

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
FACULTY OF ARTS
STUDENT RESEARCH EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE (SREQ)
ANALYSIS OF OPEN RESPONSE COMMENTS 2004

Introduction

The following document provides an analysis of the comments received in answer to the SREQ open response comments from postgraduate research students in the Faculty of Education and Social Work in 2004.

Students were asked to provide comments on the following:

- *What are the best aspects of your research higher degree experience? Please explain why these aspects are good.*
- *What aspects are most in need of improvement? Please explain why.*

Each comment received was analysed for subject content and categorised into aspects which are closely aligned with the following SREQ Scales and their characteristics:

- *Quality of Supervision*
- *Quality of Infrastructure*
- *Research Climate*
- *Generic Skills*
- *Overall satisfaction*

Comments which included more than one aspect (e.g. quality of supervision and infrastructure) were counted in all aspects mentioned.

Arrangement

1. Analysis of comments referring to the best aspects of the degree course
2. Analysis of comments referring to aspects that could be improved

Responses are ranked according to the percentage of comments received for each aspect. Sample comments have been provided for the aspects that received the most number of comments. Results from the previous years qualitative analysis are provided as a percentage. Only aspects that received 5% or more comments in 2004 are included in this report. To preserve student confidentiality, sample comments are only provided if there are five or more comments relating to that aspect in the responses. Comments which may possibly identify the student are not included in sample comments.

Attachment One: Categories and sub-categories for the analysis of SREQ Open Response comments

Rachel Symons
Quality Assurance Officer (Teaching and Learning)
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1 Analysis of comments referring to the best aspects of the degree course¹

Students are happy with their supervision (2004: 32%)
(2003: 31%; 2002: 37%)

- I enjoy working with my supervisor and associate supervisor who always respond in a timely fashion to enquiries
- I have received excellent supervision from specific staff members who are working under great pressure
- My supervisor is always extremely supportive and is hugely efficient and available
- The best aspect so far has been the support and encouragement I have received from both my primary and my associate supervisor. I feel that their assistance has been invaluable and that they are more than willing to provide opportunities for my further intellectual development

Students are satisfied with their research projects (2004: 21%)
(2003: 19%; 2002: 19%)

- Doing interesting research which makes a contribution to the field
- The opportunity for intensive research, on a single subject, over an extended period of time is the thing I appreciate the most.
- The joy of discovery and sharing this with others
- The research itself is the best aspect, in reading the literature and finding new avenues to explore

Students appreciate the independent nature of research (2004: 12%)
(2003: 16%; 2002: 14%)

- It has made me more independent from others help. I try to find the solutions myself and searching for the sources is a good way to find and know new related information
- The ability to construct my own research plan and carry it through in a scholarly environment that is both open and flexible
- Being able to conduct independent research means I can focus on my own interests and plan my own work time
- Whole process of educating yourself. Free to create your own ideas free from the undergraduate format of regurgitating information

Students appreciate the availability of research resources/ library services (2004: 12%)
(2003: 14%; 2002: 15%)

- Ability to access research materials at the library. Fisher library has quite comprehensive materials. Library staff are always helpful and very professional as well
- Library services is excellent because it provides me what ever source of information I need.
- Fisher library's excellent inter library loans department!!! Though I have not used it much this year, in previous years it was an invaluable resource, and gave me easy access to a lot of information that would have been very difficult and time consuming to track down on my own. I am very grateful to have such a good library with a wealth of resources on my topic area (which is Australian literature)
- The library resources are excellent which makes the job of getting material out of the country easier

Generic attributes (communication, problem solving etc) are being developed (2004: 9%)
(2003: 7%; 2002: 10%)

- Being able to qualitatively and quantitatively analyse particular problems, the results of which may possibly be able to advance knowledge in the particular field.
- Improvement in writing and communication skills. Facilitates interaction with others
- I've learnt to be more analytic and expressive which makes me more capable in my higher academic studies
- Developing the ability to solve problems independent of others

¹ Number of comments received: 2004: 269; 2003: 317; 2002: 239)

Students feel part of a supportive Faculty/ Department (2004: 8%)
(2003: 10%; 2002: 8%)

- A positive and supportive research environment in the Department of English
- Good support is available within the department
- The real enthusiasm shown by academics in the History Department in my topic and progress have been a consistent source of encouragement
- Support within the department of work; the enthusiasm and critique all reinforces the work I am doing in a positive way

Students find the experience challenging/ stimulating/ motivating (2004: 8%)
(2003: 4%; 2002: 6%)

- The intellectual stimulation, this is rewarding in itself
- The challenge and thrill of being able to explore in depth and topic I am involved in
- I personally feel very stimulated by my work; I find it exciting and am eager to continue
- To have satisfaction in producing an original piece of research. It presents challenges and is very satisfying to overcome them

Students appreciate the interaction with other postgraduate research students (2004:7%)
(2003: 9%; 2002: 8%)

