

COLLEGE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
FACULTY OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND NATURAL RESOURCES
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 Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources 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

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1 Analysis of comments referring to the best aspects of the degree course¹

Students appreciate the independent nature of research (2004: 20%)
(2003: 18%; 2002: 22%)

- I have developed the ability to learn independently according to my research program.
- The best thing about the research experience is that I have been given ample opportunity and freedom to plan my research and conduct my experiments
- Flexibility. It allows me to think, plan and work independently (with the assistance from the supervisor). I believe this aspect has enabled me to 'grow' into a researcher from a student
- Initiating your own work – this makes you feel independent and enables less frustrated when you join research jobs

Students are satisfied with their research projects (2004: 19%)
(2003: 25%; 2002: 24%)

- The best aspect of the experience is the research aspect – working on an issue, following ideas, writing it up
- Making new findings in my research area. This indicates progress to me and others
- Possibility to excel in an area of research and become known for that
- Opportunity to construct, develop and investigate novel research techniques, in addition to researching topics not driven purely by commercial focus, the 'blue sky' research needed for major scientific advances in less fashionable fields.

Students are happy with their supervision (2004: 16%)
(2003: 15%; 2002: 20%)

- The support and understanding offered by my supervisor has been excellent
- Excellent supervision within the faculty
- I have developed a good working relationship with both my supervisor and associate supervisor who have been very helpful this year in many areas
- My supervisor, so helpful and personally supportive

Students appreciate the interaction with other postgraduate research students (2004:10%)
(2003: 11%; 2002: 4%)

- My fellow students – this is possibly not given enough weight but the friendships with fellow postgraduates is one of the most important aspects of why my experience has (so far) been positive
- The interaction and support given by other students in my area
- Students makes me know them better and be brave enough to ask them for help whenever I need to
- Having other PhD students support

Students appreciate the availability of research resources/ library services (2004: 10%)
(2003: 7%; 2002: 4%)

- In my opinions, the most positive aspect, that someone has chosen to do graduate studies at the University of Sydney, is the access to the internet and interlibrary loans
- Library has a good collection of references that I need
- I appreciate the library facilities available at the university
- The library service is exceptional

¹ Number of comments received: 2004: 69; 2003: 71; 2002: 55)

Research skills are being developed (2004: 10%)
(2003: 6%; 2002: 15%)

- Confident in planning the research work
- Learning to conduct own research and produce research papers
- To do some unfamiliar research can obtain more skills and will also help in my future research career
- Ability to work on my own, research an area, construct experiments to answer unknown questions, organise my time. This is not only good but necessary when working in science.

Students appreciate the physical resources provided (2004: 9%)
(2003: 13%; 2002: 7%)

- Having access (24hours) to a computer, sitting space and every aspect related to this, sitting with fellow postgraduates.
- Allocation of desk/study space in postgraduate laboratory with fellow postgraduate research students allow regular discussion of research and provide social interaction which enhances the learning process
- Working with new equipment, because these equipments were not presented in my home town
- Good facilities, desk, computer etc

Opportunities for collaboration & networking are appreciated (2004: 9%)
(2003: 8%; 2002: 7%)

- Due to the nature of my research project I spend a lot of time off campus and engaging with other research institutions which has broadened my contact with other people in my discipline who provide useful equipment, knowledge and feedback for me
- Integrating with others in a similar field from different background makes me see my research more clearly. My supervisor introduced me to others working on similar research which has been very helpful so far.
- Network of professional contacts
- Collaboration with other researchers

Other aspects mentioned included:

- Supportive faculty/ department (2004: 6%) (2003: 1%; 2002: 5%)
- Development of technical skills (writing, stats) (2004: 7%) (2002: 11%)
- Development of graduate attributes (communication, analytical, problem solving etc) (2004: 6%) (2003: 11%; 2002: 22%)
- Expanding knowledge base (2004: 6%) (2002: 4%)

2 Analysis of comments referring to aspects that could be improved²

Students are unhappy with the physical facilities provided (2004: 24%)
(2003: 31%; 2002: 22%)

- The Ross St building A03 in which I spend all my time is in a terrible state, with holes in the walls, sagging roof and no temperature control (inside temperatures are regularly 15 degrees in winter and above 35 degrees in summer). Likewise the glasshouse facility I use for trials lacks temperature control and does not have adequate bench space
- Facilities at the centre are very poor and out of date. Many facilities available only at main campus while other student in other campuses deprived
- There are very limited accommodation facilities within some of the remote campuses like Camden. I think the university should give priority to postgraduate students for such a facility
- Laboratory equipments are needed to be more organised which at this moment I feel a bit disorganised because of long going renovation of different laboratories

² Number of comments received: 2004: 66; 2003: 71; 2002: 55)

Students are dissatisfied with their supervision (2004: 18%)
(2003: 14%; 2002: 27%)

- There are aspects of supervision that are a problem – particularly the ability of my supervisor to critically read what I write and suggest improvements
- Teach supervisors basic human interaction skills; teach supervisors basic project management skills
- Quality of supervision, especially in developing the research content
- Supervision needs to be a little bit more structured i.e. regular fortnightly meeting for half an hour. Supervisors are often too busy

Students consider that graduate attributes are not being developed (2004: 9%)
(2003: 4%; 2002: 9%)

- Communication skills. This is very important for me to get some help and support from others as well as cooperation with other researchers. I feel I need to improve these skills
- Managing time
- Project management should be taught as part of the PhD program
- Students should enrol in project management and human resource management

Technical skills are not being developed (2004: 9%)
(2003: 4%; 2002: 16%)

- Being able to catch up with new and important such as bioinformatics training will help me to develop a skill to cope with data analysis and my future career
- There is assumed proficiency in data management and analysis, using the computer, but at least I was prepared for this. I wonder if anyone else is in my predicament
- I have not had any support with biometric analysis of data. Access to a biometrical would be very useful to me and other students.
- It is difficult for postgraduates to get help with statistics for their research data. The Maths Learning Centre cannot help with this

Students are dissatisfied with Faculty/ University administration/ organisation (2004: 9%)
(2003: 3%)

- The administration system is too slow, resulting in student productivity loss
- Administrative support
- More user friendly admin faculty
- Feedback from university administration on written requests that have not yet been received

Other aspects mentioned included:

- | | | |
|--|------------|-----------------------|
| • Funding/ scholarships | (2004: 8%) | (2003: 10%; 2002: 4%) |
| • Guidance on management of candidature | (2004: 6%) | (2003: 10%; 2002: 7%) |
| • IT support | (2004: 6%) | (2003: 4%) |
| • Research resources/ library | (2004: 6%) | (2003: 8%; 2002: 2%) |
| • Isolation /lack of support for affiliated campuses | (2004: 6%) | (2003: 4%; 2002: 4%) |
| • Supportive faculty/ department/ school | (2004: 5%) | |

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