RMIT Business PhD Candidate receives Research Fellowship at New York University

Written by Heath Spong (PhD candidate, School of Economics and Finance)

There is no finer opportunity for a PhD student than to study at one of the world’s leading research institutions. From April through to November of 2001 I was fortunate enough to enjoy just such an opportunity. It was over this period that I was a visiting PhD student in the Department of Economics at New York University (NYU) and, more specifically, a participant in the well-known Austrian Economics Program at NYU.

This fabulous opportunity was conceived after my academic supervisor here in the School of Economics and Finance, Dr. Keith Jakee, contacted the Director of the Austrian Economics Program at NYU, Professor Mario Rizzo. Following their initial correspondence, I was invited to apply for a Graduate Student Research Fellowship in the Austrian Economics Program. After further correspondence between Professor Rizzo and myself, a visit of approximately 8 months was arranged.

NYU is located in the heart of Greenwich Village, which is in the lower section of Manhattan Island. While many American Universities have a campus that is somewhat detached from the population at large, NYU is unique in that its campus life is located within the surrounding activities of New York City. This backdrop includes the thousands of bars and coffee houses, the vast assortment of international cuisine, and an amazingly colourful street life.

The Department of Economics at NYU is one of the world’s finest, often obtaining an international ranking within the top ten. The faculty members with mainstream research interests include theorists such as William Baumol, Douglass Gale, Boyan Jovanovic, Raquel Fernandez and Debraj Ray, to name but a handful. The Austrian group that meets at NYU includes the well-known...
The progress of my research on entrepreneurial theory, and my development as an academic economist more generally, was tremendously enhanced by my visit to the Austrian Economics Program at NYU. I think there are four primary reasons for this. Firstly, there was great effort made by my advisor at NYU, Professor Rizzo, to read and discuss my research. The effort made by Professor Rizzo represented an invaluable complement to the continued thoughtful readership and feedback provided by my RMIT supervisor, Dr. Jakee.

Secondly, I greatly benefited from the opportunity to present my research to the Austrian Economics Colloquium. This provided me with feedback from established scholars with research interests similar to my own. The critique that I received from these theorists has assisted me in highlighting the strengths and improving the weaknesses of my research.

Thirdly, I found the academic activity at NYU, both within the Economics Department and in other departments, to be another substantial resource. For example, there is an expansive range of seminars and colloquia. There are meetings that focus on specific research areas within economics, and there is also the opportunity to attend seminars in other departments. However, some of the most interesting meetings are those that combine research from a number of different disciplines. Attending such meetings enabled me to gain valuable insights from those intellectuals working in different research fields.

Fourthly, interaction with active research students, also with varied research interests, was another highlight. Indeed, it is often stated that the greatest resource offered by a quality graduate school is the opportunity to interact with motivated peers. I certainly found this to be the case at NYU, where students are eager to interact with others, both intellectually and socially. There is so much that students can learn from other students with different backgrounds, both academically and culturally.

In addition to these four factors, the hospitality of NYU itself, and particularly the Department of Economics and Austrian Economics Program, ensured that despite the recent tragedies that have occurred in New York City, my experience as a Visiting Scholar at NYU will be one that I will draw on for many years to come.

A special thanks to Heath for writing this article for the BRN and providing the photograph. Heath may be contacted by email: heathspong@hotmail.com

Editors Note: Students interested in studying in the US should check the research Funding Opportunity (p.4) about the American Australian Association (AAA) fellowships available to Australian students who would benefit from engaging in advanced research or study in the US.

Recent Completions

The following students have recently completed and submitted their theses:
Brett Scarlett (PhD) School of Management
Thesis title: 'Enterprise effectiveness: A cross-cultural study of business goals.'

Paul Myers (PhD) School of Accounting and Law
Thesis title: 'The conceptual framework - The views of natural shareholders in Australia.'
Interview with Prominent New Researcher at RMIT.....

Prof. Kosmas Smyrnios

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

KS: Since graduating in Health Sciences in 1975, I have embarked on a unique course of academic and professional development that has exposed me to theoretical paradigms, research, and literature associated with varied disciplines and professional groupings, including marketing, accounting and finance, business management, psychology, psychological medicine, sociology, health sciences, and physics.

In the mid 1990s, I established a key research unit in family business within the Faculty of Business and Economics at Monash University, which enabled me to focus my breadth of experience on in-depth research in an interdisciplinary field. Under my direction, the Unit carried out cutting-edge research into capital market decision-making, fast-growth enterprises, work-family conflict, leadership, and the development of SME indices. This research is highly regarded and attracts much interest internationally and nationally. In 2001, I was awarded the prize for The Best Research Paper at the 12th World Family Business Network (FBN) Conference, Rome. I also won the award in 1998. At the national level, I have influenced ways in which academics, professional organizations, and the media view Small-to-Medium enterprises, providing a unique way of dissecting the market.

BC: What is your area of research expertise?

KS: I am an experienced applied behavioural researcher with a career path spanning over 20-years. I am a Foundation Board Member of International Family Enterprise Research Academy. My area of research expertise is in the family business area, including fast-growth enterprises, work-family conflict, succession issues, as well as methodological issues in research. I also have a track record of teaching postgraduate research methods across disciplinary fields.

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

KS: Presently, I am involved in a number of very interesting projects including fast-growth enterprises. This work has been undertaken with the support of BRW, AXA Australia, and the ARC. The present project has been tracking the performance of a number of these organizations over a 3-year period. Another area of current interest is in the work-family conflict domain. This work concentrates on the impact of work-to-family conflict on business and family performance. Yet a further study that I am involved with colleagues in the School of Marketing concerns the development of benchmarks and indices relating to marketing spend by financial institutions across different marketing and advertising elements, and business units.