- The constructive engagement with graduate students from other departments/ schools. This provides the basis for expanding one's perspective academically and personally, and for the possibility of forging constructive dialogue with different, but complementary fields of enquiry
- Continuing relationships with other postgraduates when I met in 1st year postgraduate seminars
- Best aspects have been meeting other postgraduate students and sharing their enthusiasm, as well as getting support for them about general postgraduate experience
- Regular meetings with other postgraduates. Sharing ideas with other researchers and learning about each others work. This is good because it provides a positive and supportive environment for postgraduates in the program and created a network for exchanging ideas and helping one another with any problems

Other aspects mentioned included:

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|--|------------|-----------------------|
| • Development of technical skills (writing, stats) | (2004: 6%) | (2003: 4%; 2002: 6%) |
| • Development of research skills | (2004: 6%) | (2003: 10%; 2002: 9%) |
| • Funding/ Scholarships | (2004: 6%) | (2003: 4%; 2002: 5%) |
| • Opportunities for collaboration & networking | (2004: 5%) | (2003: 6%; 2002: 5%) |

2 Analysis of comments referring to aspects that could be improved²

Students are unhappy with the physical facilities provided (2004: 30%) (2003: 28%; 2002: 28%)

- Better facilities, especially computer facilities. The current arrangements in PGARC are sound, but allocated desks would enable me to use the university as a base for my work rather than my home office
- Access to computers at the department. A good computer should be provided for postgraduate students so they can work effectively on campus
- Safe 'clean' study areas on campus, the Arts PGARC is so filthy I can no longer work there.
- We need shared offices, or at the very least individually allocated computers, or desks. PGARC is no good. There is no culture of community. Philosophy students need a place where they can all go to work and be near each other.

Students are unhappy with some aspects of financial support (2004: 18%) (2003: 13%; 2002: 15%)

- Having narrowly missed out on an APA/UPA, I predictably feel that more scholarship funding should be available. As a more achievable aim however, I believe that more should be done to encourage senior academics to seek more postgraduate and postdoctoral research funding in large applications and that more support should be given to those that do
- The faculty really should update the amount of money it offers for research grants so students who are unable to borrow money from elsewhere have the chance to attend conferences in their area of research
- I would like to see an end to discrimination for part-time students. Some Arts faculty funding and many funding opportunities offered through the Research Office specify that they are available only to full-time students. It is perfectly reasonable that financial support for individual students' livelihoods be, in effect, means tested, but I don't see why support for the actual research is applied in a discriminatory way, based on mode of attendance.
- Access to funds for field work outside Sydney and travel abroad for conferences

Students are dissatisfied with their supervision (2004: 15%) (2003: 17%; 2002: 18%)

- My supervision is appalling and I think that the department needs to be more diligent in instituting measures that bad supervision does not go unattended. The progress report is not necessarily the best forum for a student to air their grievances when its focus is on their own progress and prospective continuance (regardless of the rhetoric that suggests otherwise). There needs to be greater insistence/policing of associate or co-supervision, which does not happen, in order to militate against dodgy supervisory practices
- I get absolutely no support from my supervisor. I am part-time and off campus and I may as not exist as far as my supervisor is concerned. Doesn't even reply to my emails
- Determining the respective roles of the supervisor and myself. I am unsure of what to expect from a supervisor
- The opportunity a second supervisor will provide the student with more frequent contact with his supervisor. Now, with only one supervisor, the supervision process becomes a heavy burden

² Number of comments received: 2004: 237; 2003: 282; 2002: 226)

Students would appreciate opportunities to interact with fellow RHD students (2004:11%)
(2003: 14%; 2002: 12%)

- I think that greater access to and opportunities to meeting other research students in an intellectual form relevant to ones studies, and simply in a social situation, is something that we lack and that needs to be addressed
- I'd like to feel more linked to other postgraduate students in my department – perhaps via an ongoing postgraduate seminar program (first year research students in my department meet every week for a seminar which thereafter is abruptly cut off)
- There are few opportunities advertised for postgraduate students in Arts in social gatherings, seminars or the like. Research work is always isolating, but the opportunities should be fostered by the faculty or uni.
- There's something of a division between students who did their undergraduate degrees at Sydney and those who didn't. I don't think this is deliberate but without more opportunities for interaction it's hard for 'foreign' students (what USyd graduates call the rest of us) to break into the rather closed circle of Sydney alumni.

Students do not feel part of the Faculty/ Department/ School (2004: 10%)
(2003: 9%; 2002: 11%)

- Nobody from the department has welcomed me. I don't know any other research student
- My experience has not been good. The whole system needs revamping. There is no sense of collegiality, nor many opportunities to test one's ideas/ research.
- I feel isolated. There is no real sense of academic community amongst postgraduate students and staff in the department
- A sense of belonging to the department. Perhaps regular meetings/ gatherings for postgraduate students, often we end up doing this ourselves on a more social level.

