



RMIT University Vietnam

Application Category: Teaching and Learning Strategy of the Year

In a country where rote learning and high-stakes testing are the educational norm, RMIT Vietnam stands out as it delivers more experiential and authentic assessments as well as learning experiences that help students better prepare for life and work after graduation. Our teaching and learning strategy and innovative practices are designed to provide transformative, engaging and authentic learning experiences.

Last year was a significant year for us. We accomplished several strategic milestones, notably the completion of our authentic assessment project. This involved a comprehensive approach to authentic assessment, starting with the elimination of exams, and embedding authentic learning in everything we do, from our selection of learning materials and integration of innovative and emerging technologies, to our community outreach and staff development opportunities.

The *RMIT Vietnam Authentic Assessment Project* commenced in May 2017 and took 18 months to complete. The project initially focused on eliminating traditional final examinations but encompassed many other initiatives. By the end of Semester 3 2018, over 30 courses that were directly supported by the Project had adopted authentic forms of assessment, and industry-relevant experiences had replaced invigilated exams in the majority of our courses. Work Integrated Learning (WIL) courses have also been incorporated into most of our degree programs.

The statement of intent for this project outlines our rationale and specific objectives:

Assessment is a powerful tool for student learning only if it is designed for this purpose. RMIT assessment policy expects that assessment is authentic, inclusive, and aligned to learning outcomes. At RMIT Vietnam, it is our intent to provide assessment that is:

- *Aligned to program and course learning outcomes and graduate attributes*
- *Appropriately scaffolded across the program and within a course*
- *Authentic—not reliant on invigilated and time restricted exams*
- *Varied in format and mode*
- *A source of feedback for students*
- *Appropriately timed—students should know the major proportion of their results by week 12*
- *Equivalent and comparable to assessment for the course offering in RMIT Melbourne.*

Authentic assessment and learning is now at the core of everything we do, underpinning not only our assessment design, but also our learning design, approach to co-curricular projects, the materials selection in our courses, the feedback we give to students, our collaboration with industry/community, and our professional development and recognition of our staff.

We've also surveyed our community for feedback on our new assessment approach as we continue to evaluate our work and look for ways to improve.

Authentic Assessment

In 2017, RMIT Vietnam undertook the ambitious goal of being examination free by the end of 2018. The objective of this initiative was to ensure students were assessed in ways that mirror experiences they would have when in industry and to measure skills and application—not just tacit knowledge (Webster, 2018). The project began with extensive mapping of 10 programs identifying a number of key opportunities for improvement to strengthen assessment and related areas of learning and teaching. This revealed a need for increased variety in assessment type and mode, and a more contemporary approach. This led to reflection on the level of authenticity in existing assessments and strategies for improvement.

RMIT Vietnam targeted 30 undergraduate courses in 11 separate academic disciplines to transform assessment and replace final examinations with authentic alternatives. Additional course and assessment design projects were managed at the school or discipline level. By the end of 2018, with rare exceptions for accreditation purposes or alignment concerns with Melbourne, final exams were eliminated from higher education courses.



A student conducting a service quality audit for Victoria cruises.

The initiative sparked a tremendous transition in our community. Assessments shifted from stressful, quickly forgotten memorisation exercises to engaged, industry-relevant experiences with concrete results—work that students could proudly add to a portfolio with lasting, intrinsic value. In the wake of exams, assessments became creative, relevant and reflective experiences. For example, in the

Service Quality course, students conducted mystery shopping audits of service for Victoria Hotels and Resorts. The project ran for 16 weeks and culminated in a final presentation to the business. The partnership was a win-win: students gained evidence of their applicable skills, while the industry partner received valuable feedback.

Students in the Digital Marketing Communication course were asked to solve a real marketing problem proposed by their client, Lazada. They were given a budget of \$800,000 to design a three-month marketing communication campaign. Their objective was to boost app user numbers. Nine teams competed through elimination rounds with three finalists having a chance to present their ideas to Lazada personnel for a chance to win six-month internships.



Winners at the pitching session with Lazada.

