Welcome to this first ‘research news’ for 2004. I’m sure it will come as no surprise to anyone at RMIT that I feel continually challenged in achieving effective communication with all corners of the RMIT research world.

This ‘news’ is I hope one more part of fulfilling this challenge. In future it will sit alongside other regular publications such as our annual ‘Research Highlights’ – the 2004 edition of this series is scheduled to be available in a couple of months.

In producing this ‘news’ the team in the Research and Innovation (R&I) Section are hoping to both inform and stimulate ourselves as well as many others. If you discover the ‘news’ lying about, take the time to read, and are provoked to ask questions, please don’t hesitate to contact us.

We are keen to hear of stories we have not told this time around. There is a lot going on around research at RMIT at any one time – and we plan through this ‘news’ to describe many of them and the passionate and clever people they involve – in R&I and beyond.

You will see on the last page of this news a ‘Research Calendar’ for June through July – in case you are not aware the R&I Section produces a hard copy calendar for the whole year – the 2004 version is bright orange and available from the R&I Section. And don’t forget the R&I web-site www.rmit.edu.au/rd for a wide range of other captivating research stimulation.

Neil Furlong
Interactive Information Institute to Provide Window into the Future

The Interactive Information Institute’s expertise in virtual reality simulations is enabling clients to freely explore both time and space.

Having already conquered the past, by helping bring Phar Lap and dinosaurs to life for visitors to Melbourne Museum’s Virtual Room, the Institute is now turning its expertise to the year 2030.

Urban Futures Consulting has engaged the Institute to help create a real-time digital model for the Maribyrnong River Valley Project.

The project, forming part of the Melbourne 2030 strategy, will develop the long term vision for the river valley into Urban Design and Landscape Guidelines, ensuring protection of the river valley from inappropriate development, environmental degradation and loss of natural and cultural heritage assets.

Real-time models have particular value for testing development proposals within a broad context, particularly where it is difficult to determine precise impacts or opportunities.

Staff from the Interactive Information Institute and Urban Futures are leading the field in the area of real-time urban simulation, having collaborated on many urban design and planning projects, such as:

- Bourke Street Mall refurbishment simulation
- Queen Victoria Market height studies for the City of Melbourne
- Redevelopment of Dandenong as part of the Victorian Government's 2020 Urban Strategy
- Creation of a planning model for the City of Parramatta

Commercial Contracts Increase

An analysis of research contracts signed by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) in 2003 shows the increasing success of university staff in winning research work.

Around 300 contracts were signed in 2003, projecting $15.1 million income to RMIT. Average income per contract (with income) was around $105,000.

The top ten income-earners in dollar amounts averaged around $530,000 per contract. These figures build on the solid performance of 2002, and earlier years.

2004 has commenced very positively, with the value of research contracts, signed to the end of the first four months, double that of 2003 and 2002 - around $4.4million projected income.

The Research & Innovation Section provides support and advice for researchers establishing research projects with commercial and other clients. Please see information at www.rmit.edu.au/rd/ip and contact Dr Eric Kingston eric.kingston@rmit.edu.au for details.
2003 Research Publications Reflect an Active Research Culture

Preliminary results of the 2003 Research Publications collection show a 30% increase in publication output across RMIT University during the past twelve months. This is the third consecutive year that the University has increased its publication output and is a reflection of the hard work by research staff and candidates taking place across RMIT.

Research publication output is one of the measures employed by the Department of Education, Science and Training to measure research performance at universities. This measure contributes to the ongoing funding of research at RMIT, via the Institutional Grants Scheme (IGS) and the Research Training Scheme (RTS). RMIT was allocated $1.1 million in 2004, under the IGS and RTS, which directly related to our publications performance in 2002. The 2003 Research Publications collection will contribute towards funding in 2005.

For further information please see: www.rmit.edu.au/rd/publish

Research in Vietnam

The Research and Innovation Section is piloting a new model of research training for international students that focuses on solving social and economic issues relevant to their home country.

Ho Huu Xuyen is one of several Vietnamese postgraduate students currently enrolled in the RMIT research program which ensures that students begin and complete their degree in Australia.

Xuyen is currently in Vietnam where he is conducting field research during 2004 as part of his work with the Institute for Building Science & Technology, Southern Branch in Ho Chi Minh City.

