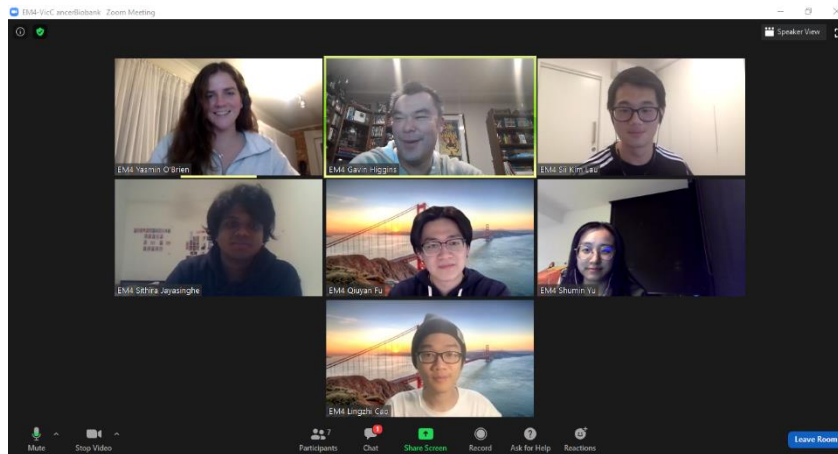


The University of Melbourne Innovation Practice Program (IPP) provides insights to biobanking challenges

Gavin Higgins, Lingzhi Cao, Qiuyan Fu, Sii Kim Lau, Sithira Jayasinghe, Shumin Yu, Yasmin O'Brien

While the Victorian Cancer Biobank (VCB) and the rest of Victoria were in a COVID-19 induced lockdown the past 4 months, the VCB has remained active in supporting researchers. During this time the VCB was also involved in the Innovation Practice Program (IPP) that is offered by the Melbourne School of Engineering at the University of Melbourne. The program allows a team of Masters students across multiple disciplines to gain industry experience through undertaking a project to create and propose an innovative solution for a business challenge facing an organisation with a mentor from that organisation. The VCB's Project Manager Dr Gavin Higgins participated in the program as a student mentor for the project with the VCB.

Gavin viewed the IPP program as an opportunity to not only enhance his communication and leadership skills, but as a means of building community awareness of not just the VCB but biobanking in general. Many of the students were unaware of what biobanking is, making the IPP an excellent platform to introduce these concepts in an academic setting.



Participants in the IPP program Zoom sessions:

*1st row from left to right:
Yasmin O'Brien, Gavin Higgins
(mentor), Sii Kim Lau*

*2nd row from left to right:
Sithira Jayasinghe, Qiuyan Fu,
Shumin Yu and Lingzhi Cao.*

The VCB set out an ambitious challenge that is a universal conundrum for many biobanks: To develop a “sustainable” service model and marketing strategy that would enable it to build the value of the VCB to its stakeholders that includes researchers, funders and donors, while promoting high impact cancer research through greater utilisation of VCB biospecimens.

Over the course of 12 weeks the students developed a strategy centred on user driven workshops to improve stakeholder engagement and foster greater research collaborations. The students gained insights through a series of interviews with key external stakeholders and consortium staff including the VCB Manager (Dr Wayne Ng), and two of our biobank managers (Ms Angela Mountain and Ms Zdenka Prodanovic). The students found this experience invaluable as it gave them some exposure to develop their professional communication skills and build their understanding of challenges biobanks face. Likewise, Gavin learnt to effectively lead adaptive teams through change, which was invaluable during these uncertain times. The VCB intends on adopting the students' strategy in future business plans.

The VCB would like to thank our fantastic team of students for their efforts, our key stakeholders who agreed to be interviewed and Dr Peter Cebon and his team of educators at the University of Melbourne for putting together this incredibly engaging and thought provoking program.

For any other biobanks that may wish to consider taking part in the IPP in the future please contact Peter for further information at either pcebon@unimelb.edu.au or IPP-team@unimelb.edu.au.