



New Master of Information Studies @ University of Canberra

The University of Canberra, in its process of course renewal, will teach a new Master of Information Studies (online) in 2009. The current Knowledge Management and Internet Communication program will expand to include a specialisation in Librarianship. Spearheading the revival of Librarianship at UC will be Dr Stuart Ferguson. Stuart is currently Head of the School of Information Studies at Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga and will take up his new position at UC in October 2008. He will play a leadership role in the development and teaching of Librarianship curriculum.

The new course will qualify students as information and knowledge professionals in diverse, contemporary environments. It is designed to equip students with the relevant skills for professional practice in libraries and all other knowledge and information management agencies. The course emphasises the management and use of digital information for a knowledge society and an organisation's competitive advantage in the effective use of the internet. A broad theoretical base, emphasising the need for communication, is translated into the necessary skills for professional practice. The course allows for specialisation in the fields of Knowledge Management, Internet Communication and Librarianship. And with the existence of these specialisations, a general information studies stream will be offered in which students can customise an information studies course to suit their individual needs and specific information environment.

The new Master of Information Studies builds on existing strength in the area of information studies. The Masters of Internet Communication and Knowledge Management are currently offered in the Faculty of Communication and International Studies as fully online courses and this new initiative will be tightly coupled to those existing courses in curriculum and mode of delivery. A significant and established base of academic staff already exists at UC to support this initiative and expertise in teaching fully online is well developed.

This course services the immediate and local needs of the National Capital, Canberra – a knowledge-based city state. In its fully online mode, the wider national and global demand for expertise in the information and knowledge economy is also accommodated. It will meet the needs of modern organisations including governments and the professions that support them – preparing or further developing students as information professionals. The course will investigate information theory and use in our society introducing information law, information security and evaluation and social and economic impacts.

Graduates of this course will find a market in information and knowledge sectors, web management units and libraries of all types – government, public, private and educational. Their job titles would include: information officer and CIO, project and policy researcher, knowledge manager, information

architect, librarian and online manager. Graduates will be well positioned to practice in a rapidly changing global information environment.

UC has been listening to the collective voices of industry and professional bodies who have signalled the need for the revitalisation of traditional information management course and the shortage of appropriately qualified information professionals to fill a range of positions. At a series of recent industry consultations at UC – 'the think tanks' – a diverse and representative group of leading industry professionals signalled strong support for this initiative.

A work-integrated learning component of the Librarianship stream will enact the vision described in the UC Strategic Plan 2008-12, *'our courses will be known for the way they prepare professional people professionally, through work-based learning and collaborative teaching with external agencies'*. The work and social experiences of the adult learner will be drawn upon in all aspects of their study.

This course puts UC at the forefront in the education of new information professionals at a national and global level. And looking to the future, this new course provides a platform from which additional specialisations and research endeavours may emerge. UC will continue to listen to the information industry to inform its direction.

Sally Burford
Course Convenor for the Master
of Information Studies
University of Canberra
sally.burford@canberra.edu.au

Student perceptions of the information professions - research and practice at RMIT

In an era of changing jobs, professions and skill bases, what makes a qualification in Information Management or Library Studies still a meaningful and interesting occupation? Well, for many of our students, their perception of the profession is the idea of working with people, helping or advising and that they will not have to 'sell' anything. This is particularly so of the graduate students who already have some experience of the job market and the valuing of the skills gained in undergraduate education. These students talk about their desire to help, educate, or advise people in a co-operative environment. 'Selling' yes, but something they believe in; service, skills, programs, advice were all part of their career perceptions. The students who come to study at RMIT see an opportunity to make a difference, be appreciated, and they often want to work in community minded organisations. They are also excited by the possibilities of working in business teams where their skills are appreciated and valued. Other students stress the broad appeal of programs that offer a choice of pathways when they graduate. While many students like the idea of working in groups, in communities or in teams, an interesting aspect of their focus is the level of autonomy that is offered by careers in LIS.