Xuyen hopes to develop an infrastructure model that can be used to improve water supply in Ho Chi Minh City as well as other parts of Vietnam.

Increase in ARC Linkage applications

This year the Research Support group has received an increased number of grant applications for Round 1 of ARC Linkage Grants funding and Linkage Infrastructure Equipment and Facilities Program.

Both schemes require significant effort on the part of academics to coordinate the sign off by industry partners and other participating universities.

The Linkage applications are a very strong demonstration of academic collaboration with industry. They also demonstrate RMIT’s commitment to research, which is focussed on outcomes beneficial to the community.

Nineteen Round 1 Linkage Grant applications were received compared to 13 for Round 1 in 2003 and 34 in Round 2. Results of Round 2 applications submitted in 2003 are expected towards the end of May this year.

In conjunction with Portfolio processes, the Research Support group undertakes review of all Linkage applications, both from the administrative aspect and from a strategic scheme perspective. We believe that this level of review has lifted our funding success rate over the past few years.

Applications for Round 2 of the ARC Linkage Grants scheme are due towards the end of October 2004.

Research Grant Application Protocols

Did you know that it is RMIT policy that all research applications for external funding must be signed off by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation), Professor Neil Furlong?

Full details of RMIT’s Research Grant Application Protocols are available on the RMIT website:

www.rmit.edu.au/rd/protocols
Is RMIT Offering a Research Candidate Experience of a National Standard?

Our research education mandate at RMIT is to offer research degree candidates a quality research experience. Whilst much effort is deployed by academics and general staff across the University toward this end, we also need to ask ourselves, are we achieving this goal?

Every year the Graduate Careers Council of Australia survey research degree graduates nationally on their satisfaction with the research experience. Called the Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ), the survey is conducted on behalf of the Department of Education, Science and Training. This survey provides a rare opportunity to evaluate the quality of the postgraduate research experience offered by RMIT in relation to national data. The latest results are for graduates in 2002.

The PREQ contains 28 multiple-choice questions addressing the quality of the research experience and a number of additional questions relating to employment. In regards to the latter, RMIT’s graduates appear to be successfully making the transition to the workforce, with the vast majority employed, often in education or government. Indeed, most already had previous experience in full-time employment.

Unfortunately, however, a more troubling result was evident when graduates reflected on the quality of their research experience. The satisfaction recorded in the area of research skills development was good, but becomes mixed in relation to supervision, marginal in relation to infrastructure, and poor in relation to the research culture. Moreover, while this trend was evident nationally, it was more pronounced at RMIT.

The latest PREQ results reveal that the satisfaction of RMIT’s graduates is consistently lower than that recorded in national averages. This is clearly a cause for concern. It demonstrates that the focus over the last few years on improving the research candidate experience – through the work of the Research and Graduate Studies Committee, for example – is essential and needs to continue.

The complete PREQ report is available on the web: www.rmit.edu.au/rtg/preq2003

Supervisor Development Workbook

Until quite recently academics became ‘qualified’ to supervise research degree students merely by virtue of having achieved their own research degree. ‘Training’ was seen essentially as on-the-job learning. However this is now changing. We are witnessing an increased recognition that much more is needed to make a good supervisor.

The following are some of the drivers of this trend:
- The emphasis on public accountability and quality performance.
- The recognition that supervision is a form of pedagogy which like all pedagogy can be developed.
- The performance based research economy that makes timely completions a crucial ‘fact of life’ for the institution and for supervisors and therefore highlights the need for supervisory practices to facilitate timely completions.
- The changing demands on supervision, particularly the emphasis on developing students’ transferable skill sets relating to employability and career development.

What all this amounts to is that the supervision of research students can no longer be left to continue simply as craft knowledge and supervisor development can no longer be left to on-the-job learning. Supervisors need the skills that will enable them to flourish in different environments and to meet the challenge of new demands. These skills can only be acquired if supervisors deliberately engage in further learning and personal development through programs focused on improving supervisory practices.

The Supervisor Development Workbook is specifically designed to meet these new needs. The aim is to help develop and enhance supervisory skills so that the supervisory process can be best managed to ensure timely completions.

