



## MPA Supervisor of the Year Application Form 2008

### Details of nominated supervisor:

Name and Title: **Professor Rodney James Devenish**  
Department/School: **Biochemistry & Molecular Biology**  
Faculty: **Medicine, Nursing & Health Sciences**  
Campus: **Clayton**

### Details of postgraduate submitting nomination:

Name: **Miss Tanya D’Cruze**  
Degree: **PhD in Biomedical Science**  
Department: **Biochemistry & Molecular Biology**  
Faculty: **Medicine, Nursing & Health Sciences**  
Number of years supervised by the nominated supervisor: **2.5 years**

Note: Where a submission is made by a group of postgraduates, please nominate one postgraduate as a contact person.

### **Instructions**

Please comment on your supervisor and supervisory relationship, addressing the four sections as set out on page 2, in a total of no more than 1500 words.

### **Submission**

Attach this front sheet to your application and submit via email to: [jenny.reeder@adm.monash.edu.au](mailto:jenny.reeder@adm.monash.edu.au) by 1 September 2008.

### **Judging**

Entries will be judged by a subcommittee of research postgraduates from the MPAEC.

### **Announcement**

The MPA Supervisor of the Year Award will be announced in October 2008, with the exact time and date of the presentation to be determined by the availability of the winning nominator and supervisor. The recipient receives a framed certificate and will be featured in an article in the MPA online magazine, *Compass Online*.

**Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology**

**MPA Supervisor of the Year 2008 Nominee:**

**Professor RODNEY JAMES DEVENISH**

**PART 1 – ACADEMIC**

**Professor Devenish encourages independence by building students' confidence in their personal research capabilities.**

Undergraduate Teaching:

- MED1011 - Medicine 1
- Convenor: BCH3031 - Advanced Molecular Biology: Modern Concepts and Applications
- BMS3021 - Molecular Medicine and Biotechnology
- BMS3042 - Biomedical basis of disease (Mini-project)
- BCH3990 – Action in Biochemistry Research Project

Professional Involvement:

- Chief Investigator: The ARC Centre of Excellence in Structural and Functional Microbial Genomics
- Member: The ARC Centre of Excellence in Structural and Functional Microbial Genomics Scientific Committee
- OZReader: Australian Research Council (ARC)
- Convenor: Scientific program committee, XXIII International Conference on Yeast Genetics and Molecular Biology, Melbourne 2007
- Member: International Yeast Society
- Editorial Board: Autophagy
- Deputy Chairman: Monash Research Graduate School (MRGS)
- Member and Convenor: MRGS Committee and a Faculty representative
- Member: Monash University Scholarship Selection Committee
- Member: Faculty Education Board

Awards and recognition:

- Commendation in 2004 MPA Supervisor of the year for Postgraduate Supervision
- Special commendation in 2006 Vice-Chancellor's awards for Postgraduate Supervision
- Commendation in 2007 MPA Supervisor of the year for Postgraduate Supervision

Research:

Professor Devenish has an international reputation in yeast (*Saccharomyces cerevisiae*) molecular cell biology with research focused principally on aspects of mitochondrial biogenesis. More recently he has developed a new research area of autophagy focussing on the turnover of cellular organelles such as mitochondria, endoplasmic reticulum and the nucleus. In collaboration with ARC colleagues he is now also involved in research being carried out to identify the interaction of host cell autophagy with *Burkholderia pseudomallei*.

Postgraduate Supervision and Co-supervision (in collaboration with Dr Mark Prescott)  
(at present):

- 2 Postdoctoral colleagues
- 5 PhD students
- 2 Masters students
- 2 Honours students
- 1 International research student
- 1 3<sup>rd</sup> year project student
- 6 3<sup>rd</sup> year students (mini-project)

Professor Rod Devenish has been managing a successful laboratory for 20 years. In that time his academic position within the department and faculty has grown – as shown in his professional involvement, and his students have academically excelled. Professor Devenish is a strong advocate for supervisor – student communication. And so, he maintains regular contact with students on an individual basis, with fortnightly “one-on-one” meetings. During these meetings, Professor Devenish discusses research updates – providing guidance and suggestions for potential experiments and progress towards publications or thesis developments. Professor Devenish also lends his expertise in yeast, by working with students on the microscopes, to carry out experiments.

Over the years, Professor Devenish has forged many collaborations within the university and internationally. As a result of his involvement with the ARC, we now also have strong collaboration with the Microbiology Departments both in Australia and Thailand.

These networks have been a tremendous support in our research and ensures future development. Within the department, Professor Devenish promotes networking with other researchers by encouraging his students to attend all departmental seminar as well as seminars by visiting scholars. He believes that these research and scientific seminars are an excellent means to forming collegial support networks beyond the supervisor. At departmental seminars and conferences, Professor Devenish encourages students to present their research and further develop their communication/presentation skills. Within that last twelve months, Professor Devenish has supported the involvement of his students in a number of international conferences, the main ones being: XXIII International Conference on Yeast Genetics and Molecular Biology 2007, 5<sup>th</sup> International Melioidosis Congress 2007 in Thailand, 3<sup>rd</sup> Gordon Research Conference on Autophagy in Stress, Development & Disease 2008 in California, and 6th International Society for Stem Cell Research 2008 in Philadelphia. He also provided financial support for students attending international conference, as he appreciates the potential collaborations that eventuate from those gatherings, and the importance of students presenting their own research.