Recently students have expressed interest in participating in more than just the required Industrial Placement, to attain more knowledge of the broad aspects of the profession

before making decisions about where they want to be after graduation. This desire is fuelled by exciting and interesting placements offered by host organisations.

Sometimes such comments from students make us think differently about the profession that we may have taken for granted through our long professional association. The changing face of the job market has made many students keenly aware of the opportunities that our education programs and the profession offer and certainly has an impact on the types of courses programs that we deliver in information, knowledge and records management. Our undergraduate program in particular, offers broad scope for careers, with many of the students keen to work in business or non-traditional library environments in content and knowledge management roles.

Underpinning the skills delivered in the lecture theatre, classroom and lab at RMIT is both practical experience and a research base which has developed recently with the appointment of new academic staff. Research interests focus on the theory of LIS, the relationships between doctoral education and the professions' new models of scholarly publishing, research capacity building and knowledge production, information management in the electronic era, and historical aspects of the profession. Teaching and research combine at RMIT University to deliver collaborative, student focussed programs.

Professions depend upon their members to increase the knowledge base and narrow the gap that exists between research and practice. At RMIT we also focus on the nexus between teaching and research which enables our students, the professionals of the future, to make those vital connections.

Bernadette Welch
GDIM Program Co-ordinator
School of Business Information Technology
RMIT University
bernadette.welch@rmit.edu.au

Convergence in the information professions

This is an exciting time to be an information professional.

The world of information is dynamic, shifting, multidisciplinary and converging. Professions, disciplines and technologies are merging; the traditional information professions are undergoing radical re-invention and the world demands new information roles that we could not even imagine a decade ago. Flexibility, imagination and creative problem-solving, as well as technical savvy are the hallmarks of the 21st Century information professional.

We need to recognize that the information professions are no longer confined to traditional cultural institutions. Organisations - government departments, cultural institutions, corporations, community groups - need people who understand that the creation and delivery of information is a complex interrelationship between users, their situations and the capabilities of emergent technologies. On any given day organisations need highly-skilled professionals who can build

seamless systems to deliver electronic information in a myriad of formats to individual desktops. Who can build databases, digitize analog materials for access and preservation, manage content and its metadata, create wikis for knowledge sharing, manage digital objects such as podcasts, vodcasts and RSS feeds, in fact, integrate the whole range of Web2 technologies. And of course, everyone well-designed websites and intranets in which the content can be easily found!

Even a cursory glance at this short list reveals that the age-old principles for managing and organizing information are only one of the building blocks required. An interdisciplinary approach, merging theory and practice, reflection and curiosity are vital for this brave new online world. Meeting this challenge requires a convergence of many disciplines, including information systems, information design, library and information science, and the information communication and social sciences.

So how can we begin to educate the next generation of information professionals to be able to meet these challenges? Clearly any education program must emphasise adaptability and flexibility, creativity and problem-solving, theoretical understanding and practical skills. One important component of this is 'learning by doing'; students should be constantly challenged to solve a variety of information problems in the context of real-life situations. We need to equip students with the ability to transfer knowledge into a variety of different contexts — professionals who can deliver a conceptual design for a database before lunch, re-write content for a new audience by mid-afternoon and coordinate a dinner-time online discussion. But seriously, since programs cannot teach all the skills students will need over years of highly varied professional practice, educators must instill a serious commitment to continual professional development and learning.

Michael Olsson
Lecturer, UTS
Michael.Olsson@uts.edu.au

Maureen Henninger
Senior Lecturer, UTS
Maureen.Henninger@uts.edu.au

ALIA's course recognition

ALIA works with education providers and other stakeholders - including students and employers - to ensure courses equip graduates with the knowledge, skills and capabilities to provide their clients with the right information at the right time.

The Association recognises courses at librarian and library technician level. The recognition process is concerned with ensuring the quality of the course and its relevance to current and emerging library and information practice. Courses to be recognised are assessed against ALIA's criteria for course recognition and underpinned by the Association's education policy statements. For further course recognition information go to <http://www.alia.org.au/education/courses/recognition.html>