



The University of Sydney

Faculty of Health Sciences

The Research Training Experience
(Research Higher Degree Students)

Student Research Experience Questionnaire 2002 – 2008
*Including the focus of written observations received from
respondents to the 2008 survey*

With attachment:

Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (2006 – 2008)

- *Quantitative data 2006 – 2008 (2005 – 2007 graduates)*
- *Qualitative data 2008 (2007 graduates)*

June 2009

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Executive summary

Data on research higher degree students' perceptions of their research training experiences are gathered each year using the Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ). The purpose of the SREQ is to provide the University community with a basis for strategic, faculty level academic development and curriculum review to further enhance the quality of research higher degrees.

Analysis of this data provides a comprehensive picture of trends in the student experience, and the performance of the Faculty in relation to two of the University's Key Performance Indicators for Research: Supervision, and Overall Satisfaction with the research higher degree; and other related areas: Infrastructure; Research Climate; and Generic Skills.

Written observations, from respondents to the survey, about their experiences provide evidence to support the Faculty SREQ quantitative data results (percentage agreement scores), and provide detailed information about key issues in the areas of best practice and suggested improvements, during their research training experience.

The analysis of qualitative data reported in this document is based on written observations received from **all** respondents to the SREQ. Faculties are advised that if they are interested, it is possible to supply copies of the written observations in the following groupings¹:

- by subject matter: general (Quality of Supervision) to specific (Supervisor(s))
- by degree
- by code

Key results for 2008

The following results are an indication of those areas of the student experience that were of significance to research higher degree students during 2008. The Faculty Score results reflect the experiences of respondents in relation to specific items in the survey; the qualitative data reflects the analysis of written observations provided by respondents in answer to open ended questions on the best areas of their experience and those that were considered to be in need of improvement.

Quality of Supervision (Section 1, pp 10 – 12)

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Supervision Scale have declined steadily since 2004, and currently sit at 74%. International students appear to experience better outcomes than their domestic counterparts. The University average for this Scale is 75%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 46% of respondents to the SREQ were satisfied with the quality of supervision received
- 22% of respondents expressed satisfaction with their supervisor and/or associate supervisors
- 7% were satisfied with the frequency of meetings and availability of their supervisor.
- The freedom to plan their own work, and the independent nature of being and RHD student was appreciated by 7% of respondents.
- Sample comment: *"My supervisor make a real effort to understand difficulties I face. Advising and assisting the candidate (me) to complete a feasible program. Overseeing the progress, coordinating weekly meetings to regular contact between the supervisor and me"*

Suggested improvements

- 25% of respondents to the SREQ suggested improvements to this area of their experience
- 10% were unhappy with their supervisor(s)
- Sample comment: *"I feel like I am mainly working on my own without any good guidance, feedback or support from my main supervisor"*

¹ Please contact Rachel Symons (r.symons@usyd.edu.au or 9351 6560) to discuss your requirements.

Quality of Infrastructure (Section 2; pp 14-15)

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Infrastructure Scale have ranged between 58% and 60% since 2005. The current score of 59% is 1% higher than the 2007 score. International students have consistently recorded significantly higher outcomes than their domestic counterparts (2006: + 18%; 2007: + 19%; 2008: 14%). The University average for this Scale is 64%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 14% of respondents were satisfied with this area of their experience
- Comments covered the following aspects: funding, scholarships (2%); physical facilities (4%); library services (5%); laboratory support; and administration.
- Sample comment: *"Great provision of work space (i.e., desk and computer in office with other post grad students) lots of room and access and not cramped- gives opportunity to liaise with other post grad students when they are there"*

Suggested improvements

- 40% of respondents suggested improvements in this area of their experience
- The following areas attracted the majority of comments:
 - Funding and scholarships, including: PRSS availability; funding for conferences; and parking fees (19%)
 - Physical facilities, including: office space, particularly for part-time and external students; computer resources, equipment (9%)
 - Administration, including: enrolment, general administrative issues, communication (8%)
- Sample comment: *"Financial support for research costs. The faculty restructure has resulted in a loss of support of research students especially with direct costs and regular student interaction"*

Research Climate (Section 3; pp 16-18)

FACULTY SCORES

The current score of 57% for the Climate Scale is identical to the previous year's results. Scores for this Scale have remained in the mid to high fifties since 2004. After recording identical outcomes in 2005, international students have subsequently recorded higher outcomes than their domestic counterparts. The University average for the Climate Scale is 59%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 56% of respondents expressed satisfaction with this area of their experience.
- 16% valued the opportunities to interact with other research higher degree students
- 19% appreciated the research culture of the Faculty; whilst a supportive and welcoming work environment was experienced by 17% of respondents
- Sample comment: *"Being part of a group of students. When I was able to attend seminars, the sharing of ideas and experiences was very valuable and intellectually stimulating"*

Suggested improvements

- 41% of respondents were dissatisfied with this area of their experience
- 22% thought that the Faculty could be more supportive and welcoming, particularly to part-time and distance students
- 8% thought that the Faculty could provide more opportunities for interacting with their fellow students
- Sample comment: *"I have found it difficult being a distance learner and not having adequate access to seminars and events I believe I would have found helpful for my research. I'm not sure if it is possible to access such information via the Internet or via other University campus within my region"*

Generic Skills (Section 4; pp 19-21)

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Generic Skills Scale have steadily increased since the commencement of the SREQ in 2002, and currently sit at 83%, the highest recorded for the Faculty. International students have recorded marginally better outcomes than their domestic counterparts since 2006. The University average for the Generic Skills Scale is 79%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 51% of respondents considered that they were developing relevant generic skills
- 17% mentioned that their skills in problem solving, analysis, and written and oral communication had improved.
- The development of research skills, and the availability of relevant training through Faculty conferences, seminars and the Learning Centre was appreciated by 8% of respondents
- 9% of respondents considered that knowledge of their subject area had been expanded; whilst the independent working skills of a further 8% were being enhanced.
- Sample comment: *Degree to which I can now work independently with respect to study design, statistical analysis, interpretation of results, oral and written communication of findings and clinical significance. These skills are what I wanted to attain from my research degree*

Suggested improvements

- 16% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with this area of their experience
- 8% would appreciate advice and training in statistical analysis, including the use of SPSS
- Sample comment: *Technical skills related to my research e.g. software such as SIM or Matlab. Writing skills sufficient for paper submission for journals not only the thesis*

Overall Satisfaction (Section 5; pp 22-23)

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Overall Satisfaction Item currently sit at 83%, which represents an increase of 3% on the previous year. Scores for this Item have consistently been in the mid to high 80s since 2005. International students have recorded a more satisfactory experience than their domestic counterparts since 2006. The University score for the Overall Satisfaction Item is 80%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 22% of respondents expressed satisfaction with this area of their experience
- The majority of these (15% of comments received) were satisfied with their research, its topic, and its contribution to the field.
- Sample comment: *The best aspect of my higher degree experience was the ability to research and contribute to something that was unique, original and never done before*

Suggested improvements

- 5% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with this area of their experience
- Sample comment: *Greater appreciation for the difficulties in combining study and work when living in an expensive city like Sydney*

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Quality Assurance Officer (Learning and Teaching)
June 2009

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Glossary

The following terms and phrases are used throughout the report

SREQ	Student Research Experience Questionnaire Administered to postgraduate research students annually, during second semester
PREQ	Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire Administered to graduates in the year after completion of studies
Supervision Scale Infrastructure Scale Climate Scale Generic Skills Scale	The University of Sydney Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ) is based upon the items included in the nationally administered Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ). These items have been shown to cluster together to form factor scales: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervision • Climate • Infrastructure • Generic Skills <p>Within the report, this naming convention is used to identify information relating to the analysis of the quantitative data (survey items)</p>
Faculty Scores Percentage agreement	SREQ item responses are combined and reported in terms of the proportions of students who agreed or disagreed that their research higher degree experience was positive in the areas of: Supervision; Generic Skills; Infrastructure; Climate; and Overall Satisfaction
Qualitative data Focus of written observations	Students' written observations received in response to open ended questions in the SREQ: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
Percentage of comments received	The number of times an aspect is mentioned within written observations of respondents received from respondents is presented as a percentage of the total number of comments received from respondents to the SREQ in any particular year.

