

FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK
STUDENT RESEARCH EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE (SREQ)
POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENTS
ANALYSIS OF OPEN RESPONSE COMMENTS: 2005

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ), which evaluates the quality of research higher degree students' experiences, was introduced in 2002. As part of the questionnaire students are asked to provide comments on the best aspects of their university experience and those that could be improved.

Based on the responses to these questions, this document seeks to provide an analysis of the areas of best practice, and opportunities for improvement, in the experiences of postgraduate research students in the Faculty of Education and Social Work in 2005.

Degree experience: areas of best practice

The aspects of degree experience which attracted most positive comments from postgraduate research students in 2005 were:

	% of comments received	
	2005	2004
Quality of supervision: supervisor	47%	40%
Overall satisfaction: satisfaction with research	28%	21%
Generic skills: working independently	10%	10%
Research climate: supportive work environment	9%	7%
Generic skills: graduate attributes	8%	8%
Research climate: research resources: library	8%	7%

Degree experience: opportunities for improvement

The areas of degree experience which postgraduate research students considered most in need of improvement in 2005 were:

	% of comments received	
	2005	2004
Quality of infrastructure: physical facilities: workspace, buildings etc	16%	27%
Research climate: interaction with other postgraduate research students	14%	15%
Administration and organisation: general	13%	11%
Quality of supervision: supervisor	13%	15%
Quality of infrastructure: funding: other	12%	9%
Research climate: student support: part-time students	6%	

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May 2006

1 Introduction

The Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ), which evaluates the quality of research higher degree students' experiences, was introduced in 2002. As part of the questionnaire students are asked to provide comments postgraduate research students are asked to provide comments on the following:

- What are the best aspects of your research higher degree experience?
- What aspects are most in need of improvement?

Based on the responses to these questions, this document seeks to provide an analysis of the areas of best practice, and opportunities for improvement, in the experiences of postgraduate research students in the Faculty of Education and Social Work in 2005.

In 2005 79% of students who responded to the SREQ provided comments on the best aspects of their degree experience, and 70% on aspects that were considered to be in need of improvement. The substantial difference in the number of positive comments received compared to those expressing the opposite opinion, possibly indicates an overall satisfaction with the degree experience of postgraduate research students in the Faculty of Education and Social Work.

2 Arrangement

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

Within the first two sections, responses are ranked according to the percentage of comments received for each aspect. Sample comments are provided for the six aspects that received the highest percentage of comments. For comparison, results for the previous years qualitative analysis (2002 – 2004) are provided in brackets after the 2005 results. This part of the analysis is based on comments received from all students who responded to the survey – local and international.

Only aspects that received more than 5% of comments in 2005 are included in this report. To preserve student confidentiality, sample comments are only provided if there are six or more comments relating to that aspect in the responses. Comments that may possibly identify the student are not been included in the sample comments. Comments are transcribed exactly as they appear in the original documents.

The last section provides an analysis of comments received from the twelve international postgraduate research students who responded to the survey.

3 Analysis of the comments: taxonomy and process

The manual analysis and evaluation method used by the University is based on an in-house taxonomy which allows for standardisation of reporting across the university and ease of comparison with the SREQ quantitative analysis reports.

Within the taxonomy, categories used for the SREQ are identical to the SREQ factor scales, with the addition of Administration and organisation, Ethics Administration, Academic Board policies, International Office, and other administrative areas and support services¹. This taxonomy is under constant revision as the need to sub-divide categories and create new ones becomes apparent.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quality of supervision• Quality of infrastructure• Generic skills• Research climate• Overall satisfaction | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Academic Board policies• Cultural diversity and Equity• Communication• Administration and organisation• Student support services |
|---|--|

Categories used in the analysis of SREQ Open Response comments

Each comment received is analysed according to the SREQ Taxonomy, with those including more than one aspect being counted in each aspect mentioned.

It should be noted, however, that the absence of favourable comments on a particular aspect of research training does not reflect that this is not an area of best practice. Rather that the students are happy with their experiences, and prefer to focus on commenting on areas in need of improvement.

