

College Appeals Committee
School of XXXXX
RMIT University

Date

Dear College Appeal Committee Members,

RE: ASSESSMENT APPEAL

I respectfully wish to submit an Appeal Against Assessment for my final grade in the course ARCH 1335 Design Studio 9, which is part of the program MC163 Masters of Architecture, owned by the School of Architecture and Design.

I wish to appeal on the following grounds as outlined in Section 4 of the Assessment: Conduct of Assessment and Appeals Policy.

- Section 4.3.4 - *the student has evidence that the assessment did not comply with the University Policies on assessment.*

I previously sought an informal review of my assessment on 17 July 2013. I met with XXX XXX (course co-ordinator) to review my folio. He explained that he, and a number of members of the moderation panel had already moderated my work and could not go back on their decision. He also informed me that my result would remain unchanged.

I am a conscientious student and am familiar with post-graduate level study and self-directed learning. This is evident in my solid academic record (see Appendix 1).

Design studios are run as an interactive class that enable students to present their work to the tutor and class and receive immediate verbal feedback. The feedback is constructive and specifically details changes and improvements to be made. This often encompasses large amounts of work to be done after the presentation for the following class. This feedback provides direction to the student to complete a successful project.

As feedback is only of qualitative nature, the mid-semester presentation and the final presentation are crucial for revealing a quantitative measure of performance in the subject. At these stages of assessment, the student receives feedback sheets that indicate the current performance and provides an indicative score. This becomes crucial if the student, at that point in time, is at risk of failing the subject. I attach a similar feedback sheet from previous semesters as reference (see Appendix 2).

The feedback holds more significance at the final presentation as there is time to make any necessary amendments or changes to the work before submitting the folio and presentation panels for moderation. At the final presentation stage, the majority of students receive a final mark given to them by the presentation

panel. For projects which are thought to be either of a very high standard or are deemed to be at risk of failure, the entire student folio is scrutinized at moderation.

During the intervening period between the final presentation and the moderation, students have the opportunity to act on the feedback received for their final presentation to work on their folio and prepare it for moderation. The moderation panel requires the entire folio, to ensure that if a very high or very low mark is to be given, that mark is reflective of the student's achievement across their entire body of work and not only the final resolved project displayed in the final presentation.

This is stated in the Design Guide for Studio 9,

"In addition students are required to prepare a portfolio representing the entire semester's work as process rather than product to be submitted at the end of semester."

In the previous 8 design studios that I have undertaken, the feedback process has been carried out in the manner as described above. In these studios, the feedback received was generally detailed constructive criticism. It focused quite specifically on precise changes that were required and often emphasised the large amounts of corrective work to be performed. This is also quite representative of the verbal feedback I received for Design Studio 9.

In the past semester, the feedback I received appeared no different in terms of content to feedback I had received in previous design studios. Similar to my past actions, I followed the advice I was given diligently. Despite this, I have been awarded a low fail grade for this Design Studio.

I believe that this assessment has breached Sections 1.1 and 1.2 of RMIT's Assessment Policy.

The MA Architecture Design Studios have been carefully designed to ensure that students have the opportunity to improve and develop the essential skills they require for professional practice within the same assessment frameworks. Despite the similarities between the overarching structure of each Design Studio and their corresponding course guides, there appears to be a lack of consistency in the way in which work is assessed throughout the program.

The fact that a student can receive similar ongoing feedback throughout two Design Studios and receive a HD in one and a NN in the other, demonstrates a level of incongruity that makes it impractical for students to utilise feedback in a meaningful way. This places the student in a difficult position where they are not aware that they are at risk of failing, when in previous Design Studios, feedback of a similar critical content and level of specificity indicated that they were on track to pass.

I attended all classes, worked meticulously and followed my tutors' weekly feedback. This feedback did not suggest or hint at any point during the semester of my risk of failing the subject.

The lack of quantitative feedback contributed greatly to this issue. As mentioned earlier, it is usual that the feedback sheet from the mid-semester presentation encompasses a quantitative grading. This mid-semester grading provides a clear and unequivocal indication of student progress. I did not receive a mid-semester feedback sheet. Without this essential form of feedback I was not provided with an accurate reflection of my progress.