Conceptual framework

Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ)

In 2002 the Institute for Teaching and Learning (ITL) began collecting data for The University community on research higher degree students' perceptions of their research training experiences. This data is gathered each year using a survey specifically developed for this task, the "Student Research Experience Questionnaire" (SREQ). The purpose of the SREQ is to provide the University community with a basis for strategic, faculty level academic development and curriculum review to further enhance the quality of research higher degrees. The SREQ is based on a national survey of research higher degree students, the Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ). Some of the information gathered by the SREQ survey also contributes to two of the University's Key Performance Indicators for research. These KPIs are the quality of Supervision, and Overall Satisfaction with the research higher degree.

The survey gathers data on students' perceptions of the quality and frequency of supervision, intellectual and social climate, infrastructure, approaches to research, and generic skills development in their research higher degree, as well as their perceptions of the administration and student support services. The ITL analyses this data and provides a range of reports to staff and students of the university through this web site.

Students are asked to respond to statements using a five point Likert Scale to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement. As part of the questionnaires, students are also asked to comment on the following questions:

- 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

Quantitative and qualitative data from the SREQ provide evidence of the success of University and Faculty initiatives to improve the overall student experience in general and the student experience of research training in particular.

Focus of the Report

Based on the answers to the SREQ, this report seeks to provide an analysis of observable trends in the postgraduate research student experience in the Faculty of Health Sciences between 2002 and 2008. The report also provides detailed information on the key issues highlighted in the analysis of the 2008 SREQ qualitative data.

Information is arranged by the SREQ Factor Scales (Supervision; Infrastructure; Climate; Generic Skills; and Overall Satisfaction, which, taken together, comprise the student experience of research training in the Faculty.

Focus of written observations from respondents

By examining the foci of the students' comments in the 2008 SREQ, this report seeks to highlight areas that were of best practice in the students' experience, together with those that have been suggested as areas of improvement.

The views of the research higher degree students, on their overall experience at the University, as received through the open response comments, are a valuable insight into what is important to them; what they consider to be areas of best practice; and what they consider are in need improvement.

It is important to remember, when looking at the results of the analysis of this data, that the absence of favourable comments on a particular aspect of learning and teaching does not reflect that this is not an area of best practice. Rather, it could be interpreted that the students were happy with their experiences, and prefer to focus on commenting about areas in need of improvement.

Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ) 2006-2008

Faculty scores from the 2006 – 2008 Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ); together with a list of comments received in answer to the open response questions in the 2008 survey, are provided as an attachment to this report. Due to the low number of comments received (<25) no analysis of the qualitative data has been undertaken.

Further information on the PREQ is available at <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/peq/>

Notes

1 Quantitative data analysis

Minimum sample size for reporting

The minimum recommended sample size for SREQ reporting is 20 valid responses. This is the same convention applied to reporting the CEQ and SCEQ. In aggregated degrees where less than 20 valid responses have been received a report is still provided however a warning message notes that the results should be interpreted with caution. Reports are not provided for samples with fewer than 5 respondents. This is necessary to ensure anonymity of respondents².

Number of respondents to the SREQ 2002 – 2008³

	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=
Domestic students	173	203	240	200	191	189	183
International students		8	10	15	22	38	29
Overall	173	211	250	215	213	227	212

2 Qualitative data analysis

The analysis of the qualitative data is based on responses to the open questions received from respondents to the SREQ.

Number of respondents who answered the open questions SREQ 2002 - 2008

<u>Areas of best practice</u>	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=
Domestic				168	146	166	145
International				10	28	35	24
Total	151	173	190	178	174	201	169

<u>Suggested improvements</u>	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=
Domestic				137	128	161	165
International				9	26	31	23
Total	143	153	152	146	154	192	165

n=the number of comments received in answer to the relevant 'open response' question

NB: Separate qualitative data for international students did not become available until 2005

3 Reliability of quantitative and qualitative data

The following information on the reliability of statistical data in the above tables should be taken into consideration when reading this report:

Quantitative and qualitative data: Where the number of respondents is between 5 and 20 results should be viewed with caution. The minimum sample size recommended for statistical analysis is 20

Qualitative data only: Where the number of respondents who have supplied written observations on their experiences is between 5 and 10 results are excluded from the report as they lie within the lower range of statistics that should be viewed with caution. This is indicated in the relevant tables by the phrase *Too few comments*

² Retrieved from ITL SREQ website *Using the report page* at <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/sreq/reportpage.htm>

³ Data retrieved from the ITL SREQ website results and reports for the Faculty of Health Sciences on 11.06.09 <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/sreq/secure/rrr.cfm>

3 Illustrative sample comments

Comments are recorded as they appear in the original documents. However, minor spelling, grammatical and transcription errors have been corrected. [sic] indicates that the word appears exactly as provided by the student, and that it is not possible to ascertain an exact interpretation of the original meaning. 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. Supervisor(s) names, where included by the respondent, have been replaced by Health Sciences, YYY or ZZZ.

4 Analysis of comments

The components of categories and sub-categories used in the analysis of qualitative data are based on:

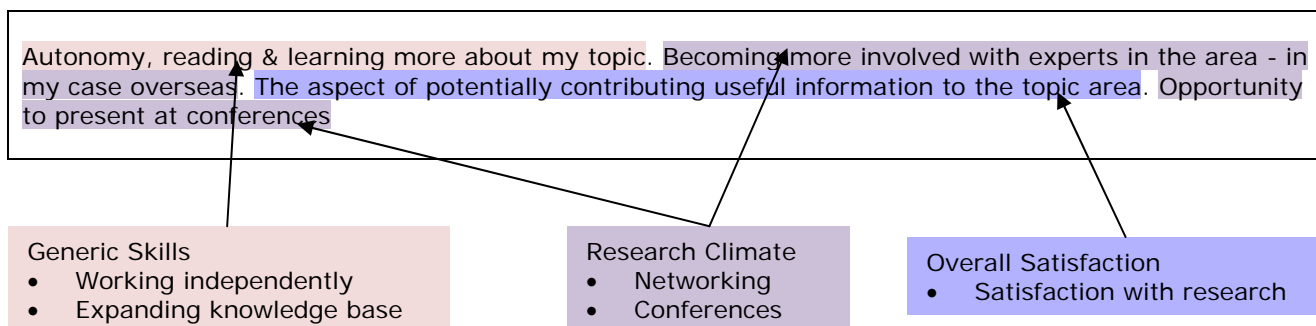
- Characteristics that define the area of the student experience
- SREQ survey items
- recurring themes in students' comments and have been developed over many years of analysing qualitative data from students' surveys.

Together, they represent the range of features of each aspect which are considered to be essential to student satisfaction with their research training experience

5 Counting of comments

Each comment is analysed according to the *Taxonomy for analysing qualitative data from the SREQ*⁴, which is based on the Factors used in the SREQ. Based on the premise that a comment is what is written by an individual respondent in response to one of the open response questions, and a tally in the statistics being a specific phrase or sentence referring to one aspect of the student experience, the total number of times an aspect is mentioned in any one set of comments is calculated as a percentage of comments received in the year of the survey. As a general rule, only those aspects which receive over 5% of comments from the whole cohort (i.e. domestic and international combined) are considered significant enough to be included as specific issues in the report.

