Interview with the School of Business Information Technology's Head of School - Prof. Carolyn Dowling

LR: You are relatively new to RMIT, can you tell us a bit about your academic background and what you were doing before coming here?

CD: I came here from Australian Catholic University in Victoria Parade where I was most recently Head of the School of Business and Informatics (Victoria). For a number of years prior to that I was Head of the School of Arts and Sciences at ACU. This was a large ‘conglomerate’ multi-campus School - an aggregation of diverse Departments including the Department of Mathematics, Science and Information Technology, of which I had previously been Head.

I had a rather varied career before becoming an academic, including quite a long period as a freelance writer. It was actually through various writing projects that I became seriously involved with computers in the early 80s.

My PhD from Monash University looked at the implications of some examples of the metaphorical language of computing. I was (and still am) interested in the way metaphorical concepts such as computing 'space'/cyberspace, the idea of the computer as a 'tool' and so on, simultaneously reflect and construct how the technology is used. The thesis focussed particularly on implications for educational uses of computers, but I've subsequently looked at this issue in a range of contexts.

LR: What is your area of research expertise?

CD: My research career has spanned around 20 years, and one of the interesting things...
about working in an area where so much change occurs is that some research themes persist over time, while others are relevant for only a particular period. You need to be flexible in shifting your focus to align with new developments in the technology.

At different times I’ve researched a range of HCI issues, aspects of Logo programming, VR in education and training, computer mediated communication within various contexts, AI applications (focussing in recent years on agent software), and assorted ethical and social issues.

LR: Can you describe some of the research projects and activities that you are currently involved in?

CD: At the moment my personal research is on the ‘back burner’ while I get to grips with administering the large and complex School of Business IT! In the longer term, being realistic, I suspect that the demands of my new position will mean that I’ll need to concentrate on theoretical/conceptual research issues rather than those demanding ‘hands on’ involvement. Overall I’m anticipating taking on more of a ‘mentoring’ role assisting early career researchers, helping to negotiate research partnerships, and hopefully having some involvement in research projects within the School. I’ve enjoyed quite a long period as an ‘active’ researcher, with the assistance of a number of generous mentors along the way, so it’s probably time to give something back to the system in this regard.

LR: Can you tell us about any initiatives within the School of Business Information Technology that are directed around research?

CD: Research in the School is focussed mainly in the fields of Knowledge Management, e-Business and e-Learning, with links to broader areas pertaining to the design and management of Information Systems. Several of our researchers are currently awaiting the outcome of grant applications related to these areas of interest.

The School is involved in the hosting of several conferences taking place over the next 12 months, a major one being ICCE 2004, a large Asia-Pacific conference concerned with educational uses of computing technologies. This conference traditionally attracts cutting edge researchers with a ‘technological’ focus from countries such as Japan and Taiwan, and will provide an excellent opportunity for our staff to showcase their own research, and to set up collaborative networks with their Asian colleagues.

LR: What do you see as some of the major challenges facing research in the business disciplines at RMIT?

CD: We certainly don’t lack talent. I see our biggest challenges being the usual ones of time and money. We’re moving into an era of much tighter budget constraints, and it’s already proving very difficult for the School to provide staff with the support they need both to compete for research projects and to sustain their overall research endeavours. Unfortunately the corporate world is also more constrained in the funding available to support research. Like everyone else, we need to come up with some more creative strategies!

LR: Can you offer any advice to aspiring researchers that may help them achieve their career and research goals?

CD: I think it’s important to find a research area you’re really passionate about, so that it’s a hobby rather than just a ‘job’. Research can be very hard, time-consuming work. The external rewards may be a long time coming, so it really helps if you can enjoy what you’re doing for its own sake.
Opportunity of HDR Students
ATN LEAP MODULES:
Project Management
Research Commercialisation

Getting the Most Out Of Your Research Degree

Registration is now available for the above moderated online modules on Project Management & Research Commercialisation offered over ten weeks beginning on the 13th of October, 2003.

These modules are designed to help you to gain extra skills that employers look for in research graduates. This and others will be offered regularly for students at the ATN Universities (Curtin, RMIT, UniSA, UTS and QUT).