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

KS: One of the main challenges facing research in the business and related disciplines at RMIT is being identified as international leaders in defined scholarly and professional areas. This is clearly the case with several Faculties within the University. I would like to see a number of teams working together in order to establish internationally- and nationally-relevant research projects, possibly in collaboration with colleagues from overseas. Another is converting
our applied research talents and links into ARC projects and scholarly publications. A further challenge is the identification of interdisciplinary Key Faculty areas of research that will culminate in commercial activity and intellectual property rights for the University. Within this context it is important to attract high calibre postgraduate students to work within these areas.

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

K.S. There a number of processes aspiring researchers could consider. I am a strong believer in mentoring and working in a collegial fashion. Much can be gained from working with experienced colleagues such as tapping into existing projects, submitting joint grant applications, and writing and doing research together. It is also an advantage to build upon one’s existing strengths and draw upon what one might first consider being unrelated expertise from one’s research and professional experience. Much can be gained by combining what you might think are disparate and unrelated areas or disciplines. Finally, as academics we have made a conscious effort to embark on a course of lifelong learning. Up-skilling oneself to develop research strengths is also another important component.

A special thanks is extended to Prof. Smyrnios for his insightful comments. Prof. Smyrnios may be contacted by email: kosmas.smyrnios@rmit.edu.au

Research Funding Opportunities

Interested in Doing Graduate or Post-Doctoral Research in the US?

WANTED: Australia’s brightest graduate and post-doctoral students in business, science, technology, medicine and engineering with innovative ideas.

REWARD: US$25,000 Fellowship for the Year 2002-2003 in the USA

DEADLINE: April 8, 2002, at 5 p.m. New York time

NEED MORE INFO.? Visit http://www.aaanyc.org/fellowships

The American Australian Association (AAA) is pleased to announce its first-ever fellowship program for Australians at the graduate and post-doctoral levels. Four fellowships of up to $25,000 each will be awarded to applicants with innovative research proposals who can best explain why a visit to the United States is important to their research or study and how it will ultimately strengthen Australia’s social programs and economy.

The Fellowships will support part of the costs of one year of research or study in the United States. Fellows are responsible for arranging their institutional or university affiliation. Go to http://www.aaanyc.org/fellowships for detailed information and an application form. Complete applications must be received by 8 April 2002, at 5 p.m. New York time at the office of the American Australian Association in New York. Applicants must use the AAA Education Fund forms and submit them in hard copy by mail. Electronic or faxed applications will not be accepted. See Instructions and Guidelines for details.

The AAAEF Committee and a panel of prominent scientists, entrepreneurs and business executives will judge the applications. Short-listed applicants will be interviewed in Australia and winners will be notified in June 2002.
Virtual Research Institute Small Grant Scheme Success

Congratulations are extended to Assoc. Prof. Sinclair Davidson from the School of Economics and Finance and Assoc. Prof. Bobby Banerjee from the School of Management who have both had success in obtaining VRI small grants in 2002.

Assoc. Prof. Davidson along with Assoc. Prof. Mark McGillivray from the School of Social Science and Planning obtained a VRI to investigate financing sustainable development in low income countries.

Assoc. Prof. Bobby Banerjee along with Dr. Ian Thomas from the School of Social Science and Planning obtained a grant to research the development of a sustainable forestry enterprise with indigenous stakeholders analysing the social impact of this.

Congratualtions and well done Sinclair and Bobby.

The RDU has Moved.......

The RDU has moved back to Building 108 on Level 13. Phone extensions and contact details remain the same for RDU staff. Please feel welcome to come and visit us in our new offices.

RMIT Foundation: International Visiting Fellowships

The RMIT Foundation International Visiting Fellowships have been established to support faculties, departments and research centers/groups in attracting international leaders in their field to visit RMIT and present lectures, seminars or other activities relevant to teaching, learning and research.

The RMIT Foundation has allocated $30,000 p.a (2002-2005) to support grants for International Visiting Fellowships. A maximum of three grants will be made each year with minimum grant being $5,000 and maximum $20,000.

Faculties, departments and research centers/groups applying for the grant are asked to match the value of the grant dollar for dollar preferably through external funding sources such as corporate or industry sponsorship or grant from another Trust or Foundation.

The RMIT Foundation grant may only be used to cover the cost of travel, accommodation and per diem or honorarium as applicable. Funding for seminars, lectures and other activities may be funded by the faculty, department or research center/group directly or by utilizing additional external funding obtained through corporate or industry sponsorship or grant from another Trust or Foundation.

For an application form and Fellowship criteria please email michael.joyce@rmit.edu.au

Deadline: 8 March 2002

For details regarding other current research funding opportunities please visit the Research & Development Funding website which provides a list of grants, awards, scholarships and fellowships available to staff and students and is updated weekly at: http://www.rmit.edu.au/departments/rd/funding.htm

Also for a listing of scholarships available please visit the Joint Academic Scholarship On-line Network (JASON) website. JASON is an on-line database of scholarship information for postgraduate students. For further information please visit : http://www.jason.unimelb.edu.au/
What’s New in the RDU Library

External Working Papers


**Upcoming Conferences**

**Dying, Death and Grieving - A Cultural Perspective Conference, March 22-23, RMIT Storey Hall**

The Australian Multicultural Foundation Aged Care Training Institute (MACTI) which is a partnership between RMIT and the Australian Multicultural Foundation is holding a 2 day conference which aims to broaden our understanding of the diversity in relation to communicative religious practices associated with death and the process of dying and grieving. The conference will cover a broad range of issues such as spiritual needs, physical needs, procedures prior to death, general beliefs from different cultures, perceptions of death and the dying patient and other related issues. For further information on this conference please contact Daveen Valentine at MACTI on 9457 4697 or email acti@rmit.edu.au.