For example, the following comment is counted as ONE COMMENT RECEIVED; but as it is mentioned in Generic Skills (Working independently; Expanding knowledge base); Research Climate (Networking; Conferences); and Overall Satisfaction (Satisfaction with research); the highlighted phrases within the comment are counted ONCE in each of the relevant categories i.e. 5 aspects in one comment.



⁴ Available from Quality Assurance Officer (Learning and Teaching)

1 Quality of Supervision

Coverage

The *Supervision Scale* covers aspects of supervision including: supervision being available when needed; understanding by the supervisor(s) of difficulties; provision of additional information relevant to the thesis topic by the supervisor; provision of guidance in topic selection and refinement; provision of helpful feedback on progress; provision of good guidance in literature search; and overall satisfaction with quality of supervision.

SREQ Survey items

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1 | Supervision is available when I need it |
| 5 | My supervisor(s) make(s) a real effort to understand difficulties I face |
| 13 | My supervisor(s) provide(s) me with additional information relevant to my topic |
| 18 | I am given good guidance in topic selection and refinement |
| 22 | My supervisor(s) provide(s) helpful feedback on my progress |
| 26 | I have received good guidance in my literature search |
| 36 | Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of my supervision |

Qualitative data analysis

There are 5 sub-categories within *Quality of Supervision*, against which students comments are analysed. Each of these sub-categories may be further broken down into relevant aspects (or components) of the research student experience of Supervision. The components of these sub-categories are based on the SREQ survey items together with recurring themes in students' comments

- Supervision (Supervisor/ Associate Supervisor; availability and frequency; evaluation of supervisor by student; feedback on work)
- Management of Candidature (guidance on thesis, literature review; topic etc; workload)
- Progress reports (value of process; structure)
- Flexibility of program
- Pressure to complete (e.g. within set time frame)

Summary

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Supervision Scale have declined steadily since 2004, and currently sit at 74%. International students appear to experience better outcomes than their domestic counterparts. The University average for this Scale is 75%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 46% of respondents to the SREQ were satisfied with the quality of supervision received
- 22% of respondents expressed satisfaction with their supervisor and/or associate supervisors
- 7% were satisfied with the frequency of meetings and availability of their supervisor.
- The freedom to plan their own work, and the independent nature of being an RHD student was appreciated by 7% of respondents.

Suggested improvements

- 25% of respondents to the SREQ suggested improvements to this area of their experience
- 10% were unhappy with their supervisor(s)

1.1 Comparative results: Quantitative data 2002–2008

The following tables show the proportion of students who either strongly agreed or agreed with relevant Supervision Scale survey items in the SREQ.

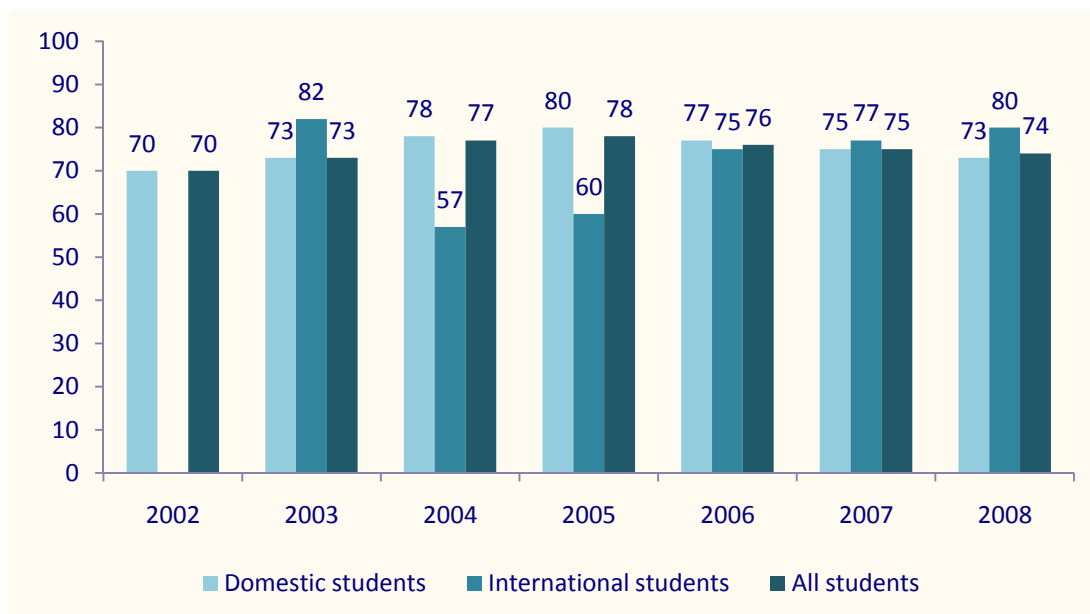


Figure 1: SREQ Supervision Scale: 2002 – 2008 (percentage agreement results)

1.2 Comparative results: Focus of written observations 2002–2008

The following table includes the percentage of comments received from respondents to the surveys, that can be classified as areas of best practice or areas for improvement under the heading of Quality of Supervision. The trends provide an indication of student satisfaction with this area of their experience between 2002 and 2008.

	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
Areas of best practice	Domestic			47%	42%	51%	49%
	International			<i>Too few</i>	29%	46%	29%
	All	35%	40%	42%	46%	40%	50%
Suggested improvements	Domestic			25%	22%	27%	29%
	International			<i>Too few</i>	31%	10%	26%
	All	29%	28%	22%	26%	23%	24%

1.3 Key issues for research higher degree students (SREQ 2008)

1.3.1 Areas of best practice

	Domestic (n=145)	International (n= 24)	All (n= 169)
Supervision			
- Satisfied with performance of supervisor(s)	40%	21%	37%
- Supervisor(s) available for regular meetings			
- Supervisor(s) provide feedback on work			
Flexibility of program			
- Appreciate flexibility and freedom of working independently	7%	4%	7%
- Allowed to set own topics, plan of work			

Domestic (n=145)	International (n= 24)	All (n= 169)
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Sample comments: domestic students

- *Being responsible wholly and solely for my research and moving along without much need for assistance (even though assistance is there).*
- *Individual learning - My supervisor guides me in the right direction but leaves it up to me select the direction I wish to take*
- *My supervisor make a real effort to understand difficulties I face. Advising and assisting the candidate (me) to complete a feasible program. Overseeing the progress, coordinating weekly meetings to regular contact between the supervisor and me*

Sample comments: international students

- *My supervisors provide excellent guidance and supervision in helping me view my research at angles I would have not seen*
- *Having one of the world's leading scholars in my area of research as my principle supervisor. Moreover, my supervisor is one of the kindest, most generous and most thoughtful people I ever met*
- *Getting to share the knowledge with my supervisors and learn a professional way the analyse results by doing so*

1.3.2 Suggested improvements

Domestic (n=142)	International (n=23)	All (n=165)
----------------------	--------------------------	-----------------

Supervision

- | | | | |
|--|-----|-----|-----|
| - Performance of supervisor(s) unsatisfactory | 21% | 22% | 21% |
| - Supervisor(s) unavailable for regular meetings | | | |
| - Supervisor(s) do not provide feedback on work | | | |

Sample comments: domestic students

- *My biggest problem has been the lack of expertise in my field at this university and the lack of expertise in my field from my Supervisor (who was brilliant in most other ways). Associate supervisors have been disappointing in their input*
- *My supervisor is brilliant but I can't ask a question, they are condescending and when things go wrong I am put in the firing line more than other students who are favoured. I would like the opportunity to ask questions without the fear of being put down*
- *I have a severe lack of support from my supervisor. Although he is extremely experienced in my research area and provides good support when he has the time, more often he has too many other students to supervise and commitments in other areas which means that he does not provide sufficient support. This problem could be improved by lessening the workload (in other areas) for this supervisor*

Sample comments: international students

- *I feel like I am mainly working on my own without any good guidance, feedback or support from my main supervisor*
- *The quality of supervision. Otherwise, the quality of thesis will drop dramatically*
- *Also, 3 months on completing my Annual Progress Review, I was sent an email as to when my review was scheduled for as they had not received my paperwork. This must be improved as it is not efficient*

2 Quality of Infrastructure

Coverage

The *Infrastructure Scale* covers aspects of the infrastructure available to research students, including: access to a suitable working space; access to technical support; access to a common room; access to necessary equipment; access to computing facilities and resources; appropriate financial support; and overall satisfaction with the quality of services and facilities.

