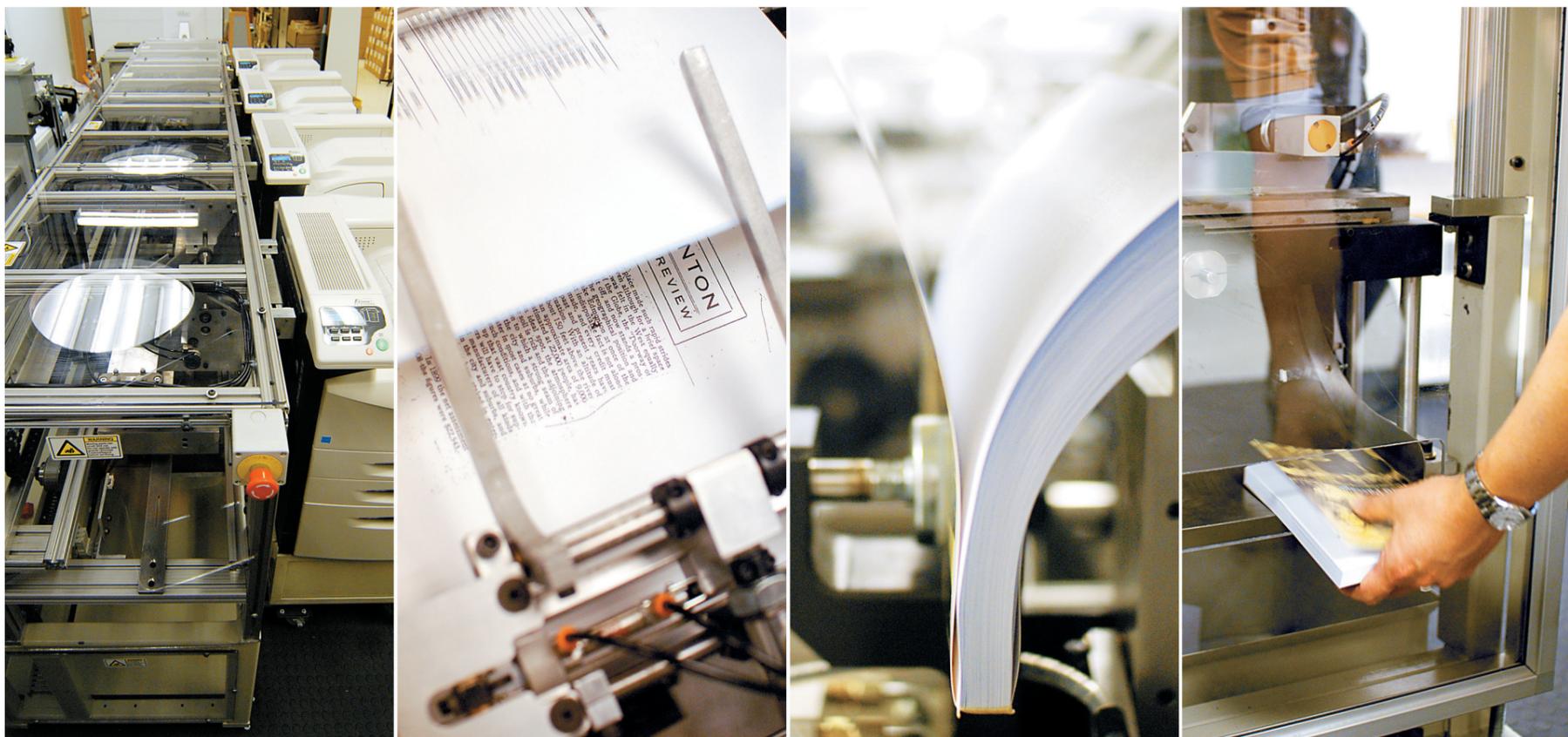


THE GATEWAY

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MIKE OTTO

ONE STEP AT A TIME The U of A has opened a new chapter in book publishing with the introduction of the Espresso Book Machine at the Bookstore. For a full breakdown on the EBM, please see pages 4-5.

Docs using bags in premature births

Pediatric researchers at the U of A have found a unique use for low-cost plastic bags: using them to keep premature babies warm right after they're born

SCOTT FENWICK
News Staff

As alarming as it sounds, putting premature newborns into plastic bags may in fact help save their lives, according to a study led by a University of Alberta researcher.

Dr Sunita Vohra, the study's co-principal investigator and an associate professor in the University's pediatrics department, explained that this stems from previous trials with plastic bags and premature babies. It was shown that wrapping them in a layer of plastic can reduce body-heat loss that leads to hypothermia.

