RMIT International University Vietnam
An Action Research Project

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A Quick Summary

RMIT Vietnam currently has:

- 700 students (330 English, 370 Degree/UPP)
- 100 staff (70% Ex-pats, 30% Vietnamese)
- Two active campuses (21 Pham Ngoc Thach, and 44 Truong Dinh), with three more campuses to follow within a year

RMIT Vietnam is teaching its 5th semester – i.e. has been operating for less than 2 years.
Programs currently offered

- English Language levels 3 to 7
- University Preparation Program (UPP)
- Bachelor of Commerce
- Bachelor of Applied Science (Software Engineering)
- Bachelor of Applied Science (Computer Science)
- Bachelor of Applied Science (IT and Multi-Media)
- Master of Education Studies.
- Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Teaching and Learning.
Ho Chi Minh City Campus
21 Pham Ngoc Thach
Original Vision

- Invitation from Vietnamese government. Broad licence conditions.
- Design was based around the delivery of existing RMIT online programs to Vietnam – through direct link to Melbourne DLS system.
- Students were to study on-line with support from “learning facilitators (LFs)”, using mainly on-line resources, and “Tutored Videotape Instruction (TVI)”.
- Limited contact time per course in class size of 24.
- 3 by 15 week semesters per year – no big breaks.
- LF's were to be 70% local Vn RMIT alumni, with ex-pats to enrich the environment. One RMIT academic to be seconded to provide leadership.
Vn LF's were to be paid around USD300 per month, and teach 20 contact hours per week.

Vn LF’s were also to conduct targeted research.

Melbourne faculties signed a “Service Agreement”, binding for 10 years.

Faculties to get USD50 per student per semester course. Large numbers of students to give economies of scale.

Big emphasis in planning on the development of the 57 ha site in Saigon South.

PNT Site was intended as a temporary “start up” site.
Start up - 2001

First variations…..

✦ Vn LFs not available in numbers expected and cost USD700 per month.

✦ 70% of LFs ex-pats - on USD2,000 per month.

✦ Lack of teaching experience in LFs, and limited professional training before start up, or on later recruitment.

✦ No teaching academics with university experience on campus.

✦ Materials provided from Melbourne not “on-line quality”.

✦ Staff and students were more comfortable with “traditional teaching”.

✦ Saigon South campus development delayed…..
Start up (cont)

First responses…

- LF s resorted to 5 hours face to face teaching per course per week.
- Materials provided from Melbourne were even less suitable for face to face mode than on-line, and needed intensive preparation.
- LF s struggle to teach 10 hours contact per week (2 courses).
- Academic Coordinator appointed after a delay (a junior academic from Melbourne).
- Search for Director Teaching and Learning delayed until after a President is appointed.
Consequences…

- Faculties get heavy criticism for not providing suitable materials.

- General confusion about the learning model, as Melbourne and Vietnam operating on different models.

- Lack of bandwidth means Vn runs separate servers on a different delivery system - more work for Faculties to provide materials in suitable format.

- Materials from faculties have to pass through “packaging” process at LTS, and are then delivered on CD ROMs to Vn. Final delivery is only a few weeks before teaching starts.
Start up – structure

- Class sizes small, and split into streams after a couple of semesters.
- Lack of computers and resources in the Learning Resource Centre.
- Breaks between semesters not long enough to finalise marking and moderation. Staff and students do not have results final before starting the next semester.
- Breaks between semesters not long enough for preparation of next semester's work. Changes to courses are continuous through semesters as needs appear. [excel spreadsheet of calendar]
Start up - students

- English skills of students poor, despite meeting IELTS6.5. Vietnamese spoken on campus when not in class.

- Students struggle to work independently, to work in teams, to communicate effectively in English, and to produce their own work.

- Cheating and plagiarism common place in Vn system, and seen as “normal”. Getting caught seen as a reasonable risk, with expectation of minimal punishment.

- Student wanted the “university experience”, and plenty of contact with “white faces”.
Start up - outcomes

- Students do remarkably well, enjoying the intensive face to face regime, but totally dependent on their teachers to tell them what to do and when to do it – as per the Vietnamese education system.

- Fees set low to attract students – well below real cost (though these were not known at the time).