The Workbook will help supervisors to:
- Develop their supervisory techniques
- Engage in critical reflection on their own supervisory practice
- Work out ways in which they can act to improve their practice
- Gain recognition for participating in supervisor development activities

The Workbook is learner-centred. It is not discipline specific so all supervisors will find it useful. It is couched in accessible language with many activities and exercises and with lots of useful references to other resources.

The Workbook will be used in the 2004 Supervisor Development Program (for details see www.rmit.edu.au/rtg/super). However, it is also designed to enable independent study and can be accessed on-line at: www.rmit.edu.au/rtg/workbook

Professor Robin Usher
Co-ordinator (Research Training Group)
Intellectual Property Policy Review

Following extensive consultation and review of the University’s Intellectual Property Policy (PS Policy 540), the Research and Innovation Section has drafted additions to the policy to clarify how the University will identify, manage and commercialise (where appropriate) intellectual property created through research and discovery by RMIT University staff, students and visitors to the University.

The additions to the University’s Policy are supported by new procedures and guidelines.

When the University Council approves the additions to the University’s Intellectual Property Policy and the new Procedures, a university-wide education and awareness program will commence.

Draft versions of the policy and supporting documents are currently available on the Research and Innovation Section website: www.rmit.edu.au/rd/ip

For further information please contact:
Professor Leigh Peterson
lfpeterson@rmit.edu.au

RMIT Colloquium on Innovating Research

We are pleased to announce RMIT’s 3rd annual Research on Research Conference which this year will take the form of a colloquium. The conference series provides an opportunity for RMIT’s researchers to share ideas and practice in a cross-disciplinary context conducive to lively debate and discussion.

Participants from across RMIT’s research communities are invited to participate: HE and VET sectors, teaching and learning practitioners, supervisors, and research degree candidates.

**The Sustainable Farm Families Project: Innovation in Rural Health**

A key characteristic of innovators is that they build and work across networks, adopting a collaborative style that often leads down interesting paths.

In 2003 RMIT's Centre for Regional and Rural Development, located in Hamilton in SW Victoria won a grant from the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) to undertake the Sustainable Farm Families project. This grant was won in partnership with the Western District Health Service, Farm Management 500 – a benchmarking group of leading pastoralists and croppers, Land Connect Australia – a premier rural training group, Australian Women in Agriculture, Meat and Livestock Australia and the Victorian Farmers' Federation.

The health promotion professionals in the Western District Health Service knew from local programs that if you provided farmers with relevant information about their health status and assisted them with a program of improvement that they would adopt more healthy living practices.

When Farm Management 500 heard of these local programs they approached the Western District Health Service and our Centre to develop an application to the Australian Government under RIRDC’s Farm Health and Safety Joint Venture to undertake a three year study of the health of farming families in western Victoria as well as Clare SA and NSW farmers north of Swan Hill.

Having completed year one of the project, participants in the workshop have committed to an action plan to improve aspects of their health, which they will report on at 12 monthly workshops over the next two years. These plans are based on an initial health assessment (blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, BMI and skin assessment). A two-day workshop presented information on the epidemiology of rural health, cardiovascular disease, cancer, stress, nutrition and sexual health.

The Centre designed the research and workshop component of the program and is currently analysing the data collected in the first year’s workshops. The evaluations show that when farmers are presented with information relevant to their health, and how it impacts their business, they are highly motivated to take action to improve.

Over the next two years participant health will be reassessed and new strategies developed. We will correlate information on health with information on their farming business collected by FM 500.

Out of this collaboration we have developed an innovative education and research program that will be taken up by other health services and farming industry groups around the country.

Associate Professor John Martin  
Director, Centre for Regional and Rural Development  
School of Social Science and Planning

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**Tips for grant rebuttal letters**

In the next few weeks nervous researchers at RMIT will receive comments from reviewers and panels pertaining to their grants in review with the ARC and NH & MRC. The comments can range from very complimentary to quite negative. There are a few guidelines that applicants should follow in order to maximise the impact of their response. I will attempt to outline these:

1. If you have two good reports and one bad one, do not focus the response on the negative reviewer. This will only highlight poor aspects of the application. Rather, use the positive comments of the two favourable reports to discredit the negative one.

