

In Progress Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire 2010

ECU Response

In the second semester of 2010, the GRS administered an electronic survey to 623 in-progress postgraduate research candidates (similar to a national survey distributed to research candidates at graduation) to evaluate candidates' needs and monitor their overall postgraduate experience. There were 331 useable responses, giving a response rate of 53%.

A report summarized the qualitative responses of respondents to two open-ended survey questions: 1) What are the best aspects of your course? 2) What aspects of your course are most in need of improvement?

This paper is the response from the University to comments provided by candidates. Thank you to all who took the time to complete the survey, we appreciate your feedback.

Graduate Research School.

Your feedback from the 2010 iPREQ survey has been used to develop several projects running in the GRS during 2011.

Infrastructure

The GRS has been working on providing a rich and varied online research training programme. The project aims to make resources and training more easily available for those candidates not able to make face-to-face sessions, as well as give greater depth and breadth to existing sessions.

Development work is on-going, however HDR students have access to:

- Epigeum research skills training (18 modules to introduce research students and staff to key areas including research methods, literature review, entrepreneurship, intellectual property, and personal professional development)
- Proquest Digital Dissertations database (which contains 2.7 million theses worldwide)
- Sage research methods (600 downloadable e-books)
- Electronic Book Library (6000 e-books available to read on your browser)
- Qualtrics Online Survey Software
- Graduate Research Induction Programme

In 2010, building 10 on the Joondalup campus was renovated and became a 'Research Commons'. The Commons is a shared space to provide additional support to HDR students by providing a location where you access the expertise of GRS staff and the HDR SOAR Centre, as well as 'hot desk' workspaces with appropriate research software. The area also has an informal lounge where you can gather, share a cup of tea or coffee, build research networks and collaborate across disciplines. The intent is to have a similar commons on Mount Lawley, however no time frame has been set for establishing this yet.

The Graduate Research School requested upgrade of two research software programs with university-wide licenses, EndNote and NVivo. EndNote X3 was upgraded to EndNote X4, and NVivo 8 was upgraded to version 9.

Supervision

The Graduate Research School continues to provide face-to-face Supervisor Training workshops regularly. The GRS has also developed an online training module for supervision, to encourage greater participation in training.

The supervisor register has been implemented. In order to be registered, all supervisors need to meet the criteria outlined in Edith Cowan's Supervision of Postgraduate Research Students Policy.

HDR students can now access an online blackboard module called "Working With Your Supervisor" which provides resources to assist in developing effective and positive relationships with their supervisors.

Skill Development and Intellectual Climate

The Graduate Research School continues to invite guest speakers to share their expertise with ECU research candidates. This included a 2 day seminar on "Demystifying the Thesis" run by Ron Adams from Victoria University, and sessions on running focus groups by Josephine Muir.

Research Week 2011 has over 40 activities, including exhibitions, workshops, public lectures, colloquiums and information sessions about research degrees. One of the Research Week themes is research training, with workshops specifically for HDR candidates on focus groups, academic writing, research data as an asset and work-life balance for researchers. There were also several workshops in developing presentation and public speaking skills associated with the 3 Minute Thesis competition, will showcase research candidate projects, as well as offer prizes and an opportunity to represent ECU in the national finals.

In 2011, dates for FOPS sessions were set in advance to facilitate inviting speakers. The variety of speakers has been broadened based on student feedback forms, and to date has included: on-line research materials, managing your supervisor, and presenting at conferences.

The Graduate Research School has held several events to provide HDR candidates the opportunity to network with fellow research candidates. In 2010, a BBQ was held at the Perth Zoo with approximately 100 attendees. Coffee mornings continue on both metropolitan campuses.

Faculty of Education and Arts

The iPREQ data collected 2008-2010 averaged over all FEA students who responded to the survey (n>80) reveal a consistent pattern of high satisfaction with supervision, skill development, goals and expectations and overall satisfaction. Rating of satisfaction with infrastructure has been consistent at 67% over the three years and is slightly lower than the ratings provided by students in FBL and FCHS. Of the iPREQ sub-scales, FEA students gave the lowest rating to intellectual climate (60%) which is also slightly lower than the ratings provided by FBL and FCHS students.

School of Education

The Education students' rating of overall satisfaction is very high (98%) with supervision (88%), skills development (88%) and goals and expectations (93%) also rated highly. Intellectual climate (71%) and infrastructure (77%) remain reasonably high. A strong seminar program and Postgraduate Research Colloquium offered by the Institute and research communities linked to CSaLT and the Fogarty Learning Centre contribute to a lively intellectual climate. Postgraduate Study suites in Building 31 at Joondalup provide excellent facilities and the suite in Building 16 at Mount Lawley has

had a new printer and fax machines added to the resources during 2010. A new suite will be opened to Mount Lawley students in Building 17 in mid-2011. In response to students' requests for additional financial support for their research, international students who need to travel overseas to their home country for their data collection have been provided with up to \$1500 in addition to the normal research allowance of \$3000.