- Large losses developing (though business plan allows for initial losses).
Settling in - 2002

- Michael Mann, ex-Australian Ambassador to Vietnam, is appointed Foundation President.
- Delays in the development of Saigon South become entrenched. A new set of labs is built at PNT, as it becomes a longer term campus. Lack of growth space already a problem.
- LRC too small to cope with student numbers. Lack of computer access and space for “general work” of students.
- Librarian appointed to manage the development of the LRC.
- Textbooks not being purchased, as students photocopy for own use rather than buy.
Enrolments continue to boom.

Staff numbers doubled at the start of September 2002 Semester. Staff office space a problem.

Bachelor of Commerce starts.

MBA introduction delayed at the last minute.

Director Teaching and Learning appointed and takes up position.
Structure of programs

English  level 3
level 4
level 5  →  University Preparation Program. (2 sems)
level 6
level 7  →  Undergraduate Degree entry.

Level 3 to 6 is 10 wks each.
Level 7 is 5 wks.

UPP 4 courses, 25 hrs per wk.
English plus 3 others each semester.
University Preparation Program

- Based on Certificate of Foundation Studies in Melbourne.
- Students doing UPP had already qualified for entry to the degree programs – except for English.
- UPP English course was taught with 10 hours contact per week in classes of 18, while three other courses were being taught at 5 hours per week in classes of 24. All had the same fees.
- Students declared their intention for future enrolment in Business or Applied Science, and were streamed into two separate versions of UPP. This complicated staffing and timetabling, required more courses to be sent up from Melbourne.
University Preparation Program

Chemistry A & B far too advanced for Applied Science students, who wanted some business background knowledge, and too specialised for the Business students.

Chemistry A & B duplicated all the content of a first semester Applied Science course – student were looking for exemptions.

Maths courses all covered material Vn students were all familiar with – but required a lot of work to be done in a very short time. High work load, but little new material.
University Preparation Program

- Foundation Studies courses (used in the UPP) are intended to be taught in 75 hours contact time face to face. A lack of electronic resources to pipe to Vn.

- UPP effectively 5 courses, 25 hours a week contact time, with heavy content load.

- UPP numbers growing rapidly despite the difficulty of the program. Biggest program by enrolments.

- UPP becomes a significant financial drain.
Changes – October 2002

- New organisational structure created and implemented. Heads of Areas created and take greater responsibility for organisation and coordination of Programs. [Org Chart]

- UPP undergoes complete review, and radical changes are planned to deal with problems identified.

- New Program code is developed for UPP (owned by FELCS), to distinguish it from Foundation Studies.

- UPP to become generic program for all students regardless of future degree. Some exposure to both Business and Computing courses, but not highly specialised.
At November 2002 Board of Management meeting the financial and educational challenges were laid out, and it was agreed that the original plan was not in place, and could not be directly implemented.

Board accepts a learning model proposal of 3 hour per week face to face with a further 5 hours per week (per course) in an expanded LRC with “light supervision”, and more emphasis on independent learning.

Implementation of new model to be in January 2003, or there is not sufficient room on the PNT campus for students.

Fees go up by 50% for all new students – starting January 2003.
Changes December 2002

- Decision taken to move to a Laptop program, where all students entering programs are provided a laptop for personal use. Campus to be wireless enabled to allow students to work anywhere anytime. Implementation aimed for May 2003.

- LRC to double in size for January 2003 start.

- Text books to be made available on a compulsory rental system.

- Lack of space becomes critical. Many attempts made to find new buildings – all fail.
Changes January 2003

- Space runs out. English Teaching program forced off campus to 44 Truong Dinh, which requires substantial refitting and will not be ready until mid February.

- LRC expanded to take over lower floor of Villa, but delayed decision means construction work will not be complete until early February.

- Laptop computers ordered to replace lab desktops set aside to be relocated into the LRC. Supplier cannot provide computers on time. Delivery delayed until mid February.

