Research to Tackle Railway Suicide

Suicide prevention is a major concern for railway operators internationally. A research team led by Professor Byron Keating from the ANU Research School of Management has started work in partnership with Sydney Trains on the development of the World's first automated railway suicide risk detection and response system.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that 2,522 Australians died from intentional self-harm in 2013, accounting for more than a quarter of all external causes of death. The most significant concern, however, is that despite concerted efforts to reduce the incidence of suicide, including the establishment of a Senate Inquiry into Suicide in Australia and increased government investment, the rate of suicide in Australia has remained constant at around 10 per 100,000 people for a decade.

One type of suicide that has been on the increase in recent years is railway suicide. Between 150-200 people die each year by intentional self-harm in and around train stations. In Australia's major metropolitan areas, this equates to more than a death a week on their networks. Most alarmingly, this rate has more than doubled since 2004.

While the absolute numbers are still very small by comparison to other forms of suicide such as hanging and poisonings, the violent and public nature of railway suicide has far-reaching impact. Research suggests that a single railway suicide incident can have negative consequences for the psychological well-being of hundreds of people, including train drivers, station staff, and bystanders.

Railway suicide also has significant financial and organizational costs stemming from service delays and railway staff absenteeism. For instance, in their submission to the Senate Inquiry on Suicide, the NSW Government estimated that the direct cost of railway suicide was in excess of $76,000 per incident. When indirect costs are taken into consideration, the net cost to the Australian economy from railway suicide is estimated at more than $1 billion annually.

Given the magnitude of this problem, it is not surprising to find that the issue of railway suicide has attracted considerable research attention since the first reported incident in England in 1852. Notwithstanding the value of this prior research, recent technological advances provide some very promising opportunities to aid in the reduction of railway suicide.

At present, we rely on human monitoring to identify persons at-risk of suicide. This approach requires station and video monitoring staff to be looking at an exact location of an incident at a given point in time. With a small team of station staff, and the requirement for security staff to monitor feeds from hundreds of stations, the probability of being able to observe an incident and respond quickly is small. Likewise, training station staff and drivers to identify and respond to at-risk behaviour is also problematic as staff are often too busy to dedicate the effort needed for suicide detection, or in the case of drivers, may not have the reflexes needed in order to respond.

The proposed detection system will seek to overcome these limitations by automatically scanning video feeds and analysing commuter behaviour to identify the location and severity of commuters identified as being “at-risk.” An associated quick response system will then alert station and monitoring staff to the risks, and communicate directly with train management systems to reduce speed and increase braking.

A Linkage Grant application for this project is currently under review with the Australian Research Council.
Postgrad Renewal
RSM is in the midst of a major overhaul of its PG coursework programs. Drawing on the ANU’s reputation for research excellence, this program of renewal will see a much stronger focus on evidence-based management. A full report will be included in the next issue of Cognōscē.

Teaching Grant Success
Congratulations to Alessandra Capezio and Andrew Bradly for their recent ANU teaching grants. Alessandra received a Research-Led Education Fellowship for her work developing an evidence-based management framework, and Andrew received an ANU Teaching Enhancement Grant to examine the online delivery of research-led masters programs.

Recent HDR Completions
Congratulations to our graduating PhD students for 2015: Chris Nailer (Supervisor: Gary Buttriss), Adnan Yusuf (Supervisor: Songtong Dong), Shun Charmaine Chan (Supervisor: Stephen Dann), Marco Feris (Supervisor: Ofer Zwikael), Yi Li (Supervisor: Lin Cui), Risa Bhinekawati (Supervisor: Andrew Bradly), Samuel Riethmuller (Supervisor: Songtong Dong/Alex Eapen).

New Research Students
Welcome to our new PhD students: Mark Humphery-Jenner (supervisor: Lin Cui), Main Soo (supervisor: Vinh Lu & Lin Cui), Katerina Korm mushesha (supervisor: Alex Eapen), Ji hye Yeo (Supervisor: Alex Eapen). We also welcome our new MPhil students: Chao Ma (supervisor: George Chen), Irina Orbes Cervantes (Supervisor: Andrew Bradly), Tuofu Jin (Supervisor: Alex Eapen).

Honours Report
50 high-performing undergraduate students attended an information session on the RSM honours program in September. The information session provided an opportunity for students to ask questions about the program, and to hear from academics about their latest research. The program has led to Honours placements being offered to six students in 2016. Special thanks to all participating staff and students.

Invitations for the 2016 Future Leader Awards will also be sent out in the first week of December to exceptional undergraduate students in RSM courses. Applications are due by December 21, with successful students to be emailed offer letters in early February, 2016.

