



Policy on Entitlements for Postgraduate Students

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Introduction

SUPRA believes that a high-quality educational environment must be provided to all postgraduate students, in accordance with basic principles of quality, equity and diversity. It is the responsibility of the University to consult with its stakeholders in policy development, and to ensure that students are informed of their rights and entitlements.

In late 2006 SUPRA conducted an online survey of its members about their experiences as postgraduate students, to which we received 877 detailed responses from research and coursework postgraduate students. SUPRA's Policy on Entitlements for Postgraduate Students includes footnotes containing statistics and illustrative comments from the results of this survey. One of the most concerning trends evident in these results was the significant disparity between faculties in terms of the resources provided to students. SUPRA believes that students across all disciplines must receive the same high standard of study environment. This disparity is clearly illustrated by the following comment from a survey respondent:

"I do not have access to an office, study space or photocopying facilities. I find this extremely unfair, especially as PhD students in other faculties have their own offices and computers. I am not sure whether this is because... [of my particular] discipline, and there is insufficient funding, or if there is some other reason, but I think that ALL post grads should have access to the same level of facilities."

SUPRA believes that the conditions prescribed in this policy are in keeping with the University's goals as outlined in *The University of Sydney Strategic Directions 2006-2010*. Specifically, adopting SUPRA's Policy on Entitlements for Postgraduate Students would advance the following stated goals:

- Conduct research in a culture that inspires discovery and innovation.
- Invest in world-class research infrastructure and administrative support structures that are recognised as best practice.
- Provide quality environments that encourage independent learning, peer interaction, effective skill development and a sense of enjoyment in learning.
- Continue to adapt and respond to student feedback.
- Ensure user-friendly administrative processes and systems which support the management of the entire student life cycle.

The adoption of this policy will help ensure that the University of Sydney increases its competitiveness in attracting quality postgraduate students, a point expressed succinctly by one respondent, who commented:

"I have studied postgraduate courses at [another University] which has the Graduate Centre: 24 hour access, individual and group secure carrels with computer, a Mac computer room, PC computer room, lounge room with papers, attic for parties, print room with 9-5 support. all exclusively for postgrads. I REALLY miss it."

It is SUPRA's belief that all University of Sydney students, whether Coursework or Research, Local or International, full-time or part-time, and regardless of gender, race, (dis)ability, parent/carer responsibilities or any other outward considerations, deserve to receive and be informed of the resources and rights this policy outlines. The University of Sydney would then lay an unchallengeable claim to be the premier destination for Postgraduate study in Australia and achieve the strategic goal of 1:5:40.

1. Common Needs for Research and Coursework Postgraduates

The following facilities and resources should be available to all postgraduates.

Induction

In SUPRA's view appropriate and comprehensive induction is critical in ensuring a good grounding for successful study. The University shall ensure that all postgraduates have access to a formal induction at an appropriate time that covers:

1. departmental procedures, including submission of assignments and formatting guidelines;¹
2. access policy;
3. safety policy, including access to University security services;
4. an introduction to departmental staff;
5. any other relevant information about the department;
6. instruction in relevant computer applications;
7. instruction on relevant research methodologies and/or information about relevant training;
8. written documentation about the department; and
9. advice on accessing resources, including University ancillary facilities such as health services and counselling;²
10. information on using library resources (including virtual resources).

For research students, the induction should also include:

11. a guide to preparing a research proposal;
12. an explanation of the thesis examination process;³
13. a guide to any available financial assistance, eg. scholarships, PRSS, thesis binding etc.
14. advice on the roles and responsibilities of the supervisor and the candidate;
15. advice on publishing papers;
16. guidance on applying for academic and other employment;
17. information about ethics and ethics approval processes; and
18. information about intellectual property rights.

Induction shall be provided in the form of ongoing structured training. In addition to the initial induction training the student shall be accorded access to any further development training relevant to their specific needs. This training is to be funded by the University.

