

In Progress Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire 2009

ECU Response

In the second semester of 2009, the GRS administered an electronic survey to 565 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. 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 2009 iPREQ survey has been used to develop several projects running in the GRS during 2010.

Infrastructure

In second semester 2010, building 10 on the Joondalup campus will be renovated and become a 'research commons'. The commons will be a shared, technology enabled 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 will also have 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.

Approval has been given for Higher Degree by Research candidates to be issued with an 'access only' staff ID. By having a staff ID, research candidates should find access to training, research and other benefits more simplified.

By the end of 2010, the GRS website will be in a new format, making information such as academic rules, policies and resources more easily available to research students and staff.

Supervision

The Graduate Research School will continue to provide a minimum of 10 Supervisor Training workshops annually. The GRS is working with schools to encourage greater participation at training sessions. We will also continue to run the "How to Manage Your Supervisor" workshops for students annually.

The supervisor register is still in progress. In order to be registered, all supervisors will need to have met the criteria outlined in Edith Cowan's Supervision of Postgraduate Research Students Policy.

Skill Development and Intellectual Climate

In addition to Forum of Postgraduate Students (FOPS) workshops and regular social events, the Graduate Research School is inviting guest speakers to share their expertise with ECU research candidates. This includes hosting a Council of Australian Postgraduate Association event in September 2010, and organising iTHINKWELL seminars which focus on techniques for being more effective.

Research Week 2010 has over 70 activities, including exhibitions, workshops, public lectures, colloquiums and information sessions about research degrees. This year is also the inaugural 3 Minute Thesis competition, which will showcase research candidate projects, as well as offer prizes and an opportunity to represent ECU in the national finals.

Commencing HDR Candidates are now provided with a thumb drive 'welcome pack' with information pertinent to the first few weeks of study, and settling in. The Graduate Research Induction Programme (GRIP) was piloted in semester 1 and provides seven modules of online induction to candidates covering the period from commencement to confirmation of candidature.

A new project is about to kick off which looks at placing resources for training and skill development online. 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.

Faculty of Education and Arts

The 2009 quantitative iPREQ data for the School of Education shows strong improvement over the already positive data from 2008. *Overall Satisfaction* increased from 89% agreement to 93%. The strongest areas of improvement were for *Intellectual Climate* up from 63% in 2008 to 82% in 2009 and for *Infrastructure* up from 68% to 80%.

The improved responses to iPREQ can most likely be attributed to initiatives taken by the Edith Cowan Institute for Education Research. Morning and afternoon tea functions were used to create a sense of community amongst HDR students and researchers, and an association of HDR students with the School's research centres. The Postgraduate Research Colloquium held during Research Week was a major event which brought together all Education HDR students together in a conference-style function which allowed students to report on their research to their peers and Education researchers. These functions were very effective in breaking down isolation, building intellectual climate and a sense of community. The Institute has also funded the acquisition of new printers and scanners for the Education postgraduate suites further enhancing facilities and infrastructure.

The iPREQ qualitative data was generally very positive with strong affirmation of the quality of supervision and the sense of being connected to a community of scholars. Suggestions for improvement include:

- clarification of students and supervisors' responsibilities which is addressed in the new ECU supervision policy and procedures for the first meeting between candidates and their supervisors;
- better integration of GRS and Faculty supports which will be addressed by a joint strategic planning meeting at the end of 2010;

- more guidance at the commencement of candidature which will be provided through the GRS GRIP induction program;
- a web page for PhD students' research profiles which is being explored; and,
- many students recognised that they need to work on improving their academic writing and recognised the valuable support provided by the Academic Writing Consultant. Expanding opportunities for HDR students to participate in FEA writing retreats will be explored.

School of Communication and Arts response to iPREQ data

Quantitative data indicate that overall satisfaction increased from 82% in 2008 to 86% in 2009. Goals and expectations and skill development both rose to a very high 90%. Intellectual climate (57%) and infrastructure (60%) data indicate that there are opportunities for improvement.

Qualitative data included positive comments regarding support from supervisors and satisfaction with opportunities for independent and self-directed inquiry. Other comments raised concerns about feeling not connected to a community of scholarship and about the noisy PhD study suite in Building 17.