¹ A copy of the taxonomy is provided as a separate document

4 Analysis of comments referring to the best aspects²

Quality of supervision: supervisor

(2005: 47%)

(2004: 40%; 2003: 38%; 2002: 40%)

- Good supervision - supervisor knows area very well and introduces me to appropriate research, organisers speakers which are relevant, allows autonomy
- I have an excellent supervisor and am located in a research centre where the whole team is supportive. This means that even if my supervisor is out of the country, there are others who are happy to give me advice immediately. My supervisor is always available and very good at explaining aspects of becoming a researcher as well as providing me with opportunities to develop these skills.
- Having a supervisor who is: * finely tuned into my research * is providing involvement in other research opportunities * is good at building confidence
- My supervisor is the expert in my field and has extensive knowledge and experience in research and supervising PhD students. He is able to give me clear and useful guidance which makes my work most enjoyable.

Overall satisfaction: satisfaction with research

(2005: 28%)

(2004: 21%; 2003: 14%; 2002: 13%)

- The opportunity to dedicate time to focuses learning. This experience has deepened my understanding about a question of particular personal interest.
- Being able to study and research a problem that is directly relevant to my work environment, and provides benefits to my employer.
- The topic I have chosen is of great interest to me and I believe my work will contribute to the body of knowledge available.
- The opportunity to undertake research in an area that is important to me and my profession and so far neglected in terms of academic scrutiny.

Generic skills: working independently

(2005: 10%)

(2004: 10%; 2003: 15%; 2002: 10%)

- Being able to work independently.
- Independent learning and the resources to research questions e.g., computer/library/net, contact with other students.
- Autonomy in pursuing and developing topic and skills developed.
- Being able to drive my own research. Follow my personal interests, at my own place, in my own time.

² Number of comment received: 2005: 251; 2004: 269; 2003: 317; 2002: 239

Research climate: supportive work environment

(2005: 9%)

(2004: 7%; 2003: 7%; 2002: 6%)

- I have an excellent supervisor and am located in a research centre where the whole team is supportive. This means that even if my supervisor is out of the country, there are others who are happy to give me advice immediately.
- The support received from my supervisors and all academic staff on level 7 (social work department) have been amazing. They have time for me whenever I need assistance and treat me with great respect as an equal and have rescued me in my enrolment process and throughout. This have been an amazing experience ! I have been to 3 universities in the past and this has been the best experience I have had with staff and the welcoming nature which makes you feel included and respected.
- This semester - the advice, support, encouragement and discussions from my research cluster group, which helped me move forward and develop as a researcher and an academic
- Now that I am onto the formal research part of my study, the support of other postgraduates and my supervisors has become useful and productive relationship.

Generic skills: graduate generic attributes

(2005: 8%)

(2004: 8%; 2002: 15%)

- Development of problem solving, analytical and writing skills.
- Learning about research, engaging in research, improving writing skills, learning about area of research i.e., topic area of thesis.
- The opportunity to develop analytical skills. These are invaluable for my work.
- My analytical and writing skills have improved a lot perhaps mainly due to hard work and desire to improve. Working and discussing with others (students) have certainly contributed to my confidence.

Quality of infrastructure: research resources: library

(2005: 8%)

(2004: 7%; 2003: 10%; 2002: 10%)

- The library has been very supportive in assisting me with literature searches, interlibrary loans etc.
- The library facilities and electronic collection is good
- the library at the School of Health Sciences, which has power outlets in all the study carrels, (unlike Fisher which is hopeless as a study environment)
- reconnecting with the uni and being able to access library, ideas and other interested students

Other aspects mentioned included:

	<i>2005</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2002</i>
Generic skills: research skills	7%	12%	3%	4%
Interaction with other postgraduate research students	7%	6%	7%	11%
Research climate: challenging, stimulating	5%	4%	4%	7%
Research climate: part of research community: faculty/ dept	5%			

5 Analysis of comments suggesting improvements³

Quality of infrastructure: physical facilities: workspace, buildings etc (2005: 16%)
(2004: 27%; 2003: 26%; 2002: 21%)