- YOU PAY NO FEES TO TAKE PART -

Project Management

This module is designed to increase your understanding of project management and help you develop the skills required for managing successful projects. As the key to successful projects is Project Definition and Project Planning, the module will focus on these two aspects of project management.

Upon completion of this module you will have increased your understanding of Project Management processes, developed a sound understanding of how project definition and planning can support and enhance your project, applied project management techniques to your own project, used a range of project planning tools to develop a plan for your own project and reflected on how the tools and principles presented apply to the workplace contexts relevant to your career.

This module is not intended to be a comprehensive course on project management but a 20-hour introduction that will give you a sound understanding of the key elements of project management.

Research Commercialisation

This module considers the links between research and knowledge transfer. The readings and activities in this module will introduce you to the key issues in this development process and link these to your current research project and its potential for commercialisation.

The intention of this module, as with all the ATN LEAP modules, is to help you develop skills and knowledge which you might otherwise not acquire as you carry out your research project. This module alerts you to the possibilities that research projects like yours offer for knowledge transfer and gives you the chance to work through the steps that are required to achieve this outcome. You already may have considered prospects for commercialising your research; in this case, the module provides you with the opportunity to reflect on your plans and test them out against the commercialisation models presented.

The module has been designed with 2nd or 3rd year postgraduate research students in mind, when projects are well developed. It is, however, applicable to most levels of postgraduate research studies, for individuals in the process of formulating, as well as completing, their research topic.

With a time commitment of only two hours per week for each module, over 10 weeks, you will be able to build your knowledge base, and talk with other students and the moderator online about the topic and your research. By participating in the interactive module tasks, you will receive a certificate of completion.

Because ATN modules are focused on your own project this will be time well spent.

Participants in module trials report that they had emerged with new insights of value to their ongoing research.

For further information please visit: https://olt.qut.edu.au/udf/ATN-leap/

Email (Helen.Lennox@rmit.edu.au) and indicate that you wish to register for the module.

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Geneva Assn: Promotion of Studies & University Research in Field of Risk & Insurance Economics.

Deadline: (external 30 Sep)

Association offers grants for research into risk & insurance economics. Apps must be accompanied by CV, description of research undertaken & letters of recommendation from 2 professors of economics. Two types of grants offered:

(1) Research Grants - primarily intended for research for PhD thesis in economics.
Amount: 10,000 Swiss Francs for 10 months

(2) Subsidies for Thesis - for authors of uni theses already submitted, dealing in depth with subject in field of risk & insurance economics.
Amount: 3,000 Swiss Francs to help defray printing costs

Suggested themes & subjects are:

Economic theory: Uncertainty: Imperfect information in deterministic v. indeterministic models; Insurance & risk management in service economy; Insurability & economic fundamentals; Insurability: Privatisation processes & public intervention; problem of reinsurer of last resort; Credibility theory (in actuarial sciences) & economics of scale; Comprehensive theories of risk: Defining, comparing & integrating pure risks, financial & entrepreneurial risks; Fiscal policy, solidarity & private insurance; Monetary stability & its impact on pure risk management; Systemic risks, liability portfolio of insurance & pure risk
management; changing role of capital in contemporary service economy with respect to financial institutions; economic value of human life.

Economic practice: Moral hazard & fraud in management of pure risks & insurance; Derivatives & their role for insurance on assets & liability side; Economics of health & medical care; development of technology in specific sectors & their impact on insurability of risks; Reinsurance markets; Role of govt, risk management & insurance institutions with reference to catastrophic & environmental risks, Financing the life-cycle, in particular with regard to increasing life expectancy of those over 60: role of insurance & public institutions; Productive activities, employment & health; National & international institutions, their impact on regulation & solvency rules in insurance market (EU, WTO etc); Fiscal policy & reserving for large low-frequency risks; Distribution strategies in insurance; Emerging markets: Problems & opportunities.

Contact: email info@genevaassociation.org

Sloan Foundation: Globalisation

RMIT deadline: Open (external: continuous via Letter of Inquiry)

Project goal is to provide fact-based picture of globalisation, primarily within specific industries. Grants have been made to study company location decisions and effects of these decisions on jobs, wages and the company's competitive position in a number of industries: computer flat display, auto, computer disk file, semiconductor manufacturing, personal computer and computer software. International collaboration is encouraged.

