comes after students in the Telescopes in Schools program have first explored the night skies with a 12-inch LX200-ACF Meade telescope. In particular, it is the reaction of the girls in the class that both delights and encourages her.

“The program has made me realise I can actually do these things,” girls will tell her. “I can work with complicated scientific equipment and I never thought I’d be able to do a job like that.”

Ms den Besten is the Laby Teaching and Outreach Fellow, supported by the Laby Foundation, and co-ordinator of the Telescopes in Schools program, which targets schools in disadvantaged areas in the north and west of Melbourne and Victorian regional centres.

Schools get the telescopes for three years, and sign up for at least six sessions a year, attended by staff and students from the University’s astrophysics group.

That gender doesn’t matter should be self-evident, but as Ms den Besten knows too well, that’s not the case. She watches what happens when students are introduced to the telescope. The boys rush in to try it out, while the girls will usually sit back and let the boys go first.

“I don’t think that’s a reflection on how boys and girls do things,” Ms den Besten says. “I think that’s a reflection on how we expect them to do things.”

Ms den Besten has become a champion for girls and women studying and working in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics – or STEM. Along with co-ordinating Telescopes in Schools, she also heads the University of Melbourne’s Women in Physics, which supports women in physics, advocates for them and works for cultural change to remove impediments to career advancement within the School of Physics and beyond. The group hosts public talks and panels, to which secondary school students are welcomed.

The very need for the Women in Physics group speaks loudly about the extent of the problems it is trying to overcome. When Ms den Besten was a physics honours student at the University in 1994, there was a 50:50 gender split – a milestone that made the papers.

Two years ago, she surveyed 200 first-year female physics students at the University, asking why they thought women don’t continue with the discipline. Some 30 per cent said it was because males were better at physics than females, more than 50 per cent believed physics was not “for women” or “too hard.” So much for self-perception. She showed the students the grades achieved by females and males. They were exactly the same.

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Jacinta den Besten: taking University science to students through the Telescopes in Schools program.

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So what is going on? In part, Ms den Besten found the number of female students studying physics had declined.

“I think we see those stereotypes more and more,” says Ms den Besten. “Women don’t do physics, they don’t do mathematics.”

And parents and teachers are reinforcing it, suggesting girls take the so-called easier route. “We are teaching them as people not to take risks, not to try hard, not to go beyond their expectations and become amazing people.”

Ms den Besten adds that by providing opportunities, presenting positive role models and taking University science into schools, girls and parents are seeing what females can achieve in science.
When she was an undergraduate physics student, Rebecca Ryan experienced the familiar struggles and tensions. Pulled in different directions by study and part-time work, she found it hard to perform to her expectations.

Doing honours was a different experience. As she puts it, she was able to “knuckle down” and did “reasonably well” – to the point where seven years ago she received the Women in Physics Award, something she never imagined winning. The award is made annually to a female student enrolled in the first year of a research higher degree in physics — established by alumna Valerie Crohn to encourage female students to pursue higher studies in physics.

“It showed me that, particularly for women who try to go through in STEM fields, there are extra awards and encouragement out there for you because they really want more women to get into the fields,” says Ms Ryan.

Life is often difficult for one of the few females in a field that is predominantly male, Ms Ryan notes, and the award gave her the encouragement to deal with that environment.

“It showed me that, particularly for women who try to go through in STEM fields, there are extra awards and encouragement out there for you because they really want more women to get into the fields,” says Ms Ryan.

The computer programming skills she developed studying her PhD have enabled her to acquire several computer programming languages, and she can now confidently pick up new languages.

“I just never would have thought of software development as a future career,” says Ms Ryan. “Getting that award, which encouraged me to continue with the PhD and software, has definitely given me a lot of career prospects.”

Other disciplines are also benefitting by gifts that encourage females to pursue study. The Irene Rogers Lowe Scholarship in Agriculture was established in 2013 by Bill Rogers to commemorate his mother Irene Rogers nee Lowe, who was the first female student in the Bachelor of Agricultural Science and the first female student at Dookie.

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