- A Postgraduate room for ourselves. The access to staff room is a bit daunting even though no one has said anything you feel as if you're invading someone else's space, a postgraduate study area will be great.
- The facilities available for part time students are inadequate. I am not in the paid workforce and so do not have access to phones, photocopiers etc through work and yet being a part-time student, as determined by University, I have no accommodation or phone/photocopying facilities. It is very expensive to fund these myself. It is an issue of equity I believe.
- Provision of resources e.g. I am still waiting for some office space
- Working within the Uni environment is highly bureaucratic and difficult to access. Greater effort is required to allow students to know what is available and a streamlined system is required to permit access to those facilities

Research climate: interaction with other research students (study related) (2005: 14%)
(2004: 15%; 2003: 15%; 2002: 15%)

- More contact with other postgraduate Education students and faculty staff would enhance the research experience by providing opportunities to interact intellectually with other academic professionals in the field.
- Co-ordination with PhD students. Students often feel isolate. Unsure what to do.
- Networking of postgraduate research students apart from postgraduate forums and being part time results in infrequent interactions and exchanges.
- the relationship with other postgrad students outside the research center needs to be improve

Quality of supervision: supervisor (2005: 13%)
(2004: 15%; 2003: 26%; 2002: 28%)

- I think currently it is pure luck as to whether you get a good supervisor who cares about your project and goals or one who is only interested in using you for work points or kudos. There seems to be no real recourse for PG students who have problems with their supervisors and no standard set of supervisor duties. Students are in a very awkward political situation and do not have any real facility for advocacy.
- Access to associate supervisors while supervisor is away and or as a second opinion
- quality and frequency of supervision; new supervisor isn't as good as former one- simply too busy- not making enough time for supervision.
- Commitment from original supervisor, when mine left to take a position elsewhere, I was without a supervisor for months then with a supervisor that was unsatisfactory for months and now with another who is not expert in my area. I have wasted much time due to this.

³ Number of comment received: 2005: 77; 2004: 93; 2003: 82; 2002: 67

**Faculty of Education and Social Work: Analysis of student experience:
Postgraduate research students: 2005**

Administration and organisation: general (2005: 13%)
(2004: 11%; 2003: 10%; 2002: 12%)

- Faculty Administration- As someone who did not complete undergraduate study at this university, I have found it incredibly difficult to understand and complete enrolment and other administrative procedures. The admin staff are NOT sympathetic to this, and are very unhelpful to the point of frustration.
- there have been times when I have found admin stuff a bit confusing - not sure if this reflect my technical limitations or a complex system?
- More effective and supportive administration at the international office and the faculty
- No one in the department of Education appears to have any clear idea of the EdD process. Slow to respond to getting committees together.

Research climate: funding (2005: 12%)
(2004: 9%; 2003: 18%; 2002: 12%)

- Financial support- Despite consistently applying for scholarships and funding, these applications have been denied. This makes me feel unappreciated and forces me to sacrifice time spent on my research for time in paid employment.
- Financial assistance should be also available and access process easier and assistance provided in the application process.
- Access to financial and logistical support for part-time and distance students.
- Financial support. Many research students can't work at the same time of study.

Research climate: student support: part-time students (2005: 9%)
(new topic in 2005: previously included with distance education students)

- While working full time, finding time to study is most difficult. Some forms of part time scholarship for part time PhD students would be most appreciated.
- Research support for part time interstate students for funding to assist with travel expenses.
- Part-time students are not a part of the USyd research community and tend to get forgotten by supervisors. I am concerned that this will impact on the quality of my work. Thus far my experience has been that of feeling very lonely and isolated.
- Although I have only been enrolled for a few months, I did expect that the faculty might have contacted me and welcomed me. I am unaware if there are any events, meetings, seminars etc arranged for graduate students. As I am studying part time and working full-time I don't have the energy to chase these things up, but would appreciate the chance to be involved

Other aspects mentioned included:

	2005	2004	2003	2002
Research climate: student support: distance education students	8%	12%	13%	13%
Research climate: funding: scholarships, PRSS	8%	9%	18%	12%
Research climate: social contact with other research students	8%			
Research climate: physical facilities: computing facilities	6%			
Research climate: integration into faculty/ department	6%	12%	13%	4%
Research climate: induction/ orientation	5%	1%	2%	
Research climate: seminars, workshops	5%	4%	4%	