School of Communication and Arts

SCA HDR students' overall satisfaction has declined 10% between 2009-10 to 76% while satisfaction with supervision (81%), skill development (88%) and goals and expectations (90%) are high. Intellectual climate (53%) and infrastructure (61%) appear to be the main areas of low satisfaction.

SCA's research student body has two large and coherent discipline areas in Creative Writing and Visual Arts. The remaining students are studying a wide range of subjects within the media and communications disciplines. Of these areas the Design cohort is growing slowly and has great potential. The school's students have expressed many positive comments about their research area's coordination, the faculty administrative support they receive and their supervisors. CREATEC continues to offer opportunities for the dissemination of research and discussion around it, and discipline areas are developing seminar programmes of their own. Action is being taken to address the persistent problem with noise in one of the study areas.

WAAPA

WAPPA has a growing cohort of HDR students, however, numbers remain modest with only a small number (n=11) responding to the iPREQ survey. The quantitative data need to be interpreted with caution, however overall satisfaction (100%) and satisfaction with supervision (100%) are very high.

Some students commented about confusion with application forms and units in courses, a problem partly arising from generic application forms and complex course structures that are being simplified for 2012. Students are strongly advised to consult with the HDR Coordinator before applying for admission. Studio space and production support will always be a point of contention. In the past, resourceful students have overcome such difficulties, often managing to acquire invaluable access and support in downtimes or, alternatively, involving external organisations in their projects. Strategies to manage this ongoing challenge are to:

- Discuss resource implications before enrolment, emphasising the significance of process over product in research investigations
- Support students efforts in seeking external funding or resources
- Continually negotiating fall-back positions if funding sources do not materialise

Faculty of Business and Law

The 2010 iPREQ results are consistent with previous years' outcomes in relation to areas most in need of improvement.

41 Doctoral and 8 Masters students from across the four Schools in the Faculty of Business and Law provided feedback, representing 56% of the PhD and 29% of the Masters by Research cohorts respectively. There are some issues to be worked on, but the majority of students indicated that they are satisfied with their courses and higher degree by research experience. Overall students were positive about their access to the development of knowledge and personal growth that HDR study affords them; their access to resources through the library in terms of databases; coursework and the choices they have available to them.

Intellectual climate, infrastructure and supervision stood out as the areas most in need of improvement and follow the same patterns in the other two faculties. Intellectual climate is

described as “seminars, FOPS, research community or culture; social events; relationship with fellow postgraduate students.” Within the Faculty of Business and Law there has been a noticeable lack of attendance by HDR students at monthly Faculty Forums and other research activities designed to promote the research culture and social interaction within the Faculty. Students’ comments indicate a need to schedule events in different formats, places and times to allow as many to participate as possible. The Office of Research & Higher Degrees and the Faculty need to take this into consideration when planning future activities and events.

Specific requests around infrastructure included the availability of more shared spaces where postgraduate students could meet and discuss their research on a daily basis; more resources and accessibility to IT support and resources for external students. The Faculty utilises three postgraduate suites which are allocated to students on a semester-by-semester basis to ensure optimal use of these facilities. All three suites are currently fully occupied and the Faculty will need to consider putting forward a case to extend these facilities in order to allow for growth in postgraduate student numbers. In the meantime, students are able to use the staff room in Building 2 as well as the hot desks and other spaces provided by the Graduate Research School.

Access to and faster support from supervisors were raised by some students as needing improvement. Students indicated that their principal supervisors were often too busy to see them or respond with feedback in a timely manner. Access to a second supervisor was noted by one student as being desirable. Schools within FBL are currently reviewing supervisor arrangements via the online supervisor register.

Students also requested more research skills development and greater structure and research training at the start of their programs. More information on research methodologies and philosophies were called for in order to understand their underpinning epistemological and ontological implications. In addition Finance students highlighted the need for training in advanced econometrics analysis methods and the School concurred that more time should be allowed in the initial stages of their candidature for students to equip themselves with the statistical tools needed to do their analyses. It should be noted that in addition to offering writing and statistical methods support in FBL, the Graduate Research School is now providing many online resources to students.

Some students indicated that funding remains an issue for the collection of data overseas but there was no indication of whether these students have utilised or are aware of the \$3000 postgraduate funding support that is available from the Schools. This may therefore highlight a need to review the level of funding available to postgraduate students.

Faculty of Computing, Health and Science

School of Exercise, Biomedical and Health Sciences

The feedback we have is generally very positive. It’s unlikely that we can substantially improve access to equipment/lab space in our more established research areas because our labs are already exceptionally equipped, although it seems some discussion needs to be had regarding access to biology labs. Also, our newer teaching/research areas are highly funded, so research equipment/lab space is being acquired rapidly; of course ‘School’ equipment can be used by researchers in all areas so we need to make sure that these ‘newer’ areas know what is available to them elsewhere.