"Because we know hypothermia is an important risk factor for death, we're looking at [plastic's] effects on mortality," she said. "We really think that this study is important to get done because it will contribute to [medical] knowledge."

The study, known as the Heat Loss Prevention Trial, is being conducted in more than 40 centres worldwide, and is currently being coordinated between the U of A Pediatrics Department and Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre in Toronto.

While no babies are being recruited in Edmonton, the U of A is helping lead the study because of Vohra's prior pediatric work with other hospitals in eastern Canada. Shortly before she moved to Edmonton in 2003, pediatricians at

Sunnybrook approached Vohra and her colleagues in Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children about helping conduct the study.

"It began in a really organic, grassroots fashion by a single unit wanting to improve the outcome for their babies," Vohra said.

"The first thing that happens is that we dry the infant. That is in recognition of the very important role that temperature plays. When a baby is wet, they get cold rapidly."

DR SUNITA VOHRA
U OF A PEDIATRICS DEPARTMENT

The trials involve putting randomly selected premature babies, with their parents' permission, up to their neck in clear plastic pouches immediately after birth, while still in their amniotic fluid.

The bags have an opening over the baby's belly to give access to the umbilical cord. The babies in the randomized trial then have their head cleaned up and a cap placed on it. Babies may be in the plastic for 15-90 minutes,

depending on how long it takes for their bodies to stabilize. Afterwards, they're cleaned up and placed in an incubator.

Vohra explained that babies born full-term, at 40 weeks' gestation, are able to control their body heat better.

"The first thing that happens is that we dry the infant. That is in recognition of the very important role that temperature plays. When a baby is wet, they get cold rapidly," she said.

However, Maureen Reily, the study's other co-principal investigator at Sunnybrook, explained that this procedure doesn't work well with premature babies born at 28 weeks' gestation or less.

"Because they are born before they have completely grown and developed, premature babies have a difficult time keeping warm soon after birth," she said in a statement on the Sunnybrook website.

Vohra added that while it can be assumed that the reduced chances of hypothermia can reduce the likelihood of deaths among premature babies, testing for and confirming this end result is very important to

"Rather than assume things, we can actually measure them [...] to see what happens to them in terms of their neurodevelopmental outcome," she said. "I think assumptions don't have to be made where you can actually measure them."

Research funding declines—report

KEVIN CHARLTON
News Staff

The University of Alberta has ranked fifth place in a list of Canada's Top 50 Research Universities for the 2006 fiscal year, one spot down from last year.

The study, carried out by Research Infosource Inc, found that the U of A suffered a 3.5 per cent decrease in research funding from the 2005 to 2006 fiscal year. But according to Dr Lorne Babiuk, the U of A's Vice-President (Research), this isn't something to worry about.

"Research funding does fluctuate from year to year, a little bit like the stock market," Babiuk explained. "On Monday, you might be at \$14.00; then on Wednesday, you could be at \$13.90; then by Friday, you might be back up at \$14.10. Last year, there was a slight dip, but this year it is looking like it is increasing significantly."

Babiuk explained that these fluctuations are caused by multiple-year grants, which typically count for the year they're issued rather than on a year-to-year basis. This accounts for much of the discrepancy, he said, as many of the universities that were on the increase for the 2006 fiscal year will be on the decrease in the 2007.

But according to Babiuk, research money at the U of A is continuing to track well, with individual

faculties maintaining constant funding ratios and continually increasing. Undergraduate students at the U of A won't be affected dramatically by the increase in research funding, he said, as they aren't directly involved in research projects.

"Most of the funding is for graduate students. This funding will allow us to take more graduate students and doctoral fellowship students," Babiuk explained. "As our funding increases, the number of graduate students and doctoral fellowships increases."

He added that research funding may affect the number of summer research positions available for undergraduates, but the number of undergraduate students admitted to the U of A will not be affected.

As to what kind of increase the University should be looking at for fiscal 2007, Babiuk estimates that the school should be "well over 5 per cent higher than last year." He predicted that the University will jump a few places as the second to fifth rankings are all quite close, with only \$65 million worth of research funding separating them.

"Our faculty members and our scientists continue to work hard to increase their funding, and we feel that we are quite competitive compared to our sister universities," he said

PLEASE SEE FUNDING ♦ PAGE 2

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Hockey Pandas lose!

The Huskies must have eaten their Wheaties, because they rebounded from a 9-2 loss to beat Alberta 5-3.

SPORTS, PAGE 9



House Butler wins!

With *What the Butler Saw*, Ron Jenkins has directed a whirlwind farce that's a little exhausting.

A&E, PAGE 14