Applications for Postgraduate Information Technology programs

The following is a guide for both Agents and prospective students. It is designed to maximise a student's chances and avoid delays and should be freely distributed. The most up-to-date version can be downloaded from www.rmit.edu.au/csit/pgs

The most important factor in determining whether a prospective student will be admitted to our programs is their performance at University in their first degree (and any subsequent degrees/diplomas).

If their first degree is not a Computer Science degree then they will be eligible for the following 1.5 year and 2 year Masters programs

- MC062. Master of Technology (Information Technology)  www.rmit.edu.au/csit/mc062

These programs are also designed for those with no background or those who have done other degrees which have smaller components of IT in them. All our programs are hands-on with a software/programming orientation.

Applicants who have a full Computer Science undergraduate degree do a different Masters program, the (1.5 year) Master of Applied Science (Information Technology)  www.rmit.edu.au/csit/mc061 or MC060. The 2 year Master of Applied Science (Information Systems)  www.rmit.edu.au/csit/mc060

Applicants and Agents may request a CD version of the 100 page information booklets for these programs, and/or obtain further information by emailing  intadmin@cs.rmit.edu.au  or writing/faxing to

International Postgraduate Administration
School of Computer Science & IT
RMIT University
GPO Box 2476V
Melbourne 3001
AUSTRALIA
Facsimile: (+61 3) 96621617

Recognition of undergraduate degrees

Degrees come in many shapes and sizes and vary from country to country and within countries. The first thing we need to determine is the standing of a student’s University relative to Australian Universities. Advice is given by an Australian Government body, known as NOOSR whose web site is www.dest.gov.au/noosr/recog.htm

RMIT University receives updated information from NOOSR. However, if the University or the degree is relatively new (established only in the last 5 years or so) or has become affiliated with a University recently, then students should attach to their application any documentation which refers to national or international acceptance/affiliation that supports the standing of the University or Degree program. NOOSR may also be
able to assist if students contact them directly. If students do not provide us with this information, then the processing of applications will inevitably be unnecessarily delayed.

**Diplomas and short courses in addition to a Degree**

Some applicants have completed IT courses and diplomas which are not recognised at a University level. We certainly consider these, however, the extent to which these influence a student’s chances of getting a place in our programs depends on the quality of the information provided to us about those diplomas and short courses. The following information will help us and it is in a student’s best interests to provide us with this information:

- How long was the course?
- Was it full time or part time?
- How many hours per week were devoted to lectures, laboratory classes etc.?
- Sample Exam/Test questions for each subject students undertook (past papers are okay too)
- Printouts of any programs that students have written
- How much of the course was hands-on using computers and how much was theoretical
- Results (show all results including any fails)

**Performance**

The next crucial matter relates to a student’s performance in any prior degrees, diplomas or short courses. Our aim is to give offers to applicants who show first class performance in their undergraduate degree. What is first class performance?

In different countries and programs this can mean:

- A Cumulative Grade Point Average of at least 3.0 (eg from Indonesia, Malaysia etc)
- A Cumulative Grade Point Average of at least 2.6 from Thailand.
- First Class Honours
- An Honours 2A or above (e.g. from the University of Melbourne)
- Second Class Division I or upper second class honours (e.g. from the UK, Hong Kong, Singapore, Mauritius)
- A Degree with Distinction
- A First Class/Division from India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan
- An excellent upper/higher second division from a Section 1 University together with a good hands-on preparatory C and Unix course or experience where appropriate
- An average grade across all courses leading to a degree, of at least 80% (in China)
- A mid to high credit average in some Australian programs (65-70% average)
- At least 7.0 from Vietnam
- Top 10% performance in GRE or GMAT tests

**Entry to the Graduate Diploma Programs**

If students fall marginally below the above requirements they may be eligible for a Graduate Diploma entry, and if they perform well (CGPA of at least 2.0) in the RMIT Graduate Diploma, they will be able to transfer into the Masters program with full credit transfer. Each of the Masters includes a “child” Graduate Diploma. Students will not lose any time and all completed courses as part of the Graduate Diploma will be credited towards the Masters.

Cricos Provider Code: 0012A

A/Prof. I. Balbin
Presenting Grades and Mark Sheets

Universities around the world have differing ways of describing a student’s performance. We recognise that a comprehensive list of levels for each Country and level of University is impossible to categorise. For example, in some Universities a “first class” degree is almost unheard of, or rare (e.g. in Kolkata). We build a database of such Universities, however, to maximise the likelihood of being selected it helps if students indicate such things by attaching **official and authorised explanations** from their University about the way that they conduct their grading. We are obviously **not** just looking for the top 5% of students!

Other useful information that students should provide are

- a definition of the letter grades (usually part of a student’s mark sheet)
- an indication of where they were ranked (percentile) if this information is available
- a definition of how an award is granted. For example, is “first division” determined by all the years of their degree, or only the final year

It is very important that students submit full mark sheets and **not** consolidated mark sheets which have had failed subjects removed, where those subjects were later passed. We need to gauge a student’s complete performance across their University studies.

**Variations to a student’s performance**

We will notice variations in a student’s performance if such should occur. For example, students may have experienced a single bad semester which is out of keeping with other semesters. It is important that students tell us why this occurred so we may take this into account. Any explanations should include evidence of claims, where possible. We try to look for reasons to select a student, it is therefore in each student’s best interests to help us with as much information as possible.

**Failed Subjects**

In some Universities students can obtain a good final result (for example a First Class/Division) even though the student has accumulated multiple fails previously. We do take the fails into consideration, and so if there is any explanation for these, students should consider this in their statement of intent. Students should also clearly list all subjects which they have failed as part of this explanation. If students do not discuss failed subjects in their letter of intent, then students jeopardise the chances for being selected.