- Moderation of exams and other assessment delayed, as staff in Melbourne are away on Christmas/New Year shutdown, and some moderation required. Student results not finalised by planned start of January semester.
Changes January 2003

- “Standard load” for teaching staff rises to 3 courses per semester.
- Learning materials for courses need to be reworked for new learning model – particularly for more independent learning in the LRC.
- Staff do not have time to prepare materials or engage in necessary professional development to cope with the new learning model about to be introduced.
- Professional development support lost as Roberta Abell takes a Melbourne based position. No replacement made.
Changes January 2003

- UPP courses particularly hard hit by change to 3+5 contact hours model. Major changes to content and materials needed for next semester, but without time to negotiate them. Staff commit substantial time and energy to planning and development of an integrated program.

- Registrar takes up position, and identifies numerous urgent student policy issues – particularly relating to discipline, and student services.

- Marketing manager, HR/Property manager, IT Manager all appointed, but not taking up roles until February or March.
Changes January 2003

- Student enrolments boom.
- A further 150 students hit the system, bringing enrolments to 370+ in the Academic Programs.
- New academic staff recruited at the last minute to cope. Lack of office space for new staff.
- System overload!
February 2003

- January 2003 semester start is delayed until after Tet holiday (mid February). One month respite saves the day.
- New learning model documented in general terms for staff and students in Vn, and circulated to interested parties in Melbourne.
- LRC is expanded, but remains far too small.
- Laptop lab created, with intention of experimenting with wireless technology.
- IT manager arrives, but is immediately swamped with massive backlog of needs.
February 2003

- Campus straining at full capacity.
- Staff lounge opens. Staff can now have conversations, tea and coffee separate from students.
- New learning model a reasonable success. Initial complaints by students reduce as students and staff learn how to work in the new system.
- Teaching staff work very hard to modify materials and teaching style. Lack of academic support telling, but great commitment from staff saves the day. Teaching Community meetings vital.
February 2003
New relationship model proposed

- Academics in Vietnam to be “faculty in another building….. in another country”.
- Both RMIT Vn and RMIT teach the same programs in the same way (as per the original agreement with Vn Govt).
- Materials and assessment to be written by both Melbourne and Vn staff, and shared as a common pool. New materials certified equivalent by Melbourne Course leader.
- No more “Vietnam specials”, just general use e-materials to complement “normal” teaching.
- New programs to be introduced according to new model.
- Generally positive reception from Faculties.
March 2003

March 2003

Ha Noi campus selected. Detailed planning for opening continues - pending Board approval.

- English to open in June 2003
- Information Management/Library Studies in October 2003
- B.Com and MBA in October 2004.
April 2003

- HR/Property Manager takes up position – immediately swamped with backlog of issues.
- Enrolments boom for June semester: 530 students likely in the academic programs (up from 375 in February semester).
- Desperate need for more teaching rooms.
- 12 more academic staff required for June semester.
- Boom in Corporate training programs – new Coordinator appointed.
Future plans – learning and teaching

Learning and teaching model to continue to evolve in negotiation with RMIT Melbourne.

Aim is to:

- Reduce extra work at RMIT.
- Bring RMIT Vn closer to RMIT [“Faculty” rather than “partner organisation”]
- Take greater responsibility for development work in Vn, and contribute ideas and materials back to RMIT.
- Increase exchange of staff and students.
Future Plans – campus development

- Ha Noi to open in June
- Saigon South ground breaking in June, opening in mid 2004.
- E-Town likely to be rented to provide overflow space until Saigon South opening.
- PNT to become Graduate School/Specialist programs.
Future Plans - programs

- MBA in October 2003 at PNT and then Ha Noi.
- Information Management/library studies (in Ha Noi) in October 2003.
- B. Business (Hospitality & Tourism) in demand, and likely to be introduced in 2004.
- Food technology courses possible in collaboration with AWB bakery project.
- Master of Architecture, with Norman Day living in Vietnam as the supervising academic.
- Logistics degree possible, if the right model can be found.
Future Plans - programs

- International Trade Diploma/Degree may be offered, particularly in Ha Noi.
- Technical training courses for the Oil and Gas industry in Vn being investigated.
- Bachelor of Engineering (Communications) slated for October 2004.
- Other engineering to follow.
- Environmental Science likely in 2005.
Future plans - programs

International students from Finland to start doing “semester abroad” study at RMIT Vn in June 2003. This may lead to broader participation from other countries.

University of Hawaii interested in doing a “three continent” degree, with students studying in the US, Vn and Australia.

Further embarrassment of opportunities appear every day!