

before making decisions about where they want to be after graduation. This desire is fuelled by exciting and interesting placements offered by host organisations.

Sometimes such comments from students make us think differently about the profession that we may have taken for granted through our long professional association. The changing face of the job market has made many students keenly aware of the opportunities that our education programs and the profession offer and certainly has an impact on the types of courses programs that we deliver in information, knowledge and records management. Our undergraduate program in particular, offers broad scope for careers, with many of the students keen to work in business or non-traditional library environments in content and knowledge management roles.

Underpinning the skills delivered in the lecture theatre, classroom and lab at RMIT is both practical experience and a research base which has developed recently with the appointment of new academic staff. Research interests focus on the theory of LIS, the relationships between doctoral education and the professions' new models of scholarly publishing, research capacity building and knowledge production, information management in the electronic era, and historical aspects of the profession. Teaching and research combine at RMIT University to deliver collaborative, student focussed programs.

Professions depend upon their members to increase the knowledge base and narrow the gap that exists between research and practice. At RMIT we also focus on the nexus between teaching and research which enables our students, the professionals of the future, to make those vital connections.

**Bernadette Welch**  
GDIM Program Co-ordinator  
School of Business Information Technology  
RMIT University  
bernadette.welch@rmit.edu.au

## Convergence in the information professions

This is an exciting time to be an information professional.

The world of information is dynamic, shifting, multidisciplinary and converging. Professions, disciplines and technologies are merging; the traditional information professions are undergoing radical re-invention and the world demands new information roles that we could not even imagine a decade ago. Flexibility, imagination and creative problem-solving, as well as technical savvy are the hallmarks of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century information professional.

We need to recognize that the information professions are no longer confined to traditional cultural institutions. Organisations - government departments, cultural institutions, corporations, community groups - need people who understand that the creation and delivery of information is a complex interrelationship between users, their situations and the capabilities of emergent technologies. On any given day organisations need highly-skilled professionals who can build

seamless systems to deliver electronic information in a myriad of formats to individual desktops. Who can build databases, digitize analog materials for access and preservation, manage content and its metadata, create wikis for knowledge sharing, manage digital objects such as podcasts, vodcasts and RSS feeds, in fact, integrate the whole range of Web2 technologies. And of course, everyone well-designed websites and intranets in which the content can be easily found!

Even a cursory glance at this short list reveals that the age-old principles for managing and organizing information are only one of the building blocks required. An interdisciplinary approach, merging theory and practice, reflection and curiosity are vital for this brave new online world. Meeting this challenge requires a convergence of many disciplines, including information systems, information design, library and information science, and the information communication and social sciences.

So how can we begin to educate the next generation of information professionals to be able to meet these challenges? Clearly any education program must emphasise adaptability and flexibility, creativity and problem-solving, theoretical understanding and practical skills. One important component of this is 'learning by doing'; students should be constantly challenged to solve a variety of information problems in the context of real-life situations. We need to equip students with the ability to transfer knowledge into a variety of different contexts — professionals who can deliver a conceptual design for a database before lunch, re-write content for a new audience by mid-afternoon and coordinate a dinner-time online discussion. But seriously, since programs cannot teach all the skills students will need over years of highly varied professional practice, educators must instill a serious commitment to continual professional development and learning.

**Michael Olsson**  
Lecturer, UTS  
Michael.Olsson@uts.edu.au

**Maureen Henninger**  
Senior Lecturer, UTS  
Maureen.Henninger@uts.edu.au

## ALIA's course recognition

ALIA works with education providers and other stakeholders - including students and employers - to ensure courses equip graduates with the knowledge, skills and capabilities to provide their clients with the right information at the right time.

The Association recognises courses at librarian and library technician level. The recognition process is concerned with ensuring the quality of the course and its relevance to current and emerging library and information practice. Courses to be recognised are assessed against ALIA's criteria for course recognition and underpinned by the Association's education policy statements. For further course recognition information go to <http://www.alia.org.au/education/courses/recognition.html>

## What is ALIA's role in education for library and information professionals?

The phrase 'library and information professionals' refers to those members of the profession who have completed an entry-level qualification in library and information management at either Associate or Library Technician level.

ALIA is the body which sets and maintains standards for entry into the library and information profession in Australia. It plays a vital role in ensuring that education for the profession produces graduates who have the ability to provide excellent library and information services to benefit the nation and individual clients and who can respond to and meet the ever-changing information needs of a dynamic society.

## What does course recognition mean for me as an ALIA personal member?

Applicants for ALIA membership who have completed an ALIA-recognised course and who otherwise meet the requirements of the ALIA Constitution may be admitted to Associate (professional) or Library Technician membership without further examination. Graduates of ALIA-recognised librarian courses are eligible for Associate membership. Graduates of ALIA-recognised library technician courses are eligible for Library Technician membership. Eligibility for Associate (librarian) or Library Technician membership of ALIA is generally required for work in Australia.

## What do competency standards mean for me as an employer?

The development of competency standards allowing industries to define the skills, knowledge and understanding needed in the workplace is a vital part of the national training reform agenda which began in 1989. Library and information professionals need to acquire the relevant disciplinary expertise, demonstrate employment-related skills and be prepared for a challenging and dynamic future.

## How are competencies being used?

The broad definition of competence in current usage recognises that work-site performance is underpinned not only by skill but also by knowledge and understanding, and that competence involves both the ability to perform in a given context and the capacity to transfer knowledge and skills to new tasks and situations. Competency benefits include:

- Key elements in enterprise bargaining
- developing career paths
- recognition that learning may be gained from experience as well as from formal qualifications
- identification by both individuals and employers of training needs statements of the differences between professional and technical work
- insurance that the industry meets an acceptable standard of skills and requirements for the library and information workforce.

There are two levels of competency standards:

1. Professional information skills
  - knowledge of the broad context of the information environment
  - information seeking
  - information infrastructure
  - information organisation
  - information access
  - information services, sources and products
  - information literacy education.
2. Generic
  - effective communication skills
  - professional ethical standards and social responsibility
  - project management skills
  - critical, reflective, and creative thinking
  - problem-solving skills
  - business acumen
  - ability to build partnerships and alliances
  - effective team relationship skills
  - self management skills
  - a commitment to life-long learning
  - relevant information and communications technology and technology application skills
  - appropriate information literacy skills.

## National Quality Council

The National Quality Council, a committee of the Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education, oversees quality assurance and ensures national consistency in the application of the Australian Quality Training Framework standards for the audit and registration of training providers.

It has specific decision-making powers in relation to the endorsement of training packages and other aspects of quality assurance under the National Skills Framework and provides a number of benefits including:

- comparability and consistency
- enabling competencies to be grouped in ways relevant to the industry
- assisting in articulation between different levels/ fields of study and movement between education and employment, and transferability
- linking of industry requirements to vocational education and training qualifications through a process of credentials reform.

Further information available from <http://www.alia.org.au/employment/salary.scales/> <http://www.alia.org.au/employment/salary.scales/>

**Dianne Walton-Sonda**  
Education Manager  
[dianne.walton-sonda@alia.org.au](mailto:dianne.walton-sonda@alia.org.au)