**Weightings**

Some Universities pay more attention to the final year than previous year’s performance. This may also be reflected in weighted GPAs. Students should inform us of any issues which are relevant to their University and the way that it calculates and categorises performance. This information can help students gain selection.

**Online or Correspondence Programs**

If students did either the whole or partial components of their degree on-line or via correspondence, then they should detail the method of assessment. For example:

- were the assignments invigilated;
- was the exam invigilated and how,
- what percentage was ascribed to assignments versus exams.

It’s not that we don’t trust such programs. We do. However, there are known cases of programs which do not have the types of invigilation that we expect.
**English Tests**
The English Requirements are currently

IELTS Academic Score of 6.5+ with no band less than 6. See [www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org/)

TOEFL Score of at least 580 with a TWE of 4.5+ paper based, or 237 (TWE 4.5+) computer based. See [www.toefl.org](http://www.toefl.org/)

IELTS is our preferred test, unless it is not readily available. A good IELTS academic score attached to an application will ensure there is no delay in an application on account of English. It is preferable students take an English test before they submit their application, so as to minimise delays and rejection. Of course, this isn’t always possible, but the underlying point we are making is that IELTS preparation should start very early and certainly not left to the last minute.

Students who do not meet the IELTS requirements by a very small margin (e.g. 0.5) in one of the IELTS Bands (Reading, Writing, Listening) should consider immediately sitting a TOEFL test. Sometimes, a student has a “bad day” which may not be entirely reflective of their English Standard.

English is **very** important. Students who don’t have the requisite skills will struggle. A student who knows that their English is not up to a very good standard, should consider undertaking advanced English tuition in their home country, leading to an IELTS certification, or if they prefer, RMIT offers remedial English courses prior to commencing study. Students can refer to [www.rmitenglishworldwide.com](http://www.rmitenglishworldwide.com/) (REW). They also offer IELTS testing.

**Work Experience**
We do not require that applicants have work experience. Our different programs are designed to cater for the complete novice to IT, mid-level knowledge, experienced programmer, and computer science major.

Applicants who do have Information Technology work experience should definitely describe this experience as part of their application. It is important to be explicit and detailed. Applicants should indicate where they have actually been involved in writing software, and (where relevant) provide

- links,
- print outs,
- URLs, or
- any other evidence to support the information supplied.

Candidates should distinguish between experience which involves using software, and experience which involves writing software.

Experience with various operating systems should be detailed, indicating the level of competence with the operating system. We are not necessarily swayed by a very long list of products which have been used by the candidate. We look for some evidence of good hands on programming experience.

Having said all that, we re-iterate that our courses are also designed for the complete novice to IT.

**Statement of Intent**
These are **very** important.
If applicants are switching to Information Technology, we would like to know why a student wishes to enrol in our programs and what they aim to get out of it. Towards this end, familiarising oneself with the actual programs and their structure is helpful. Students should also use this letter to explain any issues which they feel might be seen to be negative in their application (for example, some poor results) or highlight any relevant achievements or prizes that students have obtained.

Sometimes, applicants send “generic” letters. This does not reflect well on the applicant. We read each letter, and take them seriously and appreciate it when the applicant knows something about the program they are applying for.

**Reference Letters**

Reference letters are important if they are signed by a program coordinator and indicate where a student was ranked in their class. Often, however, reference letters are “form letters” which could have been written for any applicant. If a reference letter is to be valuable, the person giving the reference should write a specific letter and not a general type letter and should be aware of the fact that the prospective student is applying for an RMIT program in the School of Computer Science & Information Technology.

**Preparatory Studies**

If a student is a relative novice to Information Technology and they want to do some preparatory study, we strongly recommend that they do courses which are devoted to two topics only. These should be C programming and Unix. Many students do courses which claim that the student has studied 7 topics over a period of months. This is not ideal. It is much better to focus on one or two topics and do them very well and in detail. This will help students gain the most. Students who are intending to do the Internet and Web programs should substitute Java for C.

It is not necessary to undertake courses in Oracle or an MCSE or other commercially oriented courses or certification programs. Students may, of course, do them for their own benefit, but in terms of preparation for our programs, please focus on the two topics we list above. Many students study C++ as opposed to C. C++ is a complex language, and in our programs we prefer that students study the unique aspects of C++ only after they have mastered C and Java.

**What courses are best for those with a Computer Science background?**

Generally, students don’t need to do any extra courses unless they feel that their Unix or C or Java background isn’t advanced, or is in need of a refresher. Many students have studied C and Java and more. Unfortunately though, their previous University courses were such that they didn’t have lots of hands-on programming to undertake in the large. We aim to make students employable through our programs. Consequently, if a student had more “theoretical” knowledge of software oriented IT, they should explicitly mention this in their letter of intent. It will not harm their chances, of course.

**Advanced Standing**

Please note that advanced standing is rare. If students are wanting to obtain advanced standing then students must bring or send copies of the exam questions and assignments for courses that they wish to either obtain credit or choose a substitute course. Curricula are helpful, but not nearly as good an indicator as assessment material. If students have trouble obtaining this, then a past or sample paper should suffice. If we are in doubt, a student may be required to sit for a test when they arrive.
**Specialisations**
The School of Computer Science is the home of software oriented IT at RMIT. Students in our programs are able to specialise in many areas and have groups of subjects devoted to one area. The current areas we provide specialisation in are:

- Networked and Distributed Systems
- Database Engineering
- Software Engineering
- Computer Security
- BioInformatics
- Web Based Systems
- Intelligent Systems

Students generally can not be expected to know, and often have no idea in which area they should specialise. This is normal. Students are not expected to know. Our advisors will sit with students at enrolment and work out plans to suit students, on an individual basis.