

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.

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## 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.

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## 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>