Authentic learning and assessment is now integrated across all disciplines and academic levels, but has a distinctive feel in each. Activities vary from practicing corporate decision-making on a business simulation provided by an industry partner in the MBA program, to applying machine learning algorithms to analyse real datasets in Robotics, to designing a CD cover for a band, or building a brand portfolio and presenting to industry partners in Digital Media. What these activities all share is that they are more meaningful, practical, and memorable than an exam

Authentic and Digital Materials

Another significant innovation within the teaching and learning strategy at RMIT Vietnam has been the replacement of textbooks with more contemporary and digital materials. Because we want students to engage with the most current, industry-relevant and authentic materials possible, RMIT Vietnam replaced traditional, prescribed textbooks with alternative learning resources in semester 3, 2017. Since then, we have eliminated single-source textbooks from our courses. That means, courses don't draw from a single textbook but rather incorporate a variety of contemporary, online and media rich resources. This new model requires curriculum developers to work with librarians on an ongoing basis to find and continually update exemplary materials to complement the concepts and theories in their course and ensure copyright compliance.

Without prescribed textbooks, courses look radically different. For example, the course Marketing Principles draws multiple materials from dozens of distinct sources capturing items such as; current news stories, videos, interactive websites ebook chapters etc. In contrast, that same course, in 2016, offered only one textbook.

Innovation and Technology

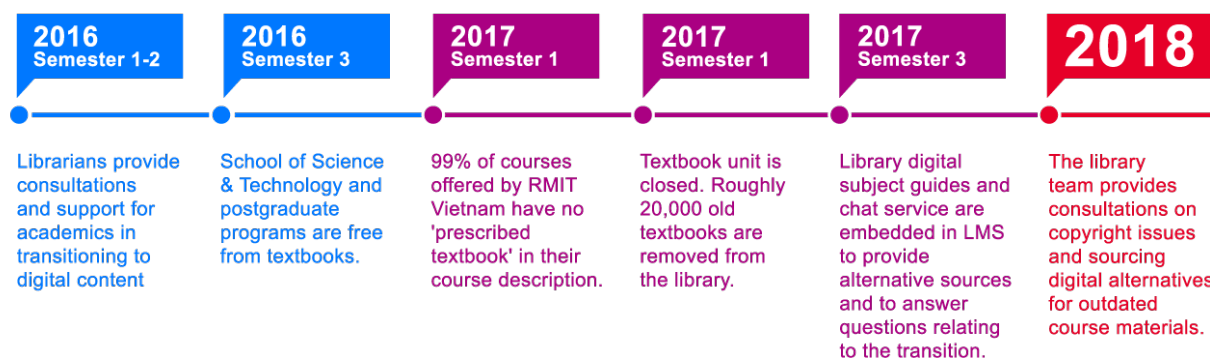
As part of the drive for a more contemporary approach in learning and teaching at RMIT Vietnam, there has been an additional focus on innovation and technology. For example, in the Design discipline we have been working to incorporate emerging technologies into the curriculum for the past several years. Khoa Nguyen reflected, "I worked with my design staff

to stretch beyond their comfort zones and introduce AR/VR and 3D printing into the curriculum. There were many growing pains, but the decision paid off when the AR/VR works produced by the students received recognition from the local press." Mr Nguyen went on to secure a grant that would launch the Mixed Reality Lab at RMIT Vietnam.



A design student using AR/VR

RMIT Vietnam is committed to enriching the whole student experience, including extra- and co-curricular activities. One of our new initiatives in this area is [Personal Edge](#), a program designed to help students develop six capabilities: *creative thinker, confident communicator, cross-cultural team player, ethical leader, digital citizen, and career strategist*. In late 2017, we introduced a mobile app which supports students to manage the development of their skills, and serves as a repository of evidence of their capabilities in a portfolio. The app is gamified to reward students for their achievements in skills development. Last year, it was used extensively, receiving about 1,400 registrations and 600 submissions. The app has been commercialised and is currently being adopted by another organisation.



Timeline: Replacing single-source textbooks

Focused Professional Development and Recognition

In order to create an environment in which teaching and learning is highly valued across the university and to recognise accomplishments that support our commitment to [making student ready for life and work](#), the university provides a wide range of professional development activities and recognition opportunities.

Professional development is available through a variety of channels year-round; however, we turn our attention exclusively towards professional development for 2 weeks out of the year, in Week 7 of each semester. In 2018, our workshops and training sessions were focused largely on authentic learning and assessment, and also included a showcase for staff to present to their peers.