Additional induction and ongoing support shall be provided to international students to help them familiarise themselves with Australian university culture, including: professional and social networks within the department or discipline; pedagogic norms (in particular the way plagiarism is defined in Australian universities) and assistance in deciding whether they may require additional language support.⁴

¹ Only 55.3% of coursework students surveyed felt that policies on formatting, footnotes and submission guidelines were adequately explained. This was identified as very important by 48.6% and important by 43.2% of respondents.

² This information is clearly needed as 40.9% of survey respondents reported that they did not know if they had prompt and adequate access to health and counselling services on campus.

³ 57% of research students reported that they had not received adequate information about the thesis examination process.

⁴ The need for a comprehensive induction into living in Sydney has often been reported to SUPRA by international postgraduate students. For example, one student asked for more information about "daily life in Australia." NB- students

Facilities

Each student shall have access to:

1. photocopying facilities charged at a maximum of cost price, including an account for photocopying within University libraries;
2. information technology support and departmental technical support;
3. tea room;
4. wash room; and
5. full library services including Australian and overseas interlibrary loans and prompt access to subject librarians and other library staff.

Access to these services shall reflect the needs of on and off campus students and full and part-time students and should in all relevant instances be provided on a 24 hour basis for the entire year excluding public holidays. These facilities shall be provided at the University's expense.

Study Environment

All postgraduate students shall be accorded a study environment which is secure and where work areas:

1. meet health and safety regulations;
2. are suitably insulated from noise;
3. are accessible to people of all abilities;⁵
4. accord secure 24 hour access;
5. are free of all forms of discrimination, including but not limited to on the basis of, age, gender, race, sexuality, gender identity, ability, religion and carer responsibilities;
6. are free of sexual harassment; and
7. display rules governing appropriate standards of behaviour for users of the space.

Students should also be provided with access to affordable and appropriate parking, with priority given to those with special requirements including but not limited to, limited mobility or caring responsibilities.

Timetabling

University timetabling will accommodate the needs of all students including where a student attends the University part-time or out of hours, whether for the purposes of coursework, consultation with supervisors, or other matters related to the progress of their study. For example, sufficient lectures and tutorials should also be available after normal business hours to allow those with daytime commitments to attend. In instances where students attend classes outside of business hours examination sessions should also be held at these times. Students should not be required to attend sessions outside of semester time as this disadvantages those who do not live locally to their campus.⁶

Ancillary Services

Support services are essential to student well-being, and shall be available at affordable subsidised rates

were not asked about attendance at the ISSU induction. These results may suggest that these inductions need to be more broadly promoted among international students.

⁵ Significant problems with disability access were raised by several students in our survey. Eg. “the university's disability resources are shamefully inadequate; the disabled tip each other off to go to other universities, which are apparently more interested in tapping our potential; if the disability ombudsman ever comes round, s/he's going to weep.”

⁶ Both of these issues were identified by survey respondents as unacceptable situations that currently occur at the University. Eg. “Although lectures are run after hours because uni understands that we work, I don't understand why our exams are held in the middle of working days”; “Courses should NOT be allowed to schedule compulsory sessions outside semester dates! This is just ridiculous and discriminates against international students.”

and for extended opening times including weekends, out of term and after hours. The services should be of a uniformly high standard. These services must be accessible by people of all abilities. Such services should include:

1. child care;
2. food and beverage facilities;
3. counselling;
4. dental; and
5. health

The services, facilities and resources provided to postgraduate students must be clearly stated on the University's website. Specific services available to coursework and research postgraduates must also be so stated. Further, each department must similarly state on its own webpage what facilities, services and resources it offers. The statement must be easy to find--preferably through a link from the homepage.

Fees

For fee-paying courses, the fees for each year shall be announced and advertised by August of the previous year. Fee-paying students must be given ample time in which to pay.⁷ Students must be given a range of payment options, particularly for those students who do not live locally to the main campus.⁸ Fees charged to continuing students may not be increased by more than the CPI per year. In cases where fees are increased students must be given reasonable notice and explanation of this decision.⁹ Fee-paying students must also be provided with information about the process of applying for extensions and appealing fee-related decisions.

