

Teaching in the Department of Microbiology

From the early 1980s, undergraduate science teaching in Microbiology was conducted in two, purpose-built laboratories within the new Microbiology Building on the Clayton Campus. The larger of the two labs was designed for 60 students at second-year level, the smaller for 32 students at third-year level of the B. Sc. degree course. In later years, the greater numbers of students attracted to Microbiology meant that the larger lab was used to accommodate 72 or more students per session, still with adequate space for all, such was the foresight shown in its original design.

In 1984, two new senior tutors, Scott Bowden and Harley Dean, were appointed to conduct practical class teaching and give lectures to science students studying Microbiology. After two years, Scott left to pursue his career in Virology and was replaced by Katerina Speer. Around 1990, Tina Zachariou (then known as Connie Maragos) joined the Department to replace Katerina. Tina remained for a number of years and was followed by Margaret Dooley. Subsequently, Cynthia O'Keefe, a former casual demonstrator, joined the Department on a more formal basis in 1996, eventually replacing Margaret, who became the laboratory manager. Susan Batt also had a teaching role for several years in the mid-90s. In 1998, Mohamed Mohideen joined the Department, replacing Cynthia, and continues to be employed in a teaching role to the present day (2013). At the end of 2005, Harley Dean retired after serving 22 years in a predominantly teaching role within the Department. He was subsequently replaced by Priscilla Johanesen who took over this position up to the present time.

During all of this time, support was provided to teaching staff by casual demonstrators comprising mainly postgraduate students in the Department, but also outside demonstrators with microbiology qualifications. It's fair to say that the teaching of the Department could not have been delivered without the cooperation of these demonstrators who are too numerous to list, but special mention should be made of Stephanie Adler who, through the entire period from 1984 to the present, took a heavy demonstrating load each year.

Also crucial to the practical class teaching were the preparation room staff, who maintained the two student teaching laboratories, provided all necessary materials for student teaching, and ensured microbial cultures were incubated and stored appropriately. Heading this group in 1984 was Tony Stott, who subsequently became involved with IT within the Department and was replaced by Toni Gartside. After the sad loss of Toni in 2004, Kylie Wilson took over and remains in charge of class preparation to the present.

At the Monash Medical School adjacent to the Alfred Hospital, the original home of the Department, undergraduate medical teaching was conducted during this period. Around 1984, Jean O'Connor and Margaret Deighton tutored and participated in practical classes to students of medicine there. Subsequently, they were replaced by Lyn Howden and Jenny Martin.

Prior to the 1990s, medicine and science teaching-only staff were totally separated, but in the early 90s Harley Dean began tutoring medical students at the Medical School, and later Lyn and Jenny commenced tutoring Science students at the Clayton Campus. With closure of the Department of Microbiology Alfred Medical School section, and with commencement of the new five-year M.B.B.S. course, Lyn and Jenny were relocated to the Clayton Campus, and soon all teaching-only staff were participating in lecturing and practical classes to students in Science, Bioscience and Medicine courses.

As the years progressed, the lecturing load given to teaching-only staff gradually increased, and the complexity of subject offerings and degree courses taught by each staff member also increased markedly. This reflected the popularity of microbiology in undergraduate courses, and its relevance in a wide range of courses offered in the Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences.

Computers in teaching.

The teaching of microbiology during the period from the mid-1980s to mid-2000s was no less affected by the computer revolution than was every other facet of life.

As an example, calculations of mean and standard deviation of student exam results were first performed using handheld electronic calculators. By the mid 80s, staff familiar with basic computer language could request, via their office dumb terminal, that some calculations be performed by the main university computer. There were no available spreadsheet programs at this time. From the late 80s, readily available stand-alone computers with ever-increasing abilities have proved invaluable in maintaining student records.

However, use of computers in student teaching proceeded more slowly. In the 80s, microbiology lecturing was all blackboard, chalk and talk. Slides were shown to illustrate certain points, but this required a projectionist

stationed at the back of the theatre, and the call “Next slide please” was routinely heard at lectures, given by a lecturer earnestly hoping that slide would appear, not jam, or not be accompanied by a blown projector lamp, as regularly occurred. The overhead projector appeared in the 90s, and finally lecture theatres were converted to computer projection, allowing use of technology such as the ubiquitous Powerpoint presentation. By this time, students expected lecture notes to be available online, and the Department maintained a complex website containing separate sections for each undergraduate microbiology subject with helpful information for their studies.