Strategies being implemented to enhance intellectual climate, research culture and infrastructure include:

- CREATEC is hosting a Postgraduate Colloquium and Exhibition during Research Week to involve all SCA HDR students in making presentations and exhibiting creative works to enhance research culture and intellectual climate
- Regular monthly meetings will be held in the Building 17 PhD suite to build a stronger research culture. The meetings will provide opportunities for students to share their ideas and supervisors can discuss central themes such as methodologies, exegesis writing, language issues, referencing etc.
- Facilities and services have been asked to arrange for the soundproofing of the PhD study suite in Building 17.
- SCA will establish a small research committee to drive strategic direction for research and research training following the recommendations of the school review.

Faculty of Computing, Health and Science

The Faculty of Computing, Health and Science has six schools responsible for higher degree by research candidates. The responses below are by theme, and by school where appropriate.

Funding.

Many schools are reviewing the funding models for supporting Higher Degree by Research candidates.

Engineering. The overall impression from iPREQ 2008 and 2009 is quite positive. At this stage the School contributes \$1500 per year for this conference travel. We will consider (after consultation with academic staff) reducing the number of supported conferences to 2 for PhD and 1 for Masters, and increase the funding to \$2000. This is the limit of affordability, because candidates have significant software and hardware requirements which are the school's primary area of focus to ensure candidates can get their research done.

Psychology. In order to ensure that students are aware of the financial support available for their research projects, the school has:

- Reviewed the financial support models used in the school;
- Provided information about postgraduate funding models (both financial and infrastructure support) to students when they enrol.

School of Natural Sciences. In response to the iPREQ Survey, the School has agreed to review the funding model.

Infrastructure

Engineering. Significant investments have been made to enhance our research infrastructure. This is an ongoing task, and not all projects can be fully supported. However, the facilities that are acquired are top class and well maintained. Library resources have been boosted significantly.

Supervision

Psychology. This is the most frequent comment under both “the best aspect of the course” and also under the “most in need of improvement” headings. This means that some staff members are doing a really good job, and some are not doing a good job as supervisors. We will encourage staff to implement the following procedure if they are not yet doing so. Negotiate and contract with research students:

1. How frequently you will meet with them;
2. How you will deal with situations where one of you cannot make a meeting;
3. How they can reach you if they urgently need guidance;
4. How long before meetings they need to provide you with material they want you to read; and
5. Within what time you will return material to them.

The school encouraged staff to undertake the supervisor workshop offered by the Graduate School, and a relatively large number of staff members have completed this workshop. Some staff members have also engaged in additional learning activities to develop their supervision skills.

Engineering. The school has encouraged training, and more staff have attended supervisor's workshops.

School of Natural Sciences. Access to supervisors is a workload issue and this is being addressed by ensuring that no staff exceed the maximum 625 workload points. We are using more sessional staff and giving staff marking assistance during very busy periods.

Intellectual Climate

School of Natural Sciences. The School is opening the discipline specific seminars and proposals to all staff and HDR students in the School in the hope that this increase Coursework for MBR will be offered online and off-campus mode to assist students studying off-campus collaboration and collegiality. We will also be holding more social events such as barbeques throughout the year. This will be increased to two each semester, start and end.

Nursing, Midwifery and Postgraduate Medicine have addressed an improvement in the research culture by the introduction of a monthly Research Interest Group. The first meeting was held in June 2010 and was well attended. A number of ideas for the functioning of the group were discussed

which included the presentation of current research, invited speakers, and journal article reviews. A separate “Hands-On” Research Interest Group is planned where students will be able to present and receive feedback from the group on work in progress.

Psychology. Past meetings of this nature have not been attended well, however the School will consult candidates in an attempt to resume such activities. The school also encourages students to participate in Google groups, Forum of Postgraduate Students (FOPS) workshops and events, and regular social events such as coffee mornings offered by the Graduate School.