Representation

To ensure that postgraduate interests are represented at the University students there should be a broad postgraduate representative organisation, faculty/departmental student representative positions and a postgraduate representative on the University Senate.

After hours access

Because postgraduate students often have other responsibilities than university alone, it is vital that where courses are available part-time, all facilities, ancillary services, and resources should also be available after hours.¹⁰ This includes access to academic and administration staff.¹¹

⁷ An illustrative comment on this issue from a survey respondent: "For distance students that live out of state, such as myself more time to pay fees would be appreciated. Due to delays in mail (it can take over a week to get my fee notice) fees are normally due the week I get the invoice, which is inconvenient."

⁸ International students in particular were concerned about the range of options for paying fees, which after taking into account credit card limits, was limited to paying by bank order. As one student said, "not every country has the system of bank orders."

⁹ Only 9.9% of respondents reported that they were given an explanation for fee increases, however 63.4% thought this was very important and 25.6% thought this was important. Similarly, only 17.3% of students felt that they were given adequate notice of fee increases while 65.5% thought this was very important and 25.7% felt it was important to receive adequate notice.

¹⁰ Difficulty in accessing basic ancillary services after hours or on weekends was reported by many students. Eg. "Our class ran from 4.30pm to 9.00pm with a tea break about 6/6.30pm for half an hour yet there was nowhere to purchase any food/drinks. If you didn't get there early enough to buy something before class you went without."

¹¹ Many students reported inconvenience caused by the University's inadequate office hours. One example: "Uni enrolment, admin and related facilities are not open at reasonable times after 6pm. As a part time student the University appears to be fully closed after 6:05 and this means I occasionally have to take leave from work." And another: "The classes are also run in the evenings, but there is no support for students during the evenings. I don't think its fair that

2. Postgraduate Coursework

Many of the problems experienced by postgraduate coursework students - including under-resourcing - stem from universities failing to understand the differences between postgraduate coursework students and undergraduate students. Such students are usually older than their undergraduate colleagues, many work full-time, and many have carer duties.

SUPRA recommends that the University undertake demographic analysis of their postgraduate coursework cohort in order to better understand who these students are, and the resources and facilities they require.

Study space

Coursework postgraduates should have 24-hour access to a quiet, postgraduate specific study space with adequate computer access, bathroom facilities and tea and coffee-making facilities.¹² This space must be accessible by people of all abilities and must also afford access to lockers or a similar storage facility.

Other resources and Facilities

As well as those facilities listed in section 1, 'Common Needs,' coursework postgraduates should have access to:

1. internet and email facilities, including after-hours and weekend/university holiday access to IT amenities and advice;
2. adequate provision of ISP facilities, including at-cost access to broadband;
3. after-hours access to printing and photocopying services, including adequate subsidised quotas for printing and photocopying;
4. free and unfettered access to on-line course notes and other material, including course readers;
5. all essential course material, such as course outlines, on-line and in hard copy free of charge;¹³
6. access to postgraduate/staff tea rooms; and
7. assurance of their safety and security on campus, particularly after hours.¹⁴

Departmental/Faculty support

Coursework postgraduate should also have:

1. access to induction / orientation sessions both in business hours and outside of working hours;
2. access to a dedicated member of department academic staff with a brief to oversee quality of coursework degrees, and assist coursework students with administration. This staff member must be available to consult with students outside of normal work hours.
3. access to research or conference attendance funds where the student is contributing to the development of new knowledge.

students studying in the evenings get LESS service because they are not on campus during the day. eg, no student admin services available.”

¹² Many students reported frustration with the difficulty in finding a quiet space on campus in which to study. One frustrated student said, “I'd like to have a place where I could go and study on campus. The Library here is a joke. People talk to each other, on phones, loud ring tones... it's a social meeting area. If I can't find a quiet place in the library, where else can I go?”

¹³ Several coursework students reported that they were expected to print out their own copies of course outlines that contained essential information for completing their course. SUPRA believes that students should not have to bear the cost of any essential course materials, much less course outlines.