Training workshops included:

- *Industry Relations: Enabling Authentic Learning & Assessment*
- *Using a Simulation for Authentic Learning & Assessment*
- *Enabling Authentic Learning & Assessment through Virtual Exchange Projects*
- *Maximising the Value of WIL Assessments*
- *Setting Up an Authentic Project Environment: Engineering Program Case Study*
- *Enhanced feedback to students*

Recognition and Awards

Through the RMIT University Learning and Teaching Awards and Research Awards, recognition is given to those who have demonstrated exemplary and outstanding work in teaching, student services and support, supervision and research endeavours. In 2018, RMIT Vietnam featured prominently, capturing a total of three awards across three distinct categories.

Award winners included:

Dr Anh Thu Nguyen, Lecturer
School of Business & Management
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education Award for Teaching Innovation

Dr Greeni Maheshwari, Lecturer
School of Business & Management
Vice-Chancellor Award for Outstanding Contributions to Learning and Teaching

Mr Khoa Nguyen, Discipline Lead, Design
School of Communications & Design
Vice-Chancellor's Award for Program Manager of the Year

RMIT Vietnam also have local awards to recognise and reward Excellence in Learning and Teaching and exceptional contributions to student learning, with winners encouraged to submit internationally .



Community Outreach

At RMIT Vietnam, we strive to incorporate community outreach into our work. Our [Education Plan to 2020](#) calls for “connecting with industry and community to build enterprise opportunity” as well as “fostering a strong sense of belonging” (p.143). Where possible, we replace classroom activities with those that allow students to venture out into the community, work directly with a client, and create a positive impact. This promotes students’ sense of engagement, pride in their work, and relevance of their studies. When describing our partnership with community partners, Professor Rick Bennett, Head of the School of Communication & Design, noted, “There’s always people who are less fortunate than ourselves; there’s always people in need of help of some sort, and so if we’ve got the resources, we’ve got the time, we’ve got the ability to help those people instead of just doing inane school projects then we’re crazy not to” (RMIT News, 2017).



A public event organised by CODE

But our drive to positively impact communities in Vietnam doesn’t stop with our students. The RMIT Vietnam Centre of Digital Excellence (CODE), a catalyst for digitally driven innovation in training and education, continued to explore major new technology trends in 2018 to identify research and development opportunities in Vietnam. By assembling teams and resources from across RMIT Vietnam, we were able to deliver six powerful research-based events that partnered with Google, LATOKEN, EdTech Asia, Saigon Innovation Hub, AVUC, Deakin University and the

Australian Embassy. These events provided expert commentators and training opportunities in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi that covered and discussed the future of Google, blockchain, trade technology, cyber security and mixed reality in education.



RMIT Vietnam staff presenting to DoET

Professional staff also engage in community outreach. Milton Nomikoudis, an Education Consultant who worked with us throughout 2018 to strengthen our authentic assessment and rubric design, conducted a seminar held by RMIT and the Department of Education and Training (DoET) in Hanoi in December, 2018. Thirty-six principals and teachers from secondary schools and high schools in Hanoi attended the inaugural event, called *The value of authentic learning and assessment: What do these mean to your students, our teachers and our society?*

The potential for national impact was evident; Ms Bui Thi Minh Nga, Deputy Manager, High school Education Department, DoET, Hanoi, noted: “DoET highly appreciates valuable seminars like this. This is a great opportunity for high school leaders to access new knowledge on assessment approaches. Time-restricted and closed book tests will be replaced with authentic assessment.”

We are thrilled to contribute to our community in these ways and look forward to more opportunities to collaborate with local innovators, local educators, and other community members in 2019.

Work Integrated Learning

RMIT's original motto, "*perita manus, mens exulta*"—a skilled hand, a cultivated mind, still applies today. We have a rich history of emphasising employability, industry relevant experience and praxis. The importance of industry engagement and community engagement is central to our [Strategic Plan](#):

Priority 3: Learning through work and enterprise

At RMIT, learning is integrated with work at every stage of the student journey. Our programs are aligned with future workforce demand and shaped by the expertise of industry practitioners. Learning through work and enterprise takes many forms, from internships to projects to virtual simulations and networks. We continuously extend the availability and quality of work integrated Learning. (Ready for Life and Work: RMIT's Strategic Plan to 2020, p. 12)

RMIT Vietnam not only supports these strategic initiatives from the university, but we often lead the way. Gael McDonald noted in a recent interview, "The reason that RMIT Vietnam has a slightly different positioning here in Vietnam to RMIT in Melbourne is because we are smaller and able to make changes more quickly. We are also able to have a close interface with key companies and the professions that we serve" (RMIT Vietnam News, 2018).