In conjunction with conferences, Professor Devenish also encourages students to further their academic development through publications. Recently, we published six reviews and/or papers in prestigious journals which outlined the exciting research being carried out in our lab. While the process of writing these papers has been challenging, Professor Devenish's unrelenting support, guidance, time and faith in us, has made these possible. In keeping with his sense of justice, he has always ensured that the primary credit for all publications is bestowed to the student working on the research. At the same time, Professor Devenish also encourages students to keep practicing their writing skills through developing their thesis. He is always happy to read any drafts, at any time, and provide constructive criticism and feedback. It's his objective that all his students are successful in the completion of their thesis, and he offers career guidance/advice regarding their prospective paths. Because of the positive regard he has for all his students, he is often portrayed as the father figure amongst his students and is warmly referred to as, "Uncle Roddy".

Professor Devenish is an encouraging, motivating and supportive supervisor. He is a model supervisor who understands students' needs, guides and supports them throughout their candidature and helps them work towards their future career.

## **PART 2 – MANAGEMENT**

### **Professor Devenish is renowned for his approachable persona.**

Professor Devenish is a very experienced supervisor who believes that regular and close contact is the single most important factor in producing successful research outcomes. And so, we have lab meetings once a week as a group, and individual "one-on-one" meetings every fortnight. Professor Devenish also has an open-door policy, where we are made to feel more than welcome when we 'drop-in'. He also has a white-board outside

his office indicating his schedule for the day. This informs us of the timings he'll be in his office, thus encouraging us to meet with him. At our individual meetings, we are required to give him a copy of our experimental timeline for the next two weeks. In this way, Professor Devenish is able to guide our research and ensure productive use of time. He also collects and discusses feedback on drafts for thesis chapters or publications – thereby monitoring our ongoing progress. During individual meetings, he often enquires about our wellbeing and any issues we may have outside the lab, which may impact on our performance levels.

As the deputy chairman of the Monash Research Graduate School, Professor Devenish is in charge of the academic status of all graduate students through the university. Because of his familiarity with all administrative processes Professor Devenish is always informing students of grants and scholarships available. He is committed to the academic development of students and has desire to see them grow through discovery, struggle, excitement and challenge.

### **PART 3 – SUPPORT**

#### **Professor Devenish is always there when academic or personal crises arise.**

As already stated, Professor Devenish is a supportive, approachable and nurturing supervisor.

When problems arise either research based (e.g., equipment, reagents, writing or administrative tasks) or personal, Professor Devenish acts accordingly to his experience and understanding of a particular individual. He understands that at these difficult times the students look up to him for guidance. In my experience, “The panic button” has never been pushed and all issues were solved in an appropriate manner.

Professor Devenish greatly assists students with their future plans. He provides advice on career development and helps students to become aware of the qualities they have to offer in a competitive field. He takes an active interest in students' future plans. For example, he constantly asks me what my plans are for the future. Do I want to continue in research or do something else related to the science? Do I want to work overseas or stay in Australia?

#### **PART 4 – OPEN COMMENT**

All these statements are based on my personal experience working with Professor Devenish.

#### **Professor Devenish is an inspiring, motivating and caring supervisor who:**

- gets to know students.
- carefully assesses students' needs
- works with students to establish strong and appropriate research projects
- provides a supportive learning environment
- initiates regular contact
- provides timely and quality feedback
- gets students involved in the life of the lab, department, faculty, university, national and international research community
- gives financial support to student to attend scientific meetings and conferences (nationally and internationally) as much as he can
- assists if academic or personal problems arise
- assists students with administrative advice throughout their postgraduate career (e.g., annual progress report, travel grants, extension forms, submitting papers for publications...)
- encourages students to write early and often, as well as publishing their work in scientifically recognised peer-reviewed journals
- takes an interest in students' future plans
- shows genuine care for his student's wellbeing
- never shows frustration around students

**It has been my pleasure to work with Professor Devenish for the past few years. In my opinion, he is the ideal supervisor who builds bridges between students, supervisor/academics, research labs, departments, faculties and research communities nationally and internationally. As a student, he is the role model I aspire to be like.**

**Therefore, I cannot think of anyone else more deserving of this award than Professor Devenish.**



**Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology**

**MPA Supervisor of the Year 2008 Nominee:**

**Professor RODNEY JAMES DEVENISH**

Additional Postgraduate students supporting the nomination:

- **Dalibor Mijaljica**
- **Anne Pettikiriarachchi**
- **Jion Battad**
- **Kristina Youngs**
- **Thien Tra**
- **Craig Don Paul**