Student would appreciate more seminars/ workshops (2004: 9%)
(2003: 5%; 2002: 10%)

- There should be more forums for postgraduates and academics working in similar areas to share ideas and research
- There needs to be organised seminars so that students feel as though they are a valuable part of the department
- After hours seminar program for part-time students
- Research seminars for postgraduates

Students are unhappy with the research resources/ library services provided (2004: 8%)
(2003: 6%; 2002: 8%)

- The library is not particularly supportive of research students
- The library acquisition are slow and poor, lack of funds. External access to resources is poor due to the CD Roms can't be accessed outside of the library
- Access to other libraries (outside of Sydney Uni) – subsidised privileges for other university's libraries

Other aspects mentioned included:

- Research resources/ library
- Supportive faculty/ department/ school (2004: 6%) (2003: 5%; 2002: 8%)
- Faculty/ University administration/ organisation (2004: 6%) (2003: 5%; 2002: 4%)

Attachment One Categories and Sub categories used in analysis of SREQ open response comments³

Category	Sub category	Includes
Quality of Supervision	Supervision	Supervisor Supervision in general, including processes in place for feedback regarding satisfaction/dissatisfaction with supervisor
	Management of candidature	Guidance on management of candidature; steps in the process
	Progress reports	Progress reports/ processes in place Value of the reporting process Structure of reporting process
	Flexibility of program	Compared to undergraduate/ postgraduate coursework Working hours etc
	Pressure to complete	Pressure to complete on time (i.e. within time frame set by APA). Workload
	Feedback from supervisor	Feedback on drafts, papers, presentations, seminars; final thesis
Quality of Infrastructure	Funding/ Scholarships	APA, UPA and other scholarships; PRSS Funding for research within faculty/ department etc
	Physical resources	Physical facilities available to postgraduate research students including workplace, computers – provided by University/ Faculty Building maintenance
	Industry facilities	Physical facilities provided by industry partner/ CRC etc
	IT support	Support available for computer hardware and software
	Research resources/ library	Electronic resources such as databases, online journals Interlibrary loan for hard-copy resources Services provided by library
	Technical and Lab support	Support available in laboratories; technician availability for experiments etc
	Resource issues	Issues which affect experience e.g. staffing and funding within department which may reduce face to face time with supervisor, or lack of supervisor due to retirement etc
Overall satisfaction	Satisfaction with research	Comments on research projects; benefits of research etc
	General comments	With university, location, etc

³ NB: Not all categories appear in responses for individual faculties.

Category	Sub category	Includes
Research climate	Challenging and stimulating	Is the research stimulating, challenging Do they feel motivated by supervisor etc
	Induction/ orientation program	Induction/ orientation program for new students, particularly those who start mid year or who come from another university
	Cultural diversity	Part of a culturally diverse student group
	Isolation: off main campus	Issues relating to students situated off main campus/ at training hospitals
	Interaction with other postgraduate research students	Opportunities to interact with other postgraduate research students Feelings of isolation from other students
	Collaboration and networking	Provision of opportunities to collaborate and network with other researchers, academics etc (university, national, international)
	Conference presentations	Opportunities to present at international and national conferences
	Research community	Part of research community/ culture within faculty/ school/ department Part of research community outside university
	Part of faculty/ school/ department	Acceptance by faculty/ department/ school Inclusion in meetings, social events etc Part of communication cycle
	Support of faculty/ school/ department	Support of faculty/ department/ school for their research etc
	Seminars, workshops	Presence of, frequency of seminar or workshop program for postgraduate research students Cross faculty involvement in seminars
	Field work, practical aspects	Field work – help with collecting data etc Practical aspects e.g. in hospitals
	Interaction with industry	Industry partnerships Support from industry in research
	Teaching opportunities/ preparation for academia	Teaching and/or tutoring opportunities offered/ available
	Location/ physical environment	Does not include buildings – location of campus, university etc
	Relevance to future/ current work/ career	Will the research be useful in the future to their careers Is it useful in their present work environment
	Support for part-time/ distance education/ external students	Support for students studying externally or part-time; recognition of difficulties faced/ access to resources etc
	International student experiences	Experiences, support for international students
Coursework component	Issues relating to coursework component of some research degrees e.g. Research Methods	

Category	Sub category	Includes
Generic skills	Graduate attributes, skills	Development of Graduate attributes e.g. communication, analytical, problem-solving skills
	Technical skills	Development of technical skills e.g. statistical skills, thesis/ academic writing, subject specific skills; use of laboratory equipment
	Research skills	Training in research methods; Development of research skills
	Expand knowledge base	Acquisition of new knowledge
	Work independently	Ability to work independently on project compared to structured work of undergraduate degree
	English language for NESB students	Development of English language proficiency Help in academic writing Specific support e.g. proof reading of thesis etc
Administration and organisation	Administration and organisation	Administration and organisation of research higher degree program
	Communication	Between administration and faculty; between support services; between staff and students
	Enrolment	Enrolment process
Other	Ethics administration	
	Equity	Harassment, discrimination etc
	Academic Board policies	Academic Honesty; Intellectual Property