SREQ Survey items

2	I have access to a suitable working space
6	I have good access to the technical support I need
10	I have access to a common room or a similar type of meeting place
12	I am able to organise good access to necessary equipment
19	I have good access to computing facilities and services
28	There is appropriate financial support for research activities
35	Overall I am satisfied with the quality of the services and facilities

Qualitative data analysis

There are 5 sub-categories within *Quality of Infrastructure*, against which students comments are analysed. Each of these sub-categories may be further broken down into relevant aspects (or components) of the research students' perceptions of the quality of infrastructure. The components of these sub-categories are based on the SREQ survey items together with recurring themes in students' comments.

- Finance and funding (funding for resources, equipment etc; scholarships, PRSS, APA etc)
- Facilities (computer hardware and software; equipment; workspace, building, parking etc)
- Research resources (provided by faculty; provided by library)
- Support (IT; technical; laboratory)
- Administration (enrolment and admission; communication between faculty and students; general comments on administration (faculty and university)

Summary

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Infrastructure Scale have ranged between 58% and 60% since 2005. The current score of 59% is 1% higher than the 2007 score. International students have consistently recorded significantly higher outcomes than their domestic counterparts (2006: + 18%; 2007: + 19%; 2008: 14%). The University average for this Scale is 64%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 14% of respondents were satisfied with this area of their experience
- Comments covered the following aspects: funding, scholarships (2%); physical facilities (4%); library services (5%); laboratory support; and administration.

Suggested improvements

- 40% of respondents suggested improvements in this area of their experience
- The following areas attracted the majority of comments:
 - Funding and scholarships, including: PRSS availability; funding for conferences; and parking fees (19%)
 - Physical facilities, including: office space, particularly for part-time and external students; computer resources, equipment (9%)
 - Administration, including: enrolment, general administrative issues, communication (8%)

2.1 Comparative results: Quantitative data 2002–2008

The following tables show the proportion of students who either strongly agreed or agreed with Infrastructure Scale survey items in the SREQ.

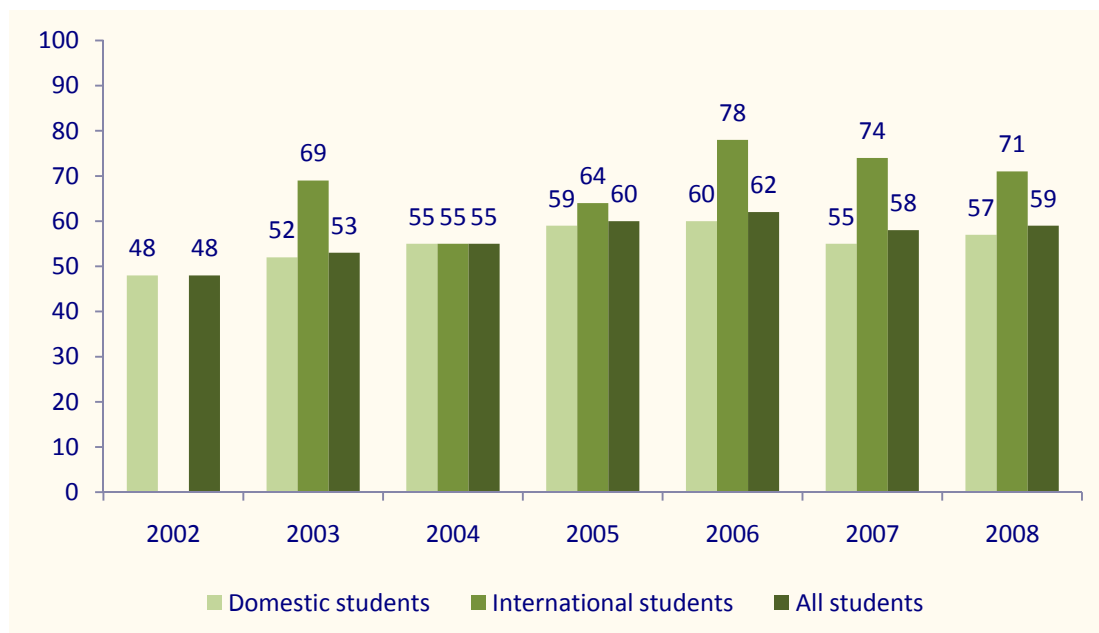


Figure 2: SREQ Infrastructure Scale: 2002 – 2008 (percentage agreement results)

2.2 Comparative results: Focus of written observations 2002–2008

The following table includes the percentage of comments received from respondents to the survey, that can be classified as areas of best practice or areas for improvement, providing an indication of trends in students' perceptions of the quality of infrastructure between 2002 and 2008.

	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
Areas of best practice	Domestic			13%	17%	13%	12%
	International			<i>Too few</i>	25%	17%	21%
	All	21%	20%	12%	13%	18%	14%
Suggested improvements	Domestic			53%	43%	48%	41%
	International			<i>Too few</i>	27%	52%	35%
	All	45%	52%	45%	53%	40%	40%

2.3 Key issues for research higher degree students (SREQ 2008)

2.3.1 Areas of best practice

14% of respondents (i.e. 23/169 comments received) who responded to the SREQ considered that improvements were needed in this area of their experience.

Sample comments: domestic students

- *Great provision of work space (i.e., desk and computer in office with other post grad students) lots of room and access and not cramped- gives opportunity to liaise with other post grad students when they are there*
- *I was previously enrolled at another university and I have found University of Sydney (and particularly the Health Sciences faculty) much more "user friendly" in terms of administration, assistance and general encouragement*
- *Receiving a scholarship to allow me to focus on my research full time*

Sample comments: international students

- *Having a conducive working environment and having the facilities (photocopier, printer, resource materials)*
- *International conference participation. Financial assistance were provided, meet experts from around the world of the same field of research*
- *FHS Library service is outstanding, supportive and save a lot of time. I love librarians here!*

2.3.2 Suggested improvements

	Domestic (n=142)	International (n=23)	All (n=165)
Finance and funding			
- Funding for research unavailable	20%	13%	19%
- Scholarships unavailable or unsatisfactory			
- PRSS, APA provisions unsatisfactory			
Facilities			
- Computers are not provided by faculty	8%	13%	9%
- Workspace, office, not provided by faculty			
- Equipment provided is not up to date or functional			
- Parking arrangements unsatisfactory			
Administration			
- Services supplied by faculty administration office is unsatisfactory	8%	9%	8%
- Enrolment and admissions processes unsatisfactory			
- Communication channels between faculty and students unsatisfactory			