It is common practice for tutors to make students who are at risk of failing aware of their performance mid-semester or at the final presentation, which is prior to folio submission, as there is time at this point to improve the work. I did not receive such feedback.

I believe the situation has been exacerbated by a lack of clarity in the way in which students are marked and the subjective approach to grading. The Architecture Design Studio 9 course guide outlines the following:

Refer to studio handouts for details of each program and specific objectives.

And that,

Details of assessment relating to the specific programming of studio subjects are provided in the studio guides.

Such studio handouts were not given for this studio, thus there was no clear articulation of the specific objectives required for assessment.

The absence of distribution of the studio guide to the class, as detailed in the Design Studio 9 course guide, is a direct breach of section 1.6 (a) of the RMIT Assessment Policy.

1.6 (a) An assessment task's purpose, requirements, standards and marking criteria are clearly articulated.

In the absence of a studio guide or marking matrix supplied, the only criteria available in terms of appraising my work was the general course objectives (virtually identical in each Design Studio Course Guide). This states as follows:

On completion of this course a student should be able to demonstrate:

- *An architectural design competence.*
- *An understanding of the relationship of a selected range of technical, programmatic, theoretical, historical and professional issues and their implications for the building design, as outlined by each studio program.*
- *An ability to synthesise and make manifest these issues via the design work within the time deadlines given by each studio.*
- *An understanding of architecture and its relationship towards location, program, form and representation.*
- *Have developed both an awareness of and a facility in using procedures and operations which may lead to an architectural design project.*

- *To develop a high standard of communications, specifically to be able to demonstrate through the building design & its representation the aims & claims that are made for the building design.*

I therefore assumed these are the areas in which my work would be assessed and that all the above areas would contribute evenly to my final mark.

However, my tutor indicated to me after the assessment had been completed that a much higher value was placed on the quality of the architectural resolution section of my folio, than to any other aspect of it. In an email dated the 15 of July 2013, he stated that irrespective of how good my research and how thorough my semester's work was, my grades would depend mostly on my architectural resolution.

Section 1.6 of RMIT's Assessment Policy clearly states that an assessment task marking criteria should be clearly articulated which was not the case here.

As with most other Design Studios, the course objectives listed (refer to previous page) in the course guide for Design Studio 9 are worded in a way in which it appears that equal weighting is allocated to process and final product.

Section 1.1 of RMIT's Assessment policy states that assessment tasks should be aligned with course objectives and is quite clear from the Design Studio 9 Course Guide that course objectives include a multitude of different skills and capabilities and that the assessment should therefore be designed to assess (and give credit to) them all.

It appears that the work in my folio that addresses these other areas was overlooked as my tutor has determined that a good architectural resolution is more important than anything else. Again, this was not articulated prior to submission.

In my review with the course co-ordinator on 17 July 2013, he confirmed that the moderation process is via discussion to decide the appropriate assessment of a student based on their professional opinion and experience. In the absence of a marking matrix, this indicates that the assessment is graded in an entirely subjective manner and there is no option for students to be made aware of exactly how their work is being assessed.

The moderators involved will evaluate a student's full body of semester work including their presentation and folio. However, there is no marking outline or criteria upon which the grades are based. I queried where I went wrong and asked for specific feedback from the course coordinator and he simply responded that 'students are marked holistically and there are no specific requirements. It is on a project by project analysis.'

This constitutes a breach of section 1.3 of RMIT's assessment policy, which states that

1.3: Assessment develops student's abilities to evaluate their own and others work against agreed standards

In this instance, there were no agreed standards and written feedback on which I could evaluate my work. This subjective marking process allows my tutor to determine my grade on the basis of one element of my work despite the fact that the course objectives make it quite clear that the subject is designed to develop a range of skills and, therefore, that the assessment should be aligned with those stated objectives.

If I were provided with any indication that I was not on track to pass the subject, I would have taken necessary measures to correct my work to ensure that I pass. I am highly aware of my performance given the close proximity to graduation. The risk of failing this subject will extend my degree by 6 months and I will lose my graduate position in an architectural firm that I have already been awarded.

Therefore, I respectfully request to appeal my assessment given the above arguments.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,