



MEDIA RELEASE
Public Affairs Unit

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RESEARCH PROJECTS WIN MARSDEN FUNDING

Research on a language disorder, a volcano and the effect of global warming on ice sheets are among the Victoria University projects to win funding from the latest round of Marsden Fund allocations.

Seven projects, worth more than \$600,000 a year, have a Victoria University academic as the principal or co-principal investigator. Two are funded from the Fast Start fund – a fund for researchers in the early stages of their careers – while the others are from the standard fund.

Dr James Noble (Mathematical and Computing Sciences) and Dr Carolyn Wilshire (Psychology) have each won \$50,000 a year for two years in Fast Start funding for their research in computing science and psychology respectively.

Dr Noble will investigate ways in which computer software programs can be built so they are easier to change and improve once they are built.

Dr Wilshire's research focuses on aphasia, a language disorder that can occur after a stroke or other brain damage. She will use new techniques to examine "competitor blocking" in aphasia – the experience where an inappropriate word comes to mind and seems to "block" access to the desired word.

Researchers to gain funding from the standard fund are Dr John Gamble (Earth Sciences), Associate Professor David Carnegie (English, Film & Theatre), Professor Rod Downey (Mathematical & Computing Sciences), Professor Alan Kaiser (Chemical & Physical Sciences) and Professor Peter Barrett (Antarctic Research Centre).

Dr Gamble has won \$120,000 a year for three years to fund research that will measure time-scales for magma generation and flow beneath Mount Ruapehu, the most active and potentially dangerous andesite volcano of the Taupo Volcanic Zone.

Associate Professor Carnegie, along with co-editors Professor David Gunby of Canterbury University and Professor Mac Jackson of Auckland University, has been awarded \$95,000 a year to complete the first critical edition in more than 70 years of the works of playwright John Webster. Volume 1 has been published by Cambridge University Press, Volume 2, produced with support from the Marsden Fund, is at press and Volume 3 will be completed with the support of this latest grant.

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Professor Kaiser has a grant of \$81,000 a year for three years for research into conducting polymers, which show a wide range of properties, including a surprisingly high electrical conductivity. Professor Kaiser's work will focus on understanding the conducting behaviour of polymer nanofibres, which are tiny fibres of less than 100 nanometres (a nanometre is a millionth of a millimetre). He will also study other new types of conducting polymer.

Professor Downey has a grant of \$120,000 a year for a study of the algorithmic aspects of mathematical processes, and which comprises a number of sub-projects ranging from the very theoretical to the implementation level.

Professor Barrett, along with Dr Tim Naish of the Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences, has been awarded \$130,000 a year to study the dynamic behaviour of Antarctic ice sheets on a warmer planet. They have hypothesised that the East Antarctic ice sheet was unstable 35-15 million years ago when planetary temperatures were 3-4 degrees warmer than at present. They plan to analyse 1500m of sediment core recovered from McMurdo Sound during the past three years by the multi-national Cape Roberts Project, and to establish the character and periodicity of climatic changes and associated advances and retreats of the ice sheets in that 20 million-year period.

This is the seventh application round for the \$28 million Marsden Fund, a government research fund administered by the Royal Society of New Zealand. Applications to the Fund are very competitive. Of the 884 preliminary proposals (707 Standard proposals and 177 Fast-Start proposals), 179 were asked to submit a full proposal, and a total of 82 were accepted.

Issued by the Public Affairs Unit of Victoria University of Wellington. For further information please contact Janet Rivers, 04 463 5873.