

COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES
FACULTY OF MEDICINE
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 Medicine 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: 21%)
(2003: 17%; 2002: 20%)

- Supervision – my supervisors are well organised, helpful and available at any time
- Supervision – excellent supervisor who is enthusiastic, loves his students, is passionate about his field and is sensitive to the student's needs and capabilities
- My relationship with my supervisor who has extended my capabilities, and travel to international conferences
- Excellent supervision. My supervisors are both involved in numerous projects and are always keen to involve me, and always open to suggested projects.

Students appreciate the independent nature of research (2004: 19%)
(2003: 23%; 2002: 20%)

- The best aspects of my research higher degree experience, have been the freedom I have been allowed in developing my ideas and in setting and maintaining deadlines. I have had a lot of support from my supervisors, and their input has been invaluable to date in keeping me motivated and enthusiastic about my research.
- The freedom of some choice of where my project is heading. I recognise that this freedom is not usually available in the world of industry, and it is this freedom that sparks my interest, passion and motivation
- The degree of flexibility and independence with the work schedule and completion of research goals. The ability to identify and solve problems yourself and with supervision if required
- You have the freedom to research anything you like within your particular field of research. This is made possible because of the people who are around you and also others (within the university and outside) who are willing to work and collaborate with you. This in my opinion elaborates the potential amount of work that can be done and also with a broader spectrum of minds in hand, has the momentum to continue developing new ideas and experiments

Students are satisfied with their research projects (2004: 19%)
(2003: 18%; 2002: 20%)

- The opportunity to experience the research process from go to woe, and improve the generic research and presentation skills. This has been largely self directed in my case. I appreciate the experience to get in and wrestle with theory and ideas, etc, and feel privileged to be able to do that
- Being able to investigate a topic of interest within a structural environment
- Researching my topic – it's interesting and may give me a new career
- Getting good results from experiments. Time to think and study – it's a pleasure to have this

Graduate attributes (analytical, problem solving etc) are being developed (2004: 14%)
(2003: 18%; 2002: 20%)

- I feel that my experience as a PhD student has improved my communication skills, both oral and written. Good communication skills mean that others in the scientific community are aware of my research which has led to collaboration
- The ability to attempt to solve a problem and have enough time and resources to follow it through despite the initial problem that you encounter. Being able to find new ways to tackle problems and then being able to use these new techniques with other situations
- Improving my skills as an analyst, writer and speaker. These are areas I knew I was capable of improving in
- My research experience has helped me improve my English (both written and speaking) and also given me well training for the research skills such as experiment planning, trouble shooting and data analysing. These experiences will help me to get ready for my future career as a researcher.

¹ Number of comments received: 2004: 304; 2003: 315; 2002: 276)

Students appreciate the opportunities for collaboration and networking (2004: 10%)
(2003: 10%; 2002: 7%)

- Opportunities to collaborate with research institutions overseas
- I am able to pursue my own networks. Freedom to explore other views/ opinions and ways of doing things. There are many more seminars etc. this year and that was great for keeping in touch with others
- My research higher degree experience enables me to get to know people who are experts in my area of research study. Also I have a supportive and encouraging supervisor. These aspects are good as they can facilitate my study and can share their expertise
- Exposure to other researchers and the research learning milieu in general. All the symposia and talks I am alerted to are fantastic – great for networking

Students feel part of a research community (2004: 9%)
(2003: 13%; 2002: 10%)

- Weekly lab meetings, seminars, postgraduate seminars and journal clubs – the discussion of research by other scientists places a lot of my own work into context
- Interaction with other researchers in my laboratory helps greatly with improving my overall skills as a researcher
- Integration into the research community with the associated broadening on experiences and career prospects
- Cooperation with other researchers in the lab. Research work is a team work, to some extent, so people in a team cooperate each other, learn and help each other.

Technical skills are being developed (2004: 8%)
(2003: 11%; 2002: 10%)

- Developing academic writing skills – useful in my future career
- I have learnt how to write manuscripts for publication. The skills to conduct field data collection and analysis skills have been improved
- Improving my knowledge of photographic and image analysis techniques as the anatomy department has great facilities
- Exposure to a wide range of techniques provided a good basic training in science and allowed me to become more confident when facing new challenges

Research skills are being developed (2004: 8%)
(2003: 10%; 2002: 8%)

- Improves understanding of research methods and hence improves ability to read research
- Improvement in research skills which helps me broaden my career
- Learning how to set up a research project and carry it through
- Learning how to do research properly

Other aspects mentioned included:

- | | | |
|---|------------|----------------------|
| • Supportive faculty/ department | (2004: 6%) | (2003: 7%; 2002: 6%) |
| • Physical facilities/ infrastructure | (2004: 6%) | (2003: 4%; 2002: 7%) |
| • Opportunities to present at conferences | (2004: 5%) | (2003: 9%; 2002: 4%) |
| • Flexibility of program | (2004: 5%) | (2003: 6%; 2002: 5%) |

2 Analysis of comments referring to aspects that could be improved²

Students are dissatisfied with availability of funding/ scholarships (2004: 21%)
(2003: 21%; 2002: 22 %)

- Funding. Some people weren't eligible to apply for most scholarships offered by the university or the faculty
- Coping financially on a scholarship has been extremely difficult at times
- Maybe research grants shouldn't be halved for part-time students – things don't cost less just because you're studying part-time
- Fees – the only time I go on campus is when I go to the library, yet I still have to pay fees for all the services I never use. Postgraduate research support scheme – it's consistently under funded, making planning for conference attendance etc extremely difficult – how much money will I get?