Sample comments: domestic students

- *The room set aside for Postgrad students to use as a "hot office" has only one computer, no printer and really uncomfortable chairs in it. It is great to have such a room for those times when my home is too noisy for me to be able to concentrate there, but it would be nice to at least have better chairs in it!*
- *Financial assistance to present at overseas conferences. \$2000.00 does not cover an airfare from Australia to almost anywhere in the world let alone accommodation, registration etc*
- *Funding. There is definitely not enough money going toward research. More equipment to allow better the quality of the results to be at its optimum*

Sample comments: international students

- *The administration process needs improvement. I was not told of the orientation (that afternoon) until I arrived at University to hand in some paperwork. Also, there is no formal form for "Permission to Count Time away" and I was asked to use the Faculty of Arts Form. In addition, 3 months after handing in this form, I was asked whether I had submitted the form, even though I had done so in person.*
- *The University of Sydney International Scholarship (USyDIS) should revise the stipend, as rental fees have increased significantly in recent market situation. Thus, I hope the stipend can be provided in a better resource in accordance with the rising standard of living*
- *Access to research equipment and computers*

3 Research Climate

Coverage

The *Climate Scale* covers aspects of the prevailing research climate in a students' school/ department, including: opportunities for social contact with other postgraduate students; integration into the school/ department community; opportunities to become involved in the broader research culture; perception of other research students as supportive; feelings of isolation within the school/ department; encouragement of interaction with other research students; provision of a good seminar programme; stimulation of personal work by the prevailing research ambience; provision of a supportive work environment; and feeling respected as a fellow researcher.

SREQ Survey items

- 3 The department / school provides opportunities for social contact with other postgraduate students
- 8 I feel integrated into the department's / school's community
- 15 The department / school provides opportunities for me to become involved in the broader research culture
- 16 I feel that other postgraduate students in my department / school are supportive
- 20 I tend to feel isolated within this department / school
- 23 Interaction with other postgraduate students is actively encouraged in this department / school
- 24 A good seminar program for postgraduate students is provided
- 25 The research ambience in the department / school or faculty stimulates my work
- 29 I feel that this department / school provides a supportive working environment
- 31 I feel respected as a fellow researcher within my department / school

Qualitative data analysis

There are 8 sub-categories within *Research Climate*, against which students comments are analysed. Each of these sub-categories may be further broken down into relevant aspects (or components) of the student experience of the prevailing research climate within the faculty. The components of these sub-categories are based on the SREQ survey items together with recurring themes in students' comments.

- Interaction with other research higher degree students (study related; social; support of peers)
- Research culture (part of research community; integration into faculty/ department/ school; conference participation; networking)
- Work environment (supportive environment; stimulating; induction/ orientation programme; respect as fellow researcher; support for part-time, external, and international students)
- Cultural diversity and equity
- Practical aspects (field work; industry/ professional experience)
- Relevance to career/ work
- Preparation for academia (e.g. availability of tutoring, lecturing)
- Location and physical environment

Summary

FACULTY SCORES

The current score of 57% for the Climate Scale is identical to the previous year's results. Scores for this Scale have remained in the mid to high fifties since 2004. After recording identical outcomes in 2005, international students have subsequently recorded higher outcomes than their domestic counterparts. The University average for the Climate Scale is 59%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 56% of respondents expressed satisfaction with this area of their experience.
- 16% valued the opportunities to interact with other research higher degree students
- 19% appreciated the research culture of the Faculty; whilst a supportive and welcoming work environment was experienced by 17% of respondents

Suggested improvements

- 41% of respondents were dissatisfied with this area of their experience
- 22% thought that the Faculty could be more supportive and welcoming, particularly to part-time and distance students
- 8% thought that the Faculty could provide more opportunities for interacting with their fellow students

3.1 Comparative results: Quantitative data 2004–2008

The following tables show the proportion of students who either strongly agreed or agreed with Climate Scale survey items in the SREQ.

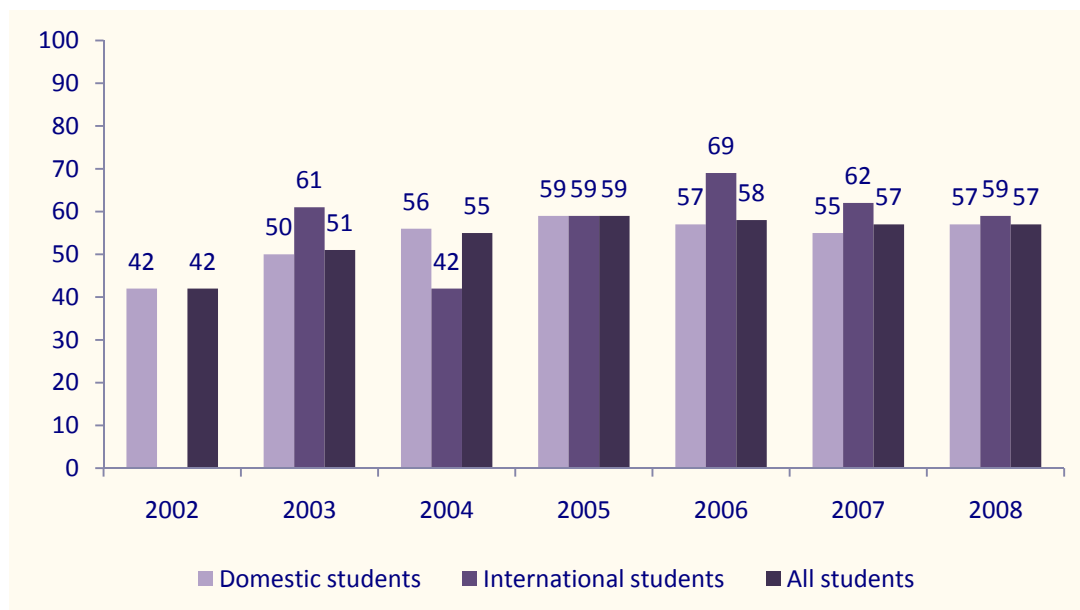


Figure 3: SREQ Climate Scale: 2002 – 2008 (percentage agreement results)

3.2 Comparative results: Focus of written observations 2002–2008

The following table includes the percentage of comments received from respondents to the surveys, that can be classified as areas of best practice or areas for improvement, providing an indication of trends in the students experiences of the prevailing research climate in the faculty between 2002 and 2008, as indicated in the responses to open questions in the SREQ.

	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
Areas of best practice	Domestic			49%	49%	59%	57%
	International			<i>Too few</i>	32%	43%	54%
	All	36%	43%	45%	48%	47%	56%
Suggested improvements	Domestic			49%	38%	35%	36%
	International			<i>Too few</i>	27%	23%	70%
	All	59%	50%	43%	50%	36%	41%

3.3 Key issues for research higher degree students (SREQ 2008)

3.3.1 Areas of best practice

	Domestic (n= 145)	International (n=24)	All (n=169)
Interaction with other research students			
- Opportunities are provided to discuss research with other students	17%	8%	16%
- Opportunities are provided for social contact with other students			
- Other students are supportive			
Research culture			
- Opportunities provided to participate at conferences	19%	17%	19%
- Networking opportunities available			
- Feel part of a research community			
- Seminar program provided by faculty			

	Domestic (n= 145)	International (n=24)	All (n=169)
Work environment			
- Research ambience stimulating, challenging			
- Satisfactory induction or orientation programme is provided	14%	29%	17%
- Feel part of / welcomed by the faculty/ department			
- Respected as a fellow researcher			
- Support is provided for students (especially part-time, external)			
- Presence of a supportive work environment			

