

# WOMEN AND RESEARCH

APRIL 2010

**Mission statement:** To foster an active and inclusive research environment in order to enhance high quality research output.

## WELCOME TO 2010 - FROM THE PEN OF ANGELA

Dear Researchers,

Welcome to another year of Women and Research! I hope the year has begun well for all of you.

For Semester 1 2010 we have three Women and Research sessions planned, Monday, April 12, Monday, May 10, and Monday, June 21. All sessions are from 12.30pm–1.30pm with a light lunch provided.

Each session is a chance for the female staff of the School of Economics, Finance and Marketing to get together for a discussion about a topic or

range of topics.

All female staff members of the school, including RA's and casual staff, are invited to attend. The aim of the group is to provide a supportive environment for female researchers to engage in networking activities and knowledge exchange.

The objective is to promote the Schools' female researchers within the college and the profession.

For our April session we have Dr Foula Kopanidis talking with us about talking.

We have Professor Gill Palmer, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Business) of RMIT University hosting an informal discussion on May 10 on changes in the access of females to careers.

And at our June 21 session Ms Shirley Robertson, Customer Operations Manager for the ConnectEast Group, will talk about senior management.

See page 2 for full details for all our guest presentations and discussions.

I look forward to an exciting Semester 1 of discussion, motivation and friendship. See you there. Angela



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### INTERVIEW

Congratulations newly promoted Professor Heather Mitchell. Well done!



Professor Mitchell and her Graduation Bear

## INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR HEATHER MITCHELL

*Hi Heather,*

*What advice would you give aspiring professors?*

RMIT is serious about the three aspects of academic life - teaching, research and leadership. For promotion you need to be outstanding in research and one other, and good in the last. This means that if you can't score outstanding in the teaching, you need to consider ways to improve your leadership profile. You should consider working on a University committee and also

take a leadership role within the school. Being co-ordinator of the honours program was mine, but I also included things like publishing with first time researchers and assisting other staff members. It helps to keep a record of acknowledgements you have received to confirm this.

*Please tell me about your career path.*

My first qualification was a diploma of civil engineering, through Caulfield Institute of

Technology, now Monash Caulfield campus. I then worked for Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (now Melbourne Water) as a sewerage design engineer for seven years and for one year at the Wineke treatment plant construction site.

During this time I married and became pregnant. Maternity leave in the early 1980's was a joke, so I resigned to be a stay at home mum. But I had to do something, so took up a degree by distance education in mathematics through RMIT. I com-

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### INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR MITCHELL CONTINUED

pleted my Bachelors with distinction and did a Masters by Research while pregnant with my second daughter.

I had chosen to do mathematics, to get more background in statistical analysis which would be useful to me in trying to get a job back at the MMBW, but become addicted to maths. For the masters I chose to do statistics because I thought it would give me better job opportunities than abstract algebra (my other love).

During this time I was asked to take some classes in statistics for engineers. I was absolutely terrified giving my first lecture. My supervisor came with me to the classroom and said things like "breathe Heather". I got two good publications from the masters, including one in Biometrika.

After finishing the masters I had caught the academic bug. Rather than have another child, I bought a guinea pig and worked on my PhD full time, with the aid of an APA. I continued to lecture part-time

and also found some tutoring work at Melbourne Uni. My husband had lost his job, along with many other public servants, so the money was essential.

While at Melbourne I worked for John Shannon (now at LaTrobe) who recommended me for the position here.

*Has academia been a good choice?*

I do think it is a good choice for women as it allows flexibility around working at home and the office which is not available elsewhere. This was important, after my divorce when I was the sole carer for my children and now when my parents are old and frail.

There is also far less sexual harassment and discrimination than working in a male dominated profession such as engineering.

For example, when I was trying to get construction experience, most of the senior engineers just refused to have a woman on their site. This was considered perfectly acceptable. I expect they would

need to be more clever about how they went excluding a woman today, but I would be surprised if it still didn't happen.

*What are your teaching philosophies?*

I am teaching a data analysis course in a business degree - and I should always remember that. Hardly any of the students care about the theory, so it should not be taught for its own sake, but rather to show how things work and what can go wrong with them.

Use REAL data as much as possible. If the data isn't genuine it makes the analysis seem fraudulent.

Base the assessment around a real problem and make sure some of the questions relate to material in other courses.

Keep the course practical.

If I was teaching as part of a statistics course, I would still use real data, but be a LOT heavier on theory.

*Thank you Professor Mitchell. We wish you all the best for the future.*



**"I do think academia is a good choice for women as it allows flexibility around working at home and the office."**  
**Professor Heather Mitchell**

### SCHEDULE OF EVENTS FOR SEMESTER 1

**Monday, April 12,  
12.30pm—2pm**

Presentation by Dr Foula Kopanidis who will be presenting on the topic of "how to be effective communicators in the workplace".

**Monday, May 10,  
12.30pm—2pm**

Professor Gill Palmer, PVC (Bus) will be running an informal discussion concerning changes in the access of females to careers.

**Monday, June 21,  
12.30pm—2pm**

Ms Shirley Robertson, Customer Operations Manager for ConnectEast Group (run and operate EastLink) presenting on what it is like to be a female senior manager.

Please think about any questions you would like to ask our guest presenters and bring them along to the sessions.

**"The thing that is really hard, and really amazing, is giving up on being perfect and beginning the work of becoming yourself."**  
**Anna Quindlen,  
(American Author and Journalist)**

### CONGRATULATIONS!

Congratulations to:

- Linda Robinson, Foula Kopanidis** and **Emily Chung**. All were successful in securing a College of Business Research Seed Funding grant.
- Seema Narayan** for three A journal acceptances (two in *Applied Energy* and one in the *Journal of Asian Economics*).
- Angela Dobe** for one A journal acceptance in the *Journal of Marketing Management*.

