



# The Royal Society of Western Australia

## RSWA Awards

### Student Medallists 2016 (presented 2017)

The Royal Society of Western Australia Student Medal is awarded annually to graduating science students with an outstanding academic record from the universities in Western Australia. The students are nominated by their institutions.

The 2016 RSWA Student Medallists were awarded by RSWA President Associate Professor Kate Trinajstic at the RSWA Annual General Meeting at the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority Administration Building, Kings Park, Perth on 17 August 2017.

Congratulations to the Medallists as follows:-

**Mr Christopher Watts** - Curtin University

**Ms Laura Barnes** - Edith Cowan University

**Mr Simon John Bagas** - Murdoch University

**Ms Jessica Puca** - The University of Notre Dame Australia

**Ms Bronte Van Helden** - The University of Western Australia

Further information on the Medallists, in their own words, is on the following pages.



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#### **Mr Christopher Watts** - Curtin University

Chris has been passionate about maths and science since a young age. He graduated with a BSc (Honours) in Geology from Curtin University in 2016, receiving first class marks and graduating at the top of his class.

Dr Jane Cunneen from Curtin University and Dr Darren Ferdinando from Murphy Australia Oil supervised his honours thesis which is titled "Seismic stratigraphic investigation of the Hammerhead Supersequence, Ceduna Sub-basin, Australian Southern Margin". His research project used new 3D seismic data to examine the far northwestern edge of the Ceduna Sub-basin on the Australian Southern margin. The project predicted the distribution of oil and gas reservoirs by utilizing seismic stratigraphic techniques to investigate how the Hammerhead Supersequence evolved as a prograding delta complex with winding channels similar to modern day braided river systems, and canyons transporting sediments to fans deeper in the basin. Chris was awarded the sedimentology and petroleum prize, along with the AIG Medal for the highest achieving geoscience honours student at Curtin University in 2016.

Since graduating, Chris has been working with the exploration team at Murphy Australia Oil exploring in a number of Australian sedimentary basins, and he is a volunteer on the PESA committee.





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**Ms Laura Barnes** - Edith Cowan University

I completed a Bachelor of Science majoring in Human Biology and Marine and Freshwater Science, finishing in Edith Cowan University's top 100 students for 2016. I also received the BMT Oceanica Prize for Excellence in Marine Science in 2016.

I grew up down south in the country so I have always had an affinity for nature and a respect for its importance and beauty.

Since university has finished I have volunteered for a Masters student's project in the marine science field.

I also now work in a geochemistry laboratory in Perth, which is developing my skills in a laboratory setting, which may be of use in the future if I decide to go back to university for a postgraduate degree or just to assist in making me more employable within a marine or freshwater science field.





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#### **Mr Simon John Bagas** - Murdoch University

I commenced my work at Murdoch University in August 2013 as a part time student and part time research assistant after taking a break from working full-time in the mining industry. I conducted research into mild hydrometallurgical processing of refractory copper sulfide minerals while undergoing my studies as a Mineral Science student.

In addition to my studies, I volunteered in the Murdoch University Chemistry Clinic where I tutored first year students in transition unit chemistry and I was an active member of the Murdoch chapter of the Australian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, participating in presentations and attending conferences. I was also a demonstrator for the Rio Tinto sponsored 'Be a Met for a Day' program designed to introduce high school students to metallurgy and mineral science.

Since completion of my degree I have continued to work as a research assistant, investigating hydrometallurgical processing of pregnant leach solutions containing lithium and I have spent as much time as possible with my wife Theresa and son Devin. In my spare time, I write and record music and play computer games.

I aspire to continue my studies of Mineral Science, particularly in the field of non-cyanide leaching of gold ores and synergistic solvent extraction of base metals. I plan to enrol in an honour's year in 2018.





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**Ms Jessica Puca** - The University of Notre Dame Australia

Jessica graduated from Notre Dame in December 2016 with a Bachelor of Science, majoring in Human Biology, but including broader scientific themes including physical science, microbiology and pollution and ecotoxicology. In addition, she tailored her degree experience, broadening its scope, to incorporate her parallel interests in Italian language, culture and history and aboriginal people. During her degree, Jessica achieved 15 high distinction and 6 distinction grades – an impressive performance.

Jessica was always an upbeat and dedicated undergraduate student who maximised every learning opportunity. Her two professional placements toward the end of her degree with Hollywood Fertility Centre and Genetic Services of WA exemplify this attitude. Both hosts reported on Jessica's thirst for knowledge and emphasised her high work performance, responsiveness to feedback, capacity to work independently and heightened awareness of sensitive issues and confidentiality. In Jessica's final semester she undertook a supervised project aligned with her major and investigated the relationship between microbial dysbiosis and the pathogenesis of endometriosis. She was awarded a high distinction for her outstanding work.

Since graduating, Jessica was selected for the Department of Health's Graduate Program where she is supported to complete a Diploma of Leadership and Management. She is currently working with the South Metropolitan Health Service. Although loving her work with the Department, true to her drive and long-term career aspiration, Jessica has recently applied to study postgraduate medicine.





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**Ms Bronte Van Helden** - The University of Western Australia

I completed my Bachelor of Science in Conservation Biology at the University of Western Australia based in Albany. During my undergraduate degree I was lucky enough to get experience volunteering with the Department of Parks and Wildlife and at the start of third year was employed as a research assistant by the Centre of Excellence in Natural Resource Management (CENRM) in Albany.

After finishing my degree I commenced honours where I studied the habitat use of the critically endangered western ringtail possum (*Pseudocheirus occidentalis*) in urban remnants. During my undergraduate degree and honours I was fortunate enough to be exposed to the wonderful research and teaching staff at CENRM and without a doubt this contributed to my achievement of First Class Honours and receiving four prizes and five scholarships over the duration of my time at UWA.

I have now commenced a PhD at the University of Western Australia which focuses on determining when and under what circumstances urban environments may be an area of conservation value to mammal communities.

In my spare time I am working with the City of Albany to conduct distance sampling for western ringtail possums and am also employed to conduct surveys for western ringtail possums by the Torbay Catchment Group. I feel very lucky to have had such an enjoyable and successful experience at university and I hope to continue with my passion for research into the future.