VC Teaching Awards
Two academics from the ANU Research School of Management received the University’s highest teaching honours from the Vice-Chancellor of the Australian National University.

Dr Vinh Lu, Senior Lecturer in Marketing and International Business, won the 2015 Vice-Chancellor Award for Teaching Excellence. Dr Lu is a leading academic in experiential learning, having successfully organised the ANU International Business Plan Competition (www.ibcompetition.com) since 2011. His commitment to teaching has been recognised with multiple awards including the 2014 OLT Citation for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning, the 2013 ANZMAC-Pearson Emerging Marketing Educator of the Year Award, the 2013 ANU Vice-Chancellor’s Citation for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning, the 2013 ANU Commendation for Citation for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning, the 2012 ANU College of Business and Economics Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Dr Ying-Yi Chih, Senior Lecturer in Project Management, won the 2015 Vice-Chancellor’s Citation for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning. She received the Citation “for sustained excellence in developing and implementing theoretically rigorous project-based learning curricula that motivates and engages students in the investigation of authentic real world problems.” Dr Chih is also the winner of the 2014 ANU College of Business and Economics Award for Teaching Excellence. Her involvement in the delivery of two courses at Tsinghua University in China, part of the ANU-Tsinghua joint Master of Management program, has led to multiple awards, including the 2013 ANU Commendation for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning, 2013 CBE Award for Excellence in Programs that Enhance Teaching and Learning, and 2012 Tsinghua Education and Training Award for Program Excellence.

The full list of the 2015 Vice-Chancellor’s teaching award recipients can be found from the ANU Centre for Higher Education, Learning & Teaching (CHELT).

Congratulations Ying-Yi and Vinh!
New Director for RSM

Professor Keating, an Australian Research Council Linkage Industry Fellow, was appointed to the position of Director of the Research School of Management earlier this year.

During his career, Professor Keating has held visiting and faculty positions at the University of New South Wales, the University of Newcastle, University of Wollongong, and the National University of Singapore. He was also the sole academic member of the Australian Government’s Service Leaders Group, where he focused on bridging the gap between industry, government and academe.

“I am honoured to be the new Director of the Research School of Management,” Professor Keating said. “I am very conscious of the significance of the position in the national and international landscape and of the tremendous concentration of excellence in the school.

“We have an important responsibility to apply our research expertise to provide thought leadership for Australia’s private, public and community sectors. That responsibility includes educating and developing the next generation of leaders for industry, government and society.”

ANU-Tsinghua Master of Management

Recognised by the Chinese Ministry of Education as a model for international education collaboration, more than 500 students have graduated from the ANU-Tsinghua Master of Management since the partnership commenced.

ANU-Tsinghua Master of Management Graduation in Beijing earlier this year. Photo: RSM Media.

RSM by Numbers

A rating of “5” in 2015 Excellence in Research Australia for Business & Management (1503) indicates our research is “well above world standard” and equal best in Australia!

Number of countries represented by RSM students over the last five years: 92

Subject Ranking for Business & Management, 2015 QS World University Rankings: 36

MBA Ranking for the ANU MBA in the Asia-Pacific, 2015 TOP MBA Rankings: 11

Proportion of female students: 41%

Proportion of postgraduate students: 38%
Katerina Wins Essay Prize

Congratulations to RSM doctoral student Katerina Kormushcheva for winning the Academy of Marketing 2015 AM Malcolm McDonald Student Essay award.

Academy of Management Awards

Congratulations to Lin Cui and co-authors who won the “Best paper on emerging markets” given by the International Management division, and Ying-Yi Chih and Ofer Zwikael for Best paper on management consulting given by the Management Consulting division. The Academy of Management is the premier international conference for management scholars.

Citations of Excellence Award

Ofer Zwikael and John Smyrk were acknowledged with an Emerald citations of excellence awards for their 2012 paper in British Journal of Management. This is an award given by Emerald publishing group for very highly cited papers.

Best Micro Paper Award

Simon Restubog, Prashant Bordia and colleagues won the BEST MICRO PAPER (“Rumours as Revenge in the Workplace”) in Group and Organization Management: An International Journal.

Rajiv Wins CBE 3MT Contest

Congratulations to Research School of Management PhD candidate Rajiv Amarnani who has won the CBE 3-minute thesis competition for 2015 with his talk: The Two Faces of Self-Esteem at Work.

Best Reviewer Award

Congratulations to Alex Eapen on his recognition as the best reviewer at the 2015 Academy of International Business Conference.