Contact: Mr Frank Mayadas Tel +1 (212) 649-1649 email mayadas@sloan.org URL www.sloan.org/programs/stndrd_global.shtml

Humboldt Research Fellowships

RMIT deadline: Open (external: continuous)

Fellowship supports highly qualified scholars of all nationalities and disciplines to carry out long-term research projects in Germany. Applicants design own research projects and select hosts at German institutions. Short-term study tours, participation in conferences, or educational visits cannot be funded.

Amount: €2,100 - €3,000. Special allw available for accompanying family members, travel expenses and German language instruction

Duration: 6 - 12 months

Eligibility: Research fellowships offered on worldwide competitive basis. Scholars from all nations and all academic disciplines may apply. No quotas in respect of either country or academic discipline. Applicants must have PhD or comparable academic degree and be aged less than 40 years. Humanities scholars should have sufficient German proficiency to conduct proposed research. Science scholars must provide proof they have sufficient proficiency in English.

Contact: (US) Tel +1 (202) 783-1907 email avh@bellatlantic.net (Bonn) Tel (011) +49 228-833-0 email select@avh.de URL www.humboldt-foundation.de/en/programme/stip_aus/index.htm

AusAID: International Seminar Support Scheme (ISSS)

RMIT deadline: Open (External: Continuous. Applics must be received at least 2 months prior to seminar to be considered)
ISSS funds attendance at international development-oriented seminars in Aust & overseas. International seminars defined as seminars, conferences, workshops & symposiums at which over 20% of expected participants (for seminars of less than 100 total participants), or over 20 individuals (for conferences of 100 or more total participants), will be from developing countries outside country where seminar is held. Normally 25 participants min. Priority is given to short seminars with clear focus & practical value. AusAID will give priority to seminars that focus on:

i. poverty reduction including, employment generation
ii. good governance, human rights & participatory development
iii. private sector development
iv. sustainable improvement of production & productivity in agriculture & other sectors, incl. technology transfer
v. economic policy reform, incl. trade & income-related issues
vi. health & population, particularly primary health & child & maternal health
vii. education, incl. adult literacy & distance education
viii. urbanisation & infrastructure development
ix. environment & development

Amount: $5,000 - $50,000. Normally only 4 participants considered from any one country. Gender balance should be achieved where possible. Up to 2 Australians considered for funding assistance. $5,000 min (except Aust nominees attending a conference organised by non-Aust orgs) & $A50,000 max may be provided for any one seminar for

i. cheapest available airfares for approved participants
ii. modest living expenses for approved participant(s), accom, & set daily living allw.

Eligibility: Orgs not eligible for funding under ISSS if already receive AusAID funding that provides support for seminars or related activities. Seminar organisers apply on behalf of participants. Seminars must be initiated or co-sponsored by Aust org. Company managing a seminar will not necessarily be regarded as co-sponsor. Non-Aust orgs (without Aust co-sponsorship) of seminars held overseas can seek funding assistance for Australians, if participant is invited either as keynote speaker or key resource person.

Eligible for funding are:

奋进 persons from developing countries who are in position to use seminar experience to influence development activities in their countries, esp. in implementation of change, e.g. people in positions of executive power or policy influence - delivery of paper at seminar is not sufficient grounds by itself for nominating person for funding assistance

奋进 Australians regarded as vital to success of seminar e.g. invited to deliver keynote address or be principal facilitator at seminar held in developing country in Asia-Pacific region.

奋进 Aust public servants invited as individuals with specific expertise may be funded if they are otherwise eligible, but not if they are attending seminar as official representatives of their dept. AusAID officers & persons directly/indirectly connected with org. of seminar are ineligible.

Contact: Tel (02) 6206 4000
email infoausaid@ausaid.gov.au
Research & Supervisor's

A series of engaging and constructive articles by RMIT Research Development Unit's Assoc. Prof. Pam Green, and New Zealand Researchers Prof. Jacqueline Rowarth (Director, Research and Dean of the Graduate School at UNITEC, Auckland) and Prof. Ian Cornforth (Adjunct Professor of Soil and Plant Science, UNITEC Institute of Technology, Auckland).