Sample comments: domestic students

- *At this point in time, the best aspect is presenting my work at conferences as this enables me to discuss my work with other researchers and assists me with the interpretation of my research and future research directions*
- *Integration within the wider research community within the school, specifically other post grad students with topics in similar field to me. Has provided peer support, opportunities to develop a leadership role within the school, opportunities to discuss new ideas in my research with other researchers*
- *When I was able to attend seminars, the sharing of ideas and experiences was very valuable and intellectually stimulating*

Sample comments: international students

- *It provided an environment in which I was surrounded by intelligent thinkers who inspire and challenge me to explore questions I might have otherwise not had the awareness nor the opportunity to ask*
- *Having a pool of postgraduate students who are around, and willing to share their tips and offer advice*
- *Feeling like and being treated like an individual and a colleague and not like another number*

2.3.2 Suggested improvements

	Domestic (n= 142)	International (n= 23)	All (n=165)
Interaction with other research students			
- Opportunities are not provided to discuss research with other students	6%	17%	8%
- Opportunities are not provided for social contact with other students			
- Other students are not supportive			
Work environment			
- Research ambience is not stimulating, challenging			
- Induction or orientation programme is not provided			
- Do not feel part of / welcomed by the faculty/ department	18%	48%	22%
- Are not respected as a fellow researcher			
- Support is not provided for students (especially part-time, external, international)			
- Supportive work environment not present			

Sample comments: domestic students

- *Feeling of community, feeling isolated makes it difficult to know where to address requests/questions and makes university a socially unpleasant experience*
- *Research Seminars and guidance with other post grad students. Some clinical research groups do this very well. Our group never meets as when something is organised no one comes*
- *Ways to engage students who are not on campus so that we benefit from all those who are the research journey as well as supporting the external students*

Sample comments: international students

- *More interaction with other people in the same department. When I go there I feel like a stranger*
- *International research students who do not attend lectures might have problems contacting and communicating with their peers in the department or making friends. Ways to encourage such contact through the department would be good*
- *The leaders of our research group (including my supervisor) do not provide a very encouraging or supportive environment for the students. They seem to have forgotten that they once have done a PhD themselves*

4 Generic Skills

Coverage

The *Generic Skills* scale reflects the extent to which students perceive their studies to have fostered the development of the generic skills recognised by the university as being a valuable outcome of university education, in addition to discipline specific skills and knowledge. Skills include problem solving; oral and written communication; development of ideas and their written presentation; collaboration with other researchers; analytical skills; planning; confidence in tackling unfamiliar problems; and ability to learn independently

SREQ Survey items

4	My research has further developed my problem-solving skills
7	Doing my research has helped to develop my written communication skills
9	I have learned to develop my ideas and present them in my written work
11	As a result of my research, I have developed the ability to work collaboratively with other researchers
14	My research has sharpened my analytical skills
17	Doing my research has helped to develop my oral communication skills
21	Doing my research has developed my ability to plan my own work
27	As a result of my research I feel confident about tackling unfamiliar problems
30	As a result of my research I have developed the ability to learn independently

Qualitative data analysis

There are 8 sub-categories within *Generic Skills*, against which students comments are analysed. Each of these sub-categories may be further broken down into relevant aspects (or components) which are based on the SREQ survey items together with recurring themes in students' comments.

- Graduate Attributes (includes: problem solving, analytical skills, oral and written communication, presentation, and planning)
- Technical skills (statistics, thesis/ academic writing, disciplinary, and training in use of equipment)
- Research skills
- Publishing skills (writing for publication; opportunities for publication provided)
- Collaboration with other researchers
- Expansion of knowledge base (i.e. on research topic and associated subjects)
- Working independently
- English language skills for NESB/ international students (proficiency, support with academic writing, proof reading etc)

Summary

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Generic Skills Scale have steadily increased since the commencement of the SREQ in 2002, and currently sit at 83%, the highest recorded for the Faculty. International students have recorded marginally better outcomes than their domestic counterparts since 2006. The University average for the Generic Skills Scale is 79%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 51% of respondents considered that they were developing relevant generic skills
- 17% mentioned that their skills in problem solving, analysis, and written and oral communication had improved.
- The development of research skills, and the availability of relevant training through Faculty conferences, seminars and the Learning Centre was appreciated by 8% of respondents
- 9% of respondents considered that knowledge of their subject area had been expanded; whilst the independent working skills of a further 8% were being enhanced.

Suggested improvements

- 16% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with this area of their experience
- 8% would appreciate advice and training in statistical analysis, including the use of SPSS

4.1 Comparative results: Quantitative data 2002–2008

The following tables show the proportion of students who either strongly agreed or agreed with Generic Skills Scale survey items in the SREQ.

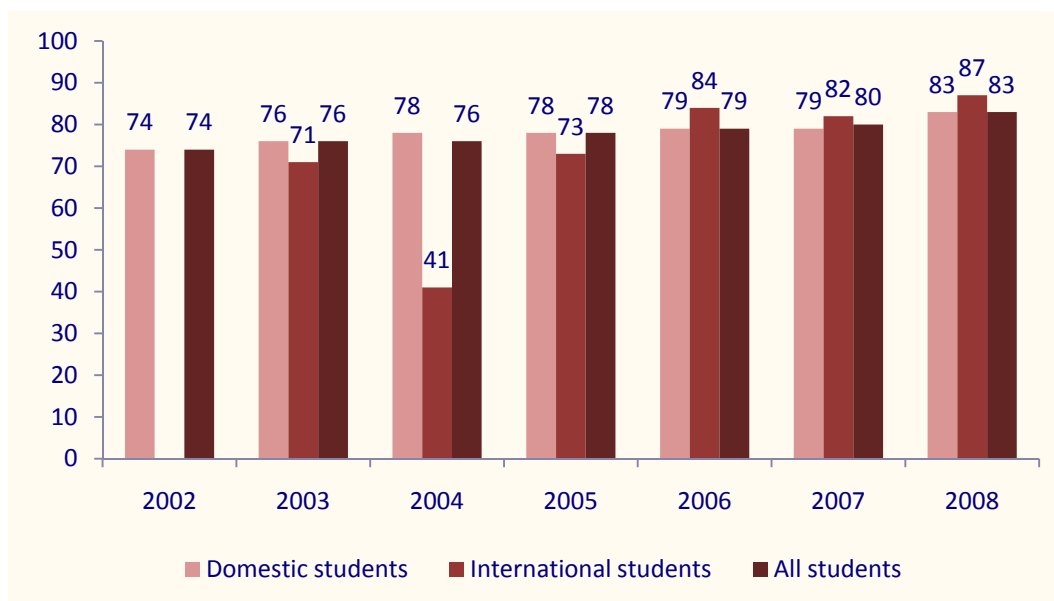


Figure 4: SREQ Generic Skills Scale: 2002 – 2008 (percentage agreement results)

4.2 Comparative results: Focus of written observations 2002–2008

The following table includes the percentage of comments received from respondents to the surveys, that can be classified as areas of best practice or areas for improvement, providing an indication of trends in the development of Generic Skills by respondents between 2002 and 2008.