Best Conference Paper Awards

Congratulations to Adnan Yusuf for overall conference best paper, as well as the best paper in the Industrial and Relationship Marketing Track at ANZ marketing academy conference (ANZMAC). Congratulations also to Chao Ma and George Chen who received best paper at the International Conference on Organisation and Management (ICOM).

Selected Publications


Forthcoming (in press)


From war zones to suburban Canberra, refugees can often struggle adapting to an unfamiliar place they now call home. But new research at the Australian National University is aiming to help refugees integrate into society and build a positive future, with a unique focus on understanding their past journeys.

This is according to RSM’s inaugural Chair of Leadership Professor Giles Hirst, who believes it can be extremely difficult for someone “who knows more about rifles than of counting” to adjust to Australian life. “These people have come from tremendous circumstances. There is also often a sense of guilt at leaving families behind, but often people see reaching the ‘promised land’ as just the start of the journey,” Professor Hirst said.

Professor Hirst said men often feel disempowerment over their difficulty to remain the breadwinner, whereas women are usually more concerned with how their children are adapting to Australian society. The latest Australian Bureau of Statistics report into refugee employment found men were more likely to be employed full-time than women. The unemployment rate for recent migrants in 2013 was 7 per cent compared with 5.4 per cent for people born in Australia. Migrants with Australian citizenship had an unemployment rate of 4.3 per cent, temporary residents 4.6 per cent and recent migrants on a permanent visa 9 per cent. The ABS also found people with permanent visas were around twice as likely to find jobs.

According to the refugee council, major barriers facing refugees seeking employment include lack of proficient English, minimal Australian work experience, trauma, workplace discrimination, and difficulty accessing transport and housing. Professor Giles’ strategy to increase employment success is to discuss past struggles, build confidence and teach refugees how to use their resilience strategically. “When we do this, there’s a palpable sense that we actually do care about them. We talk about challenging negative thinking traps around work, visas, separation and thinking positively about yourself and how you’d like to be,” Professor Hirst said.

The program, which has seen success in Victoria, will also direct people to English teaching, job-seeking and volunteering. It is funded by the Australian Research Council and will assist refugees from countries including Afghanistan, Burma and Sri Lanka.

This is an abridged version of an article written by Clare Sibthorpe. It was first published in the Canberra Times on 21 August.
Soft Launch: The RSM Future Leaders Fund

Would you like to help develop brilliant minds or to create opportunities to transform lives? You can, by making a gift to the RSM Future Leaders Fund.

The ANU Research School of Management have established an ambitious fundraising target of $2 million to support the establishment of the RSM Future Leaders Fund. The fund will be officially launched in 2016 to coincide with the ANU’s 70th Anniversary. The goal of the fund will be to support 70 students to access a quality education at Australia’s premier university. The funds raised will provide 10 x 4 year PhD scholarships, 10 x 2 year Masters scholarships, 10 x 1 year Honours scholarships, and 40 start-up grants for new undergraduate students.

Beyond the social impact, investing in education also makes good economic sense. Research by Australian politician and former ANU Professor of Economics, Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP, highlights that a high quality education has the potential to transform lives and significantly improve Australia’s national productivity. This is achieved through increased labour market participation and enhanced future income earning potential.

Interested donors can contribute to either a whole or part-scholarship, with optional named scholarships and prizes available for interested parties. For more information on the RSM Future Leaders Fund, please contact the CBE Advancement Manager, Kerry-Ann Hugo on +61 2 6125 7417 or at kerryann.hugo@anu.edu.au.

Engagement Update

18 FEB  
Alumni meet & greet with new ANU VC, Nobel Laureate Professor Brian Schmidt.  
Location: Melbourne.

25 FEB  
Alumni meet & greet with new ANU VC, Nobel Laureate Professor Brian Schmidt.  
Location: Canberra.

19 MAR  
ANU Alumni Awards Gala Dinner.  
Location: Old Parliament House, Canberra.

30 APR  
ANU Alumni and Friends Reception.  
Location: London.

18 AUG  
Annual alumni recognition reception with Professor Brian Schmidt.  
Location: Canberra.

25 NOV  
Melbourne alumni network annual dinner.  
Location: Melbourne.

Please contact the RSM office for further information and/or to RSVP for any of the above events.

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Cognoscere

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The newsletter name comes from the ANU motto Naturam Primum Cognoscere Rerum (First to learn the nature of things). Cognoscere is the Latin word for learn (or to know).

The views expressed in Cognoscere are not necessarily those of the Australian National University.