2. No matter how ludicrous you may perceive a reviewer’s comments to be (and some can be quite farcical), you must be scholarly in your response. In my lab, we adopt a 24 h rule with respect to both grants and manuscripts. That is, wait 24 h before writing a response. Addressing issues while angry can only cloud one’s objectivity.

3. Keep in mind that the panels that ultimately rank grants are reviewing a large number of them. For example our NH & MRC panel has 12 members ranking 120 grants. Therefore, begin and end the rebuttal with positives that were highlighted by the reviewers. The opening and summary is what will stick with the assessors when they ultimately rank your grant.

4. Be strategic about what to include in your rebuttal. For example, if your grant appears to hinge on one pivotal data set, try to include preliminary data pertinent to this point. If you have been criticised on track record, it is imperative that you include publications obtained since the submission.

5. Finally, get somebody who is knowledgeable but a little peripheral to the actual subject of the grant to read and critique your rejoinder. Keep in mind that the assessors are probably not totally familiar with the subject matter.

6. Once submitted, forget about it until the decision and start preparing for next year!

I hope these few basic guidelines can help you in this process.

Good luck!

Mark A. Febbraio Ph.D.  
NHMRC Senior Research Fellow and  
Grant Discipline Panel Member  
Assoc. Professor and Head, Skeletal Muscle Research Laboratory  
School of Medical Sciences
Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) Secretariat

Cooperative Research Centres, generally known as CRCs, bring together researchers from universities, government laboratories and private industry to undertake long-term and collaborative industry-oriented research that can be utilised by the industry participants. RMIT is currently a participant in twelve CRCs over a broad range of disciplines. A detailed list of the CRCs RMIT participates in is available at www.rmit.edu.au/rd/centres

Research & Innovation Section is currently establishing a Secretariat to facilitate and support the University’s participation in Cooperative Research Centres and to ensure this participation achieves the objectives of RMIT’s Research and Innovation strategies.

Professor Leigh Peterson and other staff within the Research and Innovation Section will run the RMIT CRC Secretariat.

Centralised Finance Processes

From April this year Internal Orders for research income need to be created by the Research Support Group in the Research and Innovation Section. The Financial Services Group will create all other categories of Internal Orders.

When academics submit a grant application through the Research Support Unit the coversheet (www.rmit.edu.au/rd/protocols) will include information for the creation of an Internal Order.

Once the Research Support receives notification from the relevant funding agency and the contract is signed, an Internal Order will be opened and the Chief Investigator and School Administrator will be advised of the number.

For research funding that is not generated via an application sent through the Research Support Group, academics will need to use the previously established process of completing a Research Activity Data Form: www.rmit.edu.au/rd/dataform.

The most common reason for delays in opening Internal Orders is the failure to forward complete documentation, especially fully signed contracts and ethics approvals or references to their location if already with R&I (where relevant).

Key Contacts in R&I

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Research Calendar

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<td>9th</td>
<td>Research Supervisor Development &amp; Training [link]</td>
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<td>16th</td>
<td>Research Literacies Program [link]</td>
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<td>21st</td>
<td>Research &amp; Graduate Studies Committee</td>
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<td>23rd</td>
<td>Research Literacies Program [link]</td>
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<td>28th</td>
<td>Research Domain Committee</td>
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<td>29th</td>
<td>Research Discussion</td>
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<td>5.00pm – 6.30pm, Research Lounge, Building 28, Level 5</td>
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<td>6th</td>
<td>Research Supervisor Development &amp; Training [link]</td>
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<td>R&amp;D Intellectual Property Committee</td>
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<td>19th</td>
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<td>Research Literacies Program [link]</td>
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<td>29th</td>
<td>Early Career Researcher Workshop [link]</td>
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<tr>
<td>30th</td>
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The Secretariat will perform a range of functions including:

- Establishing a register of RMIT’s commitments to the CRCs and the benefits it obtains
- Assisting with future CRC bids, including the identification of relevant expertise
- Communicating general CRC information to the University community
- Monitoring and reporting on the University’s performance in CRCs, and
- Maintaining an up-to-date collection of CRC bids, agreements and contracts.

For further information please contact Professor Leigh Peterson [link].