These affable papers provide research students and supervisors with insights and advice concerning problems and hurdles often encountered during the research process. Below are short extracts with the complete versions available online at the RDU’s website @ www.rmit.edu.au/BUS/RDU/R&S

Writer’s Block
Jacqueline Rowarth, Ian Cornforth and Pam Green

'...Overcoming writer's block is possible by following various steps, the first of which is not to angst about it. Just as worrying about not sleeping ensures you will not sleep, worrying about writer’s block ensures that the words won’t flow. Just as relaxing about being awake at 3 am (and using the time to ensure a few moments dreaming about your new life after thesis completion) will allow you to go back to sleep, so relaxing about the block and following the suggested steps will allow the words to flow...' (Read on @ www.rmit.edu.au/BUS/RDU/R&S)

Managing Your Supervisor Effectively
Pam Green and Jacqueline Rowarth

'The relationship between supervisor and candidate is indeed a delicate one. There are many shifts in the research journey, difficult and puzzling zones of uncertainty along the way, and innumerable possibilities in terms of roles within the relationship. So, yes, the complexities really do abound. However, all does not rest in the hands of fate. You can actually influence the ways in which both of you work. As student you can ‘manage’, at least in part, your supervisor - remembering, however, that it is a two way process...' (Read on @ www.rmit.edu.au/BUS/RDU/R&S)

Myths in research degrees
Jacqueline Rowarth, Ian Cornforth and Pam Green

'The pursuit of a research degree is fraught with myths. Be wary of the following (and undoubtedly other) urban myths that might come your way...' (Read on @ www.rmit.edu.au/BUS/RDU/R&S)

Finding the Light at the End of the Tunnel: Completion Strategies for Research Degrees
Pam Green and Jacqueline Rowarth

'Beginning a higher degree is not unlike embarking upon a long journey where the light at the end of the tunnel often seems elusive. However, the time does somehow flee once you move along the tunnel a little, and keeping on task and keeping in view your goal of a timely (and successful) completion is vital. What completion strategies, as candidate, supervisor and/or institutional level, are available to us?' (Read on @ www.rmit.edu.au/BUS/RDU/R&S)

Criteria for Appointment of Supervisors
Jacqueline Rowarth and Pam Green

‘Across Australasia, research training has been highlighted as a vital part of positioning for the Knowledge Economy of the 21st Century. The ‘research assessment exercise’, which appears under various acronyms in various countries, requires timely successful completions from research students. The onus is currently on the Tertiary Education Institutions to ensure that the students have an appropriate support system to assist them to achieve their potential within the appropriate
timeframe and according to the degree in which they are enrolled - that is, to achieve (in alignment with their potential) a successful completion in a timely manner. 
(Read on @ www.rmit.edu.au/BUS/RDU/R&S)

Writing Your Way to Success
Pam Green and Jacqueline Rowarth

To write or not to write? Is that the question?
Actually no - that is not the issue at all.

Writing matters. Writing your way through your research degree is a key path to success. To write is to ‘know’. In other words, it is through the act of writing that we best think and through writing that we can find out what it is that we know (or do not know). Ideas and questions are found within ourselves through the act of writing. 
(Read on @ www.rmit.edu.au/BUS/RDU/R&S)

Recent Student submissions

Congratulations to the following research students who have recently submitted there theses for examination:

Ms Meredith Doig, PhD, School of Management,
Thesis title: The Nature of Organisational Sustainability

Mr Vikash Ramiah, PhD, School of Economics & Finance,
Thesis title: Quantifying Noise Trader Risk

Ms Tricia Hiley, PhD, School of Management,
Thesis title: Living and working in the First Person

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Staff at the RDU
Assoc. Prof. Pam Green, Associate Dean (Research)
Bronwyn Coate, Lecturer Research Methods
Liz Merlot, Research Officer
Kalpana Lalji, Administrative Officer
Laszlo Romer, Administration Assistant
Ebony Rea, Administration Assistant
James Hill, Acting Research Student Admin. Officer

The aim of this newsletter is to keep staff informed of research activity within RMIT Business and of research opportunities both outside and within the faculty. If you have any contributions (we are always interested in research or researchers for our feature article) that you think would be of interest to the faculty please contact Bronwyn Coate at the RDU.

The Business Research News is also available for viewing on the RDU’s web site shortly after it has been distributed in paper form. The web site also contains information for research staff and students including the RDU’s library holdings.