	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
Areas of best practice	Domestic			45%	44%	42%	51%
	International			<i>Too few</i>	46%	49%	50%
	All	52%	49%	51%	44%	44%	43%
Suggested improvements	Domestic			15%	18%	12%	16%
	International			<i>Too few</i>	23%	26%	17%
	All	26%	14%	25%	14%	19%	16%

4.2 Key issues for research higher degree students (SREQ 2008)

4.2.1 Areas of best practice

	Domestic (n=145)	International (n=24)	All (n=169)
Graduate Attributes			
- Problem solving skills are being developed	17%	21%	17%
- Analytical skills are being developed			
- Oral and written communication, and presentation skills are being developed			
Research skills			
- Research skills are being enhanced	9%	4%	8%
- Research methodology courses are available			
Work independently			
- Developed ability to plan own work	8%	8%	8%
- Developed ability to learn independently			

	Domestic (n=145)	International (n=24)	All (n=169)
Expand knowledge base	9%	8%	9%
- Knowledge of research topic is being expanded			
- Knowledge of associated topics is being expanded			

Sample comments: domestic students

- Degree to which I can now work independently with respect to study design, statistical analysis, interpretation of results, oral and written communication of findings and clinical significance. These skills are what I wanted to attain from my research degree
- Developing research skills and developing confidence in being able to see a project from beginning to end
- To be able to work independently on my project enabled me to gain important skills, confidence, knowledge and relationships with other professionals

Sample comments: international students

- Academic and scientific writing. My Research Higher Degree experience has really developed this skill
- Learn to work independently. This is very good for my future career
- Using new methods and theory for my project which have not been used before

4.2.2 Suggested improvements

	Domestic (n=142)	International (n=23)	All (n=165)
Technical skills	8%	4%	8%
- Would appreciate support in statistical analysis			
- Support in thesis/ academic writing would be appreciated			
- Training in use of equipment not available			

Sample comments: domestic students

- Postgraduate workshops on research methods. This was expressed by the majority of students at a recent workshop
- Introduction to research in the first year, e.g. " how to write a thesis". I was totally lost in my first year and it took me until Nov to find this course to do at the conference
- Technical skills related to my research e.g. software such as SIM or Matlab. Writing skills sufficient for paper submission for journals not only the thesis

Sample comments: international students

- My ability to write English. My ability to communicate, to express my idea (lack of vocabulary hinder good explanation).
- Better statistical workshops for post graduate research students; monthly workshops held by senior researchers or statisticians in which HDR student can bring their own actual data and run through the data with SPSS (or other similar program) for an open discussion/interpretation of the results
- Transform simple things into publishable papers. I tend to design complicated things

5 Overall Satisfaction

Coverage

This single item asks graduates about their overall level of satisfaction with their research higher degree experience.

SREQ Survey items

43 Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of my research higher degree experience.

Qualitative data analysis

There are 3 sub-categories within Overall Satisfaction. They represent the range of aspects of the postgraduate research student experience which are considered to have a major influence on the quality of the research degree experience, and which are not covered elsewhere.

- General comments
- Quality of degree (incl. coursework component)
- Satisfaction with research (topic, contribution to field)

Summary

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Overall Satisfaction Item currently sit at 83%, which represents an increase of 3% on the previous year. Scores for this Item have consistently been in the mid to high 80s since 2005. International students have recorded a more satisfactory experience than their domestic counterparts since 2006. The University score for the Overall Satisfaction Item is 80%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 22% of respondents expressed satisfaction with this area of their experience
- The majority of these (15% of comments received) were satisfied with their research, its topic, and its contribution to the field.

Suggested improvements

- 5% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with this area of their experience

5.1 Comparative results: Quantitative data 2002–2008

The following tables show the proportion of students who either strongly agreed or agreed with the Overall Satisfaction item in the SREQ.

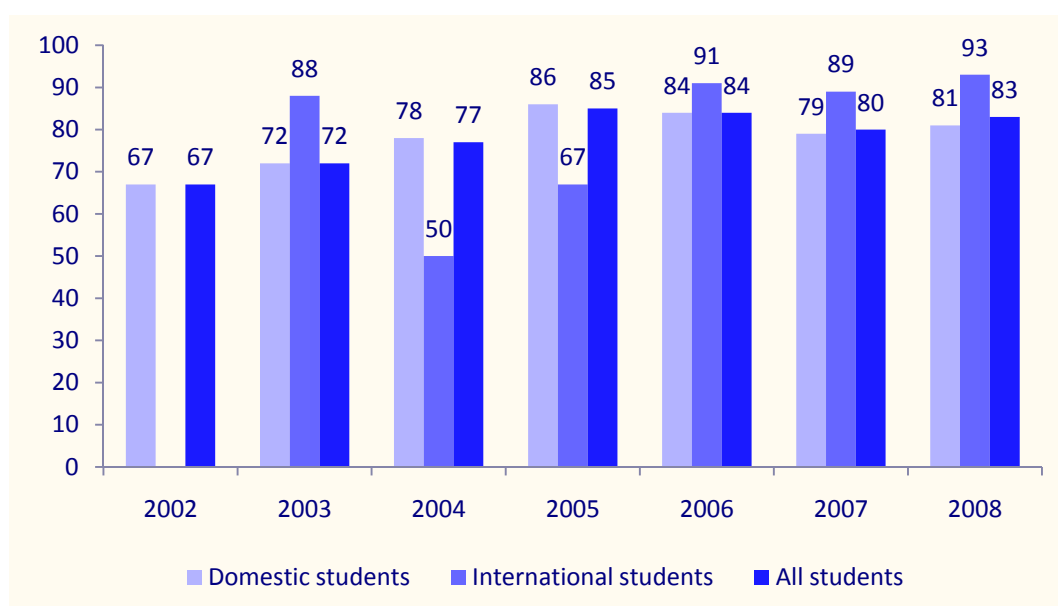


Figure 5: SREQ Overall Satisfaction Item: 2002 – 2008 (percentage agreement results)

5.1 Comparative results: Focus of written observations 2002–2008

The following table includes the percentage of comments received from respondents to the survey, that can be classified as areas of best practice or areas for improvement, providing an indication of trends in research higher degree students' overall satisfaction between 2002 and 2008.

		SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
Areas of best practice	Domestic				26%	26%	20%	21%
	International				<i>Too few</i>	11%	6%	25%
	All	25%	16%	21%	25%	24%	17%	22%
Suggested improvements	Domestic				6%	3%	5%	6%
	International				<i>Too few</i>	4%	3%	0%
	All	1%	2%	2%	5%	3%	5%	5%

5.2 Key issues for research higher degree students (SREQ 2008)

5.2.2 Areas of best practice

	Domestic (n=145)	International (n=24)	All (n=169)
Satisfaction with research			
- Research topic will contribute to field	14%	21%	15%
- Researching topic that have always been interested in			
- Research is worthwhile			

Sample comments: domestic students

- *Feeling that the outcomes of my research will have real clinical benefits*
- *Researching an area in need of development - good because it has not been done before, able to contribute new information to existing body of knowledge*
- *The best aspect of my higher degree experience was the ability to research and contribute to something that was unique, original and never done before*

Sample comments: international students

- *Having time to go deeper in what I really believe it is important to my career*
- *Have an in-depth understanding of my research topic. Helped me to be more focus on my approach to my research project. It has also helped me to decide on the qualitative approach*
- *I like the challenge of it and the fact that I get to work in a research area that interests me. It enables me to further extend my knowledge and to further improve my analytical skills. It is a good feeling to have solved problems related to my research*

5.2.3 Suggested improvements

5% of graduates (i.e. 9/165 comments received) who responded to the SREQ considered that improvements were needed in this area of their experience. There were no comments from international students on this topic.

