RMIT University
Learning and Teaching Investment Fund 2009
Final Report
Due date is February 19, 2010 to your LTIF College Coordinator

| Project title                | On –Line Studio Contact Blogsite  
|                             | – an experiment in student networking and collaborative art practices. |
| Project leader              | Dr. Phil Edwards              |
| Team members                | None                          |
| Funds approved              | $8,000                        |

Funds acquitted (attach financial statement)

Introduction
An experimental project that tested the use of a blogsite to act as a conduit for international RMIT SOA students and local students to exchange ideas and collaborate on art related projects so as to reinforce ties between RMIT’s various School’s of Art.

Detailed project description and outline of what was done
An experimental blogsite was established called “The Mythological Studio”. http://mythologicalstudio.blogspot.com/ which aimed to initiate in an informal way contact between interested students in RMIT’s various Schools of Art. It was imagined that, given the increasing use of the Internet as a social networking site, students from different campus’ in different countries would, after encouragement join in activities that encouraged student connections with the possibility of student-driven publications and on – line exhibitions.

I made an initial attempt, to involve students in the project solely within the SOA Painting area through direct communication at a class level. This involved a series of introductory lectures at different year levels in the SOA painting dept. and direct communication with staff at each level. Results for this were disappointing as they resulted in some minor interest expressed but no real involvement. More pressing realities of class assessment needs and school timetables took precedence.

The use of a BLOG project within a structured painting elective, “Art and the Environment” was trial led during first semester of 2009 and worked very well with all students participating on a set project by submitting altered photographs and documentation to a blog site titled ‘Art and The Environment”. All students expressed an interest in being participants in a larger project later in the academic year. ‘Art and the Environment” is going to use the blog exercise again this year, under the tutelage of another lecturer.

I gave a talk to introduce the project in Hong Kong while teaching there at the
SOA. I helped some students set up their own blogs and encouraged others to be involved in the next semesters project. Unfortunately time with these students was brief and only a couple of students continued to contribute to the project.

After failing to get much initial interest through direct contact by the end of second semester, (lectures at student meetings), I sent an email to all students enrolled in the various SOA courses in Hong Kong and Melbourne at the beginning of semester two. The response was immediate and very encouraging. Overnight about 50 students from all courses replied indicating that they would be interested in being involved. Since then the number of students enquiring about the project has increased by about 30.

The site expressed its intention as; -

“The mythological studio is intended to act as an online studio contact site where students from RMIT’s various arts courses and in different geographical locations can interact with each other purely on a social level or as way of setting up contacts for either on-line projects or exhibitions/books/ whatever in real space. It is at an embryonic stage at present and welcomes any interaction. At present artists from Hong Kong, New Zealand and Australia, and in all courses, are involved but hopefully this will expand to other universities and maybe artists outside Uni’s as well. A publication may result from the actual site itself when there is enough material.”

It was hoped that this informal and open-ended invitation would appeal to students so that they may be inclined to expend energy on a project that was not embedded in a course.

It was envisaged that, given time, for the project to develop, nominally one year, participating students would make informal contact with each other through the submission of images in the form of photographs, written commentary about their ideas about art, and hopefully, develop collaborative art projects, on-line or in real space at a RMIT SOA location.

At this stage I have been forced to reconsider my approach to this project and am currently devising new strategies, in consultation with staff at Hong Kong and 1st and 2nd year students.

The full aims of the BLOG project have only been partially realised at this stage – the end of the academic year 2009. The experimental project though, is established and is now ongoing, with the aim of improving outcomes in 2010.

The main problem was not one of lack of student interest but perhaps of having too ambitious an expectation of being able to fulfil all aims in one year. The realities of school timetables and competing interests of structured courses compromised the complexity of delivering the outcomes I envisaged. At this stage it must be said that the aim of improved student learning experiences, outcomes and employment opportunities are still embryonic. As an experimental project, which this is, there are still some issues that need to be refined and that is the aim of the next stage in this project in 2010. It is an innovative project in that it endeavours to use an online activity to add to students social networking skills and collaborative learning processes. As such the activity while specific to RMIT SOA may have potential when it is better adapted throughout the university.

### Attach the full and detailed report and evaluation of your project outcomes including evidence of the impact the project has had. Also make reference to how the outcomes address the five key objectives:

- Improved student learning experiences, outcomes and employment opportunities
- Innovation
- Strategic alignment
- University wide application
I have identified some problems in the administering of this project in 2009.

- The project suffers from not being embedded within the course structure somehow.