Students are dissatisfied with their supervision (2004: 19%)
(2003: 17%; 2002: 20%)

- Access to high quality supervision, i.e. your supervisors should know more about the topic than you, and should be aware of evidence based practice principles
- Supervision: not to allow husband and wife supervision teams as it is biased. There should be a course for supervisors so they know how to manage people.
- Some very hard questions need to be asked of the supervisors. The plan of progress (past and future) should be examined by a panel. There should be more assessment of the 'physical' progress of the degree. If the panel becomes aware of poor supervision they should act on it rather than suppressing it
- More supportive supervisor. Supervisor able to communicate, understand students' various difficulties better instead of treating students at their very own disposal. Would appreciate more "EQ" from supervisor instead of just pure intellectual input

Students are unhappy with the physical facilities provided (2004: 18%)
(2003: 14%; 2002: 20%)

- Although there is a lot of support from my department, there are not sufficient facilities provided by the university specifically for postgraduate students
- There needs to be greater access to equipment within the university. I have found that there have been times when some labs have been reluctant to let us sue pieces of equipment. There should be a list of the equipment that is available for students to use, and the person who should be contacted.
- Computer availability at Westmead Millennium Institute student room – not enough access to computers, more social activities at Westmead
- Poor working space with no natural light and poor access to computer facilities.

Students feel isolated from main campus (Camperdown) (2004: 9%)
2003: 14%; 2002: 8%)

- Want more 'attention' from the university because being on an affiliated campus makes me forget that I am still a uni student sometimes. Although people in charge on the affiliated campus really make an effort to provide advice and help to all students, there is still a limited amount of social and educational activities (compared to when I was at main campus). In particular I feel neglected by the student union
- There are approximately 50 postgraduate students out at the children's hospital at Westmead, there needs to be rotated seminars out here as well as on other campuses.
- Seminar at University of Sydney for external/ out of campus students to present their study and financial support to attend it
- I'm not sure that it is something that can be improved, but I feel a little physically isolated working at Westmead campus, although the regular emails to research students from main campus at least let me know what's going on, even if I can't be personally involved in some of the meetings/ seminars etc.

² Number of comments received: 2004: 239; 2003: 272; 2002: 225)

Technical skills are not being developed (2004: 8%)
(2003: 7%; 2002: 9%)

- Need guidance for writing thesis in final stage. Hard to find thesis guide in detail
- Guidance on thesis – technical, editing information, planning stage
- Statistical consulting. Need help from someone in the School of Public Health to briefly check the statistical analysis. At the moment there is no-one allocated
- Better statistical support is needed from protocol design right through to data analysis and publication

Support for part-time/ distance education students required (2004: 7%)
(2003: 3%; 2002: 2%)

- Over the phone consultation with university teaching staff. When I approached statistician (based on schools advice) over phone (since I live interstate) I got told abruptly that there were other local uni students who needed help and that they can't help me and I should access local facilities
- As a part-time research student off campus I do sometimes feel quite isolated
- As a research student enrolled part-time and not based on campus or in a department (i.e. I work from home) I don't have access to a lot of support in terms of equipment, contact with others and have had to pay all of my own expenses
- I am a part-time student, most of the activities/ meeting rooms etc are for full-time students. I am unaware of activities/ access to common rooms etc

Students do not feel supported by the faculty/ department/ school (2004: 6%)
(2003: 8%; 2002: 4%)

- Most of the faculty's support is not really relevant for me and they seem to only understand lab based research. Medicine doesn't really support social science research and has little understanding of our methodologies etc
- Supervision, making students feel they are a valuable part of the school community, and providing support for students, particularly orientation for new students
- Students doing qualitative research should be given the same level of support compared to students doing laboratory/ clinical research. This is particularly a problem in the faculty of Medicine
- Insufficient support for international research students, perhaps due to a lack of acknowledgment that we do have different needs and problems compared to local students. Also a lack of channels for building up peer support aiming international research students

Students would appreciate more guidance with the management of their candidature (2004: 6%)
(2003: 4%; 2002: 5%)

- I feel that the level of information given early in the course of the program could be improved. I don't feel that I had adequate guidance for my literature review or for getting started with my research
- I would have benefited from more detailed, more prompt advice about my literature review and project management of my thesis – these issues must be even greater importance to newer PhD students who have much shorter completion thesis
- For supervisors to make sure that students are on track and provide them with good guidance and feedback
- More written information (more details) about what is expected of postgraduate students and some advice on things that will happen, also what is the best way of going about things for new students

Students are dissatisfied with Faculty/ University administration/ organisation (2004: 5%)
(2003: 3%)

- Administration requirements are too onerous.
- Better contact systems with university and department administration e.g. I had problems with my funding and it wasn't clear who I should be talking to
- Communication at administrative level between my school and the International Office. Every single semester mistakes are made in my enrolment, fees and scholarship payments that are caused by the International Office and it's a real stress/ headache to sort out
- Administration is always difficult. Research office and faculty department give conflicting advice

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