One area for possible change however is with supervisor capability/capacity. In our school there are newer disciplines with no substantive research history, and in older disciplines there’s a possibility for some supervisors to be functioning sub-optimally. We believe the best way to improve the consistency of our postgraduate supervision across the school is to meet ‘in house’ to discuss best practice regarding supervision. It is not possible to force supervisors to work in a specific way, but having an open discussion about standards and methods of supervision it may be possible to set a

benchmark by verbal contract. Regardless, in order to ensure supervisory parity across disciplines within the school we will need first to discuss the possible options.

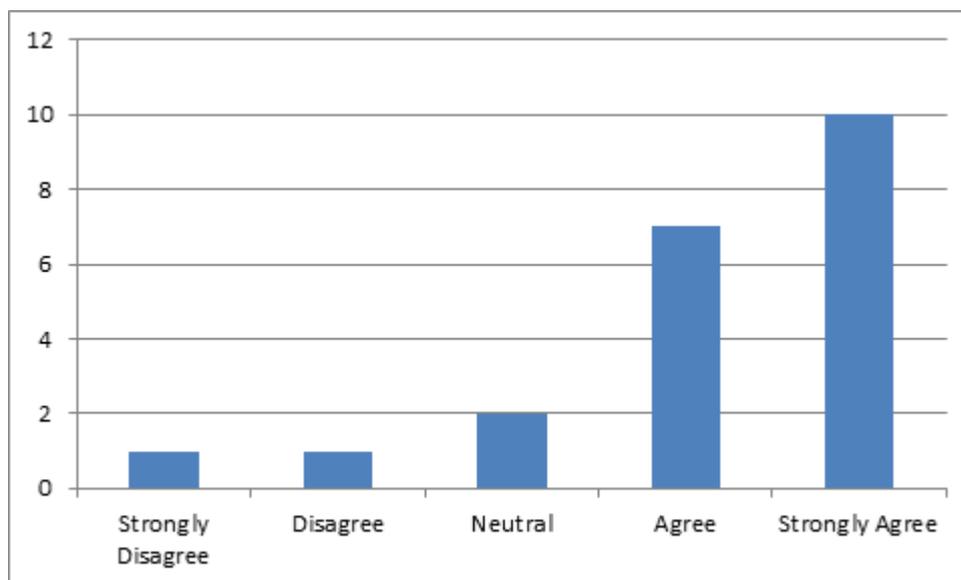
A second area for change is to ensure that all postgraduate students understand the 'chain of command' within the School, so that any student who has questions, or is in any way unhappy, knows who they can talk to in order to sort potential problems.

School of Computer and Security Science

- Staff who are studying research degrees can discuss with their Head of School inclusion in their workload model, as this is an agreed outcome.
- The school encourages students who have issues with supervision or other aspects of their course to contact the Head of School. When meeting with HDR students, the Head of School will raise the escalation process and also email to all students.
- Students who need to establish long-term experiments can use network simulators as an alternative to networking labs in Building 13.
- From Semester 2, all lectures will be Camtasia recorded. We can extend this to workshops at the school level for research.
- The school will be looking at professional development and other means of improving supervision.

School of Engineering

For the question on "Overall Satisfaction" only two responses were in the disagree category (1-disagree and 1 strongly disagree) out of 21 responses. This gives a result like this:



The result is very good and the negative answers are most likely related to some particular matters or events that may have happened but are not easily identifiable.

For the other questions:

1. Administration Services: only one negative comment.
2. Best Aspects: Comments are positive and broad ranging.
3. Aspects in need of improvement: There are a few comments in relation to resources (library, financial and facilities).

School of Psychology and Social Sciences

The recent School Review report recommended that the SoPSS establish a Research Committee. One of the functions of this committee would be to manage the student experience of HDR students. The School has adopted this recommendation. The first meeting of the School Research Committee is 23rd May, and will meet monthly thereafter. The first meeting will consider the iPREQ results and develop a strategy for dealing with the issues raised.

One obvious issue that has been raised in the iPREQ results is that many HDR students appear to have an inaccurate perception of their role and that of their supervisors during the period of their candidature. One method the school will consider is to hold annual orientation sessions for new HDR students that will include advice on the various roles and responsibilities of students and supervisors.

School of Nursing, Midwifery and Postgraduate Medicine

Were recorded for 11 of our postgraduate research students. Of these 4 gave the response that they 'strongly' agreed with the statement that they were satisfied with the quality of their higher degree research experience, 6 agreed and 1 neither agreed nor disagreed.

In response to the issues identified in relation to supervision, it is hoped that the new resources and training of supervisors by the GRS will be beneficial. We have recently introduced a monthly Research Interest Group for students. It is hoped that this will be an additional avenue for support and assistance. Where, possible meeting dates for the year are sent to students on a group distribution email. Other dates are sent as they become available.

School of Natural Science

Comments were predominantly positive. The School will find out whether there are constraints applied on PGs access after hours, and then respond appropriately (i.e. make sure Postgrads have appropriate access). The quantitative responses will be fed into the school planning process.