Fashion students and staff partner with local company Paper Wings on sustainable fashion projects

Our recent progress in incorporating Work Integrated Learning (WIL) across the curriculum is a clear example of RMIT Vietnam moving faster than others. We've established the objective of ensuring that students in every undergraduate program experience a minimum of two designated WIL courses.

In 2018, RMIT Vietnam participated in 57 distinct WIL projects in which students engage with industry partners on an interactive project. In addition, lecturers regularly facilitate guest lectures and field trips. In a 2019 survey to assess adoption of industry engagement, discipline leads responded that at least 26 courses included specific assessment tasks involving collaboration with industry partners.



Bachelor of Design (Digital Media) students prepare to build a house in the Mekong Delta.

Started in 2017, one especially successful WIL course has been the design course Studio V, in which students participate in volunteer work with Habitat for Humanity. Dang Ha Thanh Vy, a design student, reflected, "I have to say before the trip, I didn't know anything about construction work, and looking at Habitat's pictures, I thought that it was going to be simple. But only when we came and worked, did we realise how difficult it was." Ultimately, students were glad they had participated. The course will continue to work with various community partners in 2019.

Evaluation and Evidence

Throughout the implementation of these new learning and teaching initiatives, we've surveyed students and staff to understand strengths and weaknesses in the new model. Dr Reza Akbari, Lecturer in Logistics, felt authentic assessment improved the course, noting that "overall satisfaction (OSI) scores for the course increased from 74.3% in 2016, to 86.3% in 2017, and to 97.9% in 2018." Dr Akbari also said that he felt authentic assessment better served his students because of the variety and flexibility it provides, allowing students to express and explore "different social, cultural, and academic characteristics and skills, and unique motivations for undertaking higher education."

Many students indicated that assessments had become more challenging, but most agreed that the assessments helped them practice skills they would need in the workforce, and many also commented that they benefited from more enhanced teacher feedback. For example, in Business Statistics 1, 95% of respondents (39 total respondents) agreed with the statement "The assessment tasks were similar to activities that I would expect to be doing if I were employed in the field." In Prices and Markets, 90% of respondents (31 total respondents) agreed with the statement, "Overall, the assessments in the course were a positive learning experience."

“I like doing the survey and infer from its data in order to collect information about the population. Really helpful and informative.”

- student, Business Statistics 1, Semester 1, 2018.

The evaluation also helped us identify problem areas to inform our next steps. We found that as assessments became more complex, students wanted more feedback and support on academic skills for more help with skills. This prompted further development with academic staff in regard

to student feedback as well as a redesign and implementation of student academic and personal support services.

“The assessments were quite relevant to our course. Teacher gave feedback in details and it helped us so much in our assessment.”

- student, Law of Investing and Financial Markets, Semester 1, 2018.

Authentic assessment is usually not implemented in Vietnamese high schools, therefore our students need a high level of scaffolding to help them transition to university. We offer tutoring and additional resources through our [Student Academic Success](#), the [Learning Lab](#) and other resources. We have begun and will continue to bolster these services to support students to succeed in completing authentic assessments.

In working with academics on their courses, the Learning & Teaching team has also been able to guide teachers in more explicit and inclusive practices such as the creation of clearly written, authentic assessment guides, and rubrics that inform students about assessment requirements. A significant project achievement has been the creation of common rubrics in three disciplines, which has brought more clarity and consistency to the achievement and marking of learning outcomes. The Student Academic Success team and Learning & Teaching team both provide [model rubrics](#) to guide academics in making assessments explicit and expectations clear.

The comprehensive learning and teaching initiatives are seeing early signs of success. We experienced a 16% increase in commencing enrolments from 2017 to 2018. Student employability has increase in the past year is at a high of 73.2%. We now look forward to building on this success to become the most industry connected higher education institution in Southeast Asia.

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