Feedback from D.Psych Candidates

The professional doctorate is a fee paying course that does not fall under the Research Training Scheme (RTS) and currently the structure and the course content are determined by our accrediting body, the Australian Psychology Accreditation Council. These students do not enjoy all the privileges the PhD students enjoy and therefore it is understandable that they feel aggrieved. Some of the complaints raised will be identified with greater accuracy in the unit and teaching surveys, but it is worth noting seminars are offered in the evening because most students prefer this as it allows many of them to study part time, which is the only option they have, and give them enough time to do their practical training. The School is in the process of closing down some of the professional doctorates and converting others into courses that will meet the criteria of the Research Training Scheme. The school investigated how it could address the concerns expressed by DPsych students and is currently in the process of discontinuing some of the DPsych courses and restructuring the remaining DPsych courses so that they meet the criteria of the Research Training Scheme.

Faculty of Business and Law

2009 saw a great deal of change occurring in the Faculty of Business and Law. A new Executive Dean was recruited, and a new Associate Dean of Research and Higher Degrees was appointed. It is likely that this transitional period for the Faculty affected the outcomes of the 2009 iPREQ survey. While the results for *Overall Satisfaction* and *Skill Development* remained steady (81% and 92% respectively), there were noticeable declines in other areas. Based on the results from the iPREQ, several initiatives have been put in place on 2010 to better service our postgraduate students.

Infrastructure

A slight decline in infrastructure led to a need to re-evaluate the way we accommodate and integrate our postgraduate students. Currently, the Faculty has been able to ‘house’ 30 RHD students in three areas. Two of the rooms, housing nine and 13 students, are located in building 2. This allows for proximity to supervisors and others working in the discipline area. The other room being utilised in is building 31, which although removed from the Faculty, does house 11 students. Each student is allocated a desk, a locked filing cabinet and has access to in-room printing facilities and kitchen facilities.

The Faculty employs a research and a writing consultant. Both consultants are based in building 2 in close proximity to the Faculty RHD office. This provides for convenient access to all critical points for the student’s needs. The research consultant is available three days per week, while the writing consultant is available 2 ½ days per week. In addition, extra support is provided on an ad hoc basis for students in need.

Supervision

In 2010, the Faculty of Business, in conjunction with GRS, has run two supervisor training workshops. The purpose of these workshops is to inform new and existing supervisors of the changes in supervisory requirements and to alert them to basic issues that may arise in the supervisor – student relationship. To date, 40% of active supervisors have attended the workshop. An additional workshop for the remaining 60% is planned for semester two, 2010. The goal of the Faculty is to have 100% of supervisors having received training by the end of 2010.

In semester two, the A/D RHD will undertake individual meetings with all RHD students. One of the issues that will be discussed at these meetings is the supervisor – student relationship with the objective being to ensure that the student is receiving the level of service they need.

In addition, the Faculty is encouraging a panel approach to supervision. This ensures that the student receives the level of supervision that they need, and that they have a wide range of expertise to draw on. It also allows them to utilise resources outside of their main discipline and fosters cross-disciplinary research.

Intellectual Climate

A number of programs have been put in place to help boost the intellectual climate of the faculty. A series of Faculty Forums has been running for the 2010 period. Held every six weeks, the forum provides three key speakers from the Faculty across a variety of topics. Graduate students are strongly encouraged to attend and have been invited to present their research. The forums are followed by an informal social so that students and staff can freely mingle.

A monthly RHD morning tea has also been implemented. Again, the purpose of this is for students and staff to informally meet and discuss research and other issues. It is the intent that these activities will encourage the students to become more integrated in the faculty and will serve the purpose of stimulating the intellectual climate.

Skill Development

The presence of a research consultant and a writing consultant has been viewed favourably and has contributed to the strong result for this measure. The writing consultant has encouraged students and supervisors to utilise his services early in the process. This helps to ensure that the student has a sound understanding of academic writing requirements and is equipped to develop their thesis proposal.

The research consultant, in addition to being available for individual consultation, has presented two workshops – one on LISREL and the most recent on Research Methodology and Random Survey Design. A third workshop on Troubleshooting Surveys, is scheduled for the second semester. These workshops have been well attended by both RHD students and supervisors. Further week-long workshops are currently being explored to help further skills in both qualitative and quantitative techniques.