Sample comments: domestic students

- *Greater appreciation for the difficulties in combining study and work when living in an expensive city like Sydney*
- *A disproportionate amount of my PhD has been spent working on areas in which I do not have the appropriate skills/knowledge to fix the many problems that arise and thus I have to rely on my supervisor to help me. As most of the time, he does not have the time to do so there have been many long delays in my research*
- *Structuring timetabling, systematising the process of PhD part time research so that maximum learning opportunities can be realised*
- *I have an ARC Scholarship, part of a larger project (qualitative). There has been great difficulty in clarifying roles and delineating the PhD from the broader research project*
- *[the department] appears to be now dominated by clinical areas, which is fine but comments from physiologists coming out of the university indicate that it is becoming very narrow in focus, the focus is more to do with pathology, which is not bad but it signifies a narrowing that is worrying. There needs to be a good basis, from which pathology follows. some of the researchers in the department have a disproportionate affect on the directions of the faculty, which is due to their research records. While that's fine, there needs to be more of a balance*
- *Being part time it is difficult to achieve a sense of moving forward regularly and consistently*

Attachment A Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ 2008)

The survey

In 2002 the Institute for Teaching and Learning (ITL) began collecting data for The University community on research higher degree graduates' perceptions of their research training experiences. This data is gathered each year using a national survey specifically developed for this task, the "Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire" (PREQ). The purpose of the PREQ is to provide the University community with a basis for strategic, faculty level academic development and curriculum review to further enhance the quality of research higher degrees. The PREQ also provides data for benchmarking between similar programmes in different universities.

The survey gathers data on students' perceptions of the quality and frequency of supervision, intellectual and social climate, infrastructure, approaches to research, quality of thesis examination, and generic skills development in their research higher degree. The ITL analyses this data and provides a range of reports to staff and students of the university through their web site⁵

The ITL use responses obtained from graduates of the University of Sydney who completed their courses in the previous year (i.e. the 2008 reports are for students who completed in 2007). As an example: the 2008 reports are for graduates who completed their degree in 2007.

Quantitative data 2006 – 2008 (2005 – 2007 graduates)

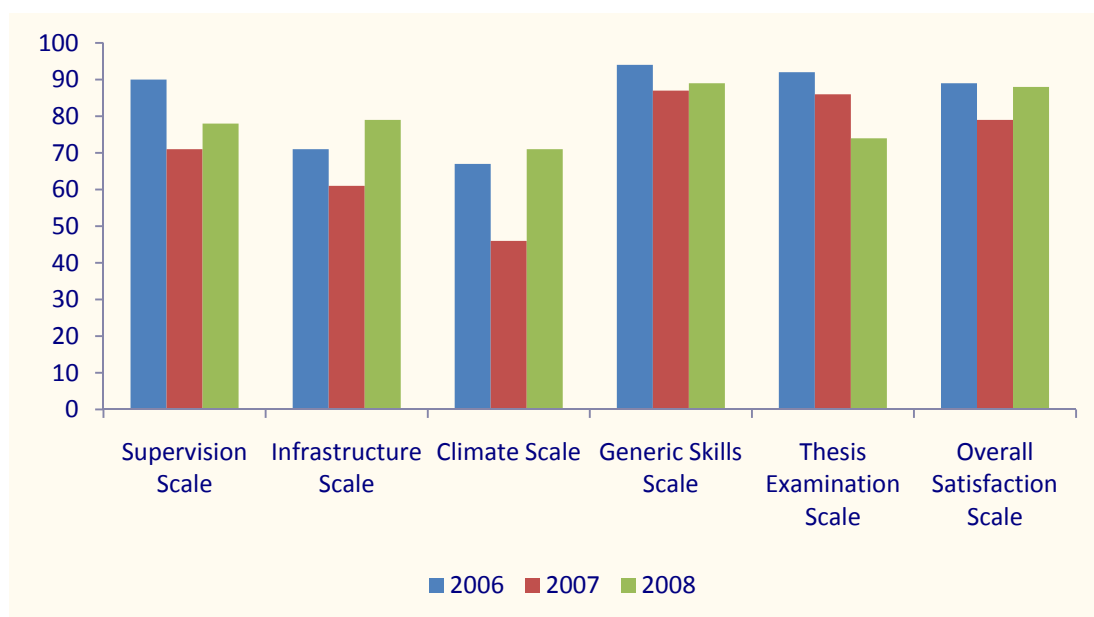


Figure 6: PREQ results: 2006 – 2008 (percentage agreement results)

Qualitative data 2008 (2007 graduates)

The following comments were received from research higher degree graduates in response to the 2008 PREQ.

Areas of best practice

Domestic students

- Able to do own research, encouraged to do it.
- Access to University of Sydney library - journal/databases - remote access. Learning and developing skills in all aspects of research, improving writing skills-thesis and publication. Clinical, research and writing expertise of supervisors - extremely high quality supervisors.
- Being surrounded by dedicated professionals and being able to work with outstanding sports people.
- Developing research skills, to do own project.

⁵ For more information on the PREQ, and results and reports 2002 - 2008 see <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/preq/>

- Developing writing skills.
- Fantastic supervisors ensuring that, even though I was off-campus, I had access to support/feedback etc.
- Gaining research experience.
- Great support and guidance from supervisors.
- I had really helpful supervisors.
- I have experienced creative time in process of doing my project, which will help and inspire me in future study and life.
- I really enjoyed my learning experience.
- Independence.
- Inspiration of my supervisor who also built a student research network for group support and learning.
- Learning how to tackle new problem with analytic and evidence-based approach.
- Learning how to write for publication, develop international links through presentation at international conferences, good support and vision from the supervisor XXX to pursue excellence and disseminate the results of my research at many stages through the process of completing my master then upgrade to PhD. These networks and links, and capacity for written work now strengthens my career prospects over and above the PhD qualification itself.
- Level of supervision - very good supervisors feedback and support, always available.
- Opportunity to consider theoretical and practical/clinical aspects of my specialty area in great detail for an extended period.
- The quality of supervisions I received was fantastic. The opportunity to learn how to publish quality papers and present at conferences. Opportunity to be involved in wider research community even though off-campus. Library did an excellent job of providing resources (articles).

International students

- I arrived with strong organizational, analytical, and problem solving skills and I needed minimal guidance in topic selection and no guidance in my literature search so my answers to the related questions are not a reflection of the supervision that I received.
- The research environment. The chance to exchange knowledge and information among colleagues and staff in general. The stimulus received to aim high quality research all the time.
- The social environment. Good resources to work with.

Suggested improvements

Domestic students

- Advanced equipments are needed. Supervisors should have necessary and basic knowledge, related to projects their students did.
- Being an independent researcher, writing articles.
- Better interaction between Postgraduates.
- Examination requirement requiring an internal (University of Sydney) examiner creates issues in finding an appropriate examiner.
- Greater face-face contact with supervisors (as an external/distance student).
- I enjoyed the course from start to finish so can't really think of things that needed to improve.
- Integration into Department of Science's community and providing opportunities for participation in broader research.
- More frequent access to research education workshops early in degree - online research resources/education. Access to statistics software.
- Process of thesis submission, marking and final submission was disorganised and took much too long (12 months); wrong information given to myself and supervisor.
- Support of statistic and thesis writing components - for example short courses.
- The school decided to combine our department to the other and that really stopped my motivation to do higher degree.
- The thesis examination process was the most appalling educational process I have had the misfortune of being involved in. It was not timely and it appeared 1 marker either did not like or did not understand thesis by publication. The process I endured should never be allowed to occur again as it spoils what was otherwise an excellent experience.
- Training on equipment.
- Writing and time management.

International students

- Funding for research and conference travel. A faster thesis examination (mine took 6 months!). The funding that I received was a shame compared to the international fees that I paid. That is a very bad image from the University that I'll carry with me.
- Seminar program but I understand that that has been improved.
- The process of examination of the thesis, specially related to time involved.
- Value for money - too expensive for international students - you feel like a big money tree.