- As semesters are very short, (12 weeks), and operate at different times in Hong Kong and Melbourne it was difficult for students to maintain the momentum or energy level needed while they are also involved in various assessment tasks for accredited subjects. End of year assessment, graduation shows and swat back periods all impeded the ongoing development of the BLOG project.

An initial misjudgement of mine was that participants would naturally develop communication that would continue the year round and be ongoing. I still think this could happen but I propose the following nine procedures be set up in 2010 to encourage this.

1/ The blogsite acts as a general site with specific links to project based activities that operate only for a short time (perhaps 3 weeks) within a specific semester.

2/ Each semester a specific enquiry, possibly but not necessarily, linked to research aims of the University, be set for students to pursue. Research cluster groups will be informed of this.

3/ At the end of each mini-project the BLOG results is presented as a possible publication in the form of B/W photocopy booklet that is archived. This makes a physical outcome that can be used by the students on their CVs and as a resource for research staff.

4/ Staff at each university are encouraged to promote the use of the BLOG site as a social networking site and WIL tool for students to develop skills at communication and collaborative practices. It is important though that staff do not see this as an added burden to their workload.

5/ The Blog project becomes embedded in BLACKBOARD or as part of a WIKKI. This allows students access to it without having a further allocation of work hours for staff.

6/ It would still be necessary for an individual staff member to be the administrator so as to monitor RMIT’s legal responsibilities for postings and duty of care of students. I envisage that as my role initially still but envisage a ctee of interested students from Hong Kong and Melbourne also being involved as administrators in order to encourage the WIL activities related to professional responsibility.

7/ A more direct contact is established between Hong Kong and Melbourne SOA with a contact people (on-line) at each location on staff. It will be
8/ The site be used to advertise and promote exhibitions and events concerning student activities in either location.

9/ It may be possible to use the site as an informal online tutorial contact. Already some students have asked for feedback from other students on their studies and their artworks. This will be encouraged through the site in 2010.

Conversations with and emails from students indicate to me an ongoing interest I this project developing and so at this stage I intend to make a series of small projects throughout the year. Immediate steps include 1/ bulk email to students with small RE-ACT activities proposed. Several students suggested this as a means of having on-line international exhibitions within a fixed time frame and with an identifiable outcome. These exhibitions have currency as official exhibitions worthy of inclusion on a professional CV.

2/ Individual contact with staff at all locations in order to bring them on-side with the aims of the project so as they may help promote the project and perhaps even suggest selected students for specific activities.

3/ Small exchange exhibitions and low-fi publications in Hong Kong and Melbourne to encourage interest in supporting the activities of the project. The cost of these small exhibitions to be borne by me, (postage. Photocopying, binding etc).

4/ The promotion of these blogprojects as they are finished to be imbedded into RMIT’s official web site.

### Summary of the project, outcomes, impacts and dissemination

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dissemination of project outcomes both completed and planned. This should include both within RMIT and externally.</th>
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<td>At this stage there is the blogsite only to disseminate information re the blog project. As I will be involved in the setting up of Blackboard sites within the SOA in 2010 I intend to promote the site through that. Also direct contact with student in both Hong Kong and Melbourne will be amplified through visits and talks to raise the profile of the project.</td>
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### Note:

This experimental on-line studio contact blogsite project sought to encourage both social networking links and professional collaborative activities between students in RMIT’s various on and off-shore Schools of Art. Its results at this stage are mixed but there are enough encouraging signs to continue with project in 2010.

A blog site titled the Mythological Studio, [http://mythologicalstudio.blogspot.com/](http://mythologicalstudio.blogspot.com/), was initiated and, after some considerable difficulty gaining a profile, garnered enough student interest to encourage belief in its worth as an ongoing project. Over 50 students expressed interest in being involved initially in 2nd semester from all disciplines in the SOA but competing academic activities, school timetables and the open-ended approached first suggested to student activities meant that at the end of
2009 many of the aims of the project were still embryonic. Student contact and feedback has been very positive and constant though such to indicate that the project should still be developed but with students having more ownership over time-based collaborative projects and with the resulting dissemination of successful experiments being readily available to the general public as well as the RMIT community so as to reward students with something they can use on CVs as a record of their professional artistic activities. Students have expressed desire to use the site as a networking site, collaborative exhibition site and most often as tutorial feed-back site between locations.

It is intended that the project be extended and diversified in 2010 with a series of defined collaborative exercises between small pairings or groups of students, in greater consultation with supportive and interested staff, at locations in Hong Kong and Melbourne. Supplementary reports of the projects activities and successes will gazetted in appropriate RMIT forums.