¹⁴ Security on campus was raised consistently by survey respondents as an important issue. One student said, “My biggest issue is security and access to safe transport at night – I do most of my work at night.”

Library services

Each coursework student should have:

1. access to sufficient after-hours library services for all University libraries. It is not sufficient for the library to be open after hours only one day per week, or, in the case of summer terms, unavailable in the evenings outside of semester.¹⁵ It is also not acceptable for smaller discipline-specific libraries to have inadequate opening hours¹⁶;
2. access to a reasonable number of copies of textbooks and required reading materials, taking into account the number of students enrolled in a given course;
3. free access to inter-library loans;
4. off-site on-line access to library databases; and
5. photocopying and mailout services where deemed necessary;

The costs of the facilities and resources listed above shall be met by the university.

3. Postgraduate Research

SUPRA believes that the best way to ensure the timely completion of quality research is to ensure that such students are well supported during candidature.

Some universities now have policies covering the resources and facilities which will be made available to postgraduate research students, as well as outlining the roles and responsibilities of student and supervisor. SUPRA believes the University should provide the following as a minimum.

Agreed Support

In the case of research students, the establishment of an agreement between the postgraduate and supervisor shall form part of the induction process. Such agreements should include:

- the provision of any special resources necessary for the student to undertake the project;
- the agreed frequency and duration of meetings between supervisor and student
- a time-line or plan for the following 12 months
- in-principle agreement about authorship arrangements during the student's candidature

Students will be invited to review these agreements every 6 months if they deem it necessary. Where students complete an annual progress report or similar, the opportunity must be provided for the student to comment on the facilities and resources available to them.¹⁷

Students should be provided with regular opportunities for networking with other students, staff and researchers.

¹⁵ Many students complained about library opening hours. One example: "Ensure there is after hours access to all libraries and that all libraries are open on weekends, particularly Sundays. Having libraries all over the place and only open during business hours makes access to books impossible for full time working postgraduates." And another: "[the] library doesn't even open during the weekend (Sundays) when intensive courses are on in summer and winter."

¹⁶ Students complained about access to several of the University's smaller libraries, including this comment from a law student, "There is not enough library access for law students. As a full time working single mother and as I study part time not having access to the library out of session or on a Sunday is a huge inconvenience," and this from a nursing student: "The library hours in nursing should be a bit longer - usually they run 9am-7pm."

¹⁷ Only 44.4% of research students reported that they have a formal agreement about supervision arrangements, however 37.8% thought this was very important and 37.6% thought this was important.

Study Space

Research students generate new knowledge and contribute to the research output of universities. In this way, research students are the junior colleagues of the academic research staff with whom they work. Like staff, research students shall thus have access to an office or reasonable shared working space which is secure, ventilated, heated, cooled, lit to ASA standards, located proximate to toilets and other amenities and accessible by people of all abilities.¹⁸

Research students shall also have exclusive access to:

1. an ergonomically sound chair and desk, desk space to be no less than 1m²;
2. adequate filing cabinet space that can be locked;
3. adequate book shelving space;
4. a personal computer, with access to current research and publishing tools including e-mail and the internet;¹⁹
5. a Sydney University email account, which continues to be available during periods of suspension of candidature and during the examination process; and
6. sufficient laboratory space, equipment and facilities to complete the program of research.

Other Resources and Facilities

The following resources must also be available:

1. access to a fax machine and telephone;
2. postage and courier service;
3. an on-campus mailing address;
4. stationery;
5. free printing²⁰; and
6. free photocopying, including in the library.

These facilities will be accessible 24 hours a day, and adequately maintained, for the duration of the research and writing component of the candidature and if revision is required after thesis examination.

Where a student is studying off-campus, such that they relinquish access to office facilities as described above, they shall be provided with enhanced telecommunications facilities in their off-campus study location. This shall include computer, network, information technology support, fax and telephone facilities of the standard described in this statement. All costs associated with the conduct of the research, including the funding of the above, shall be met by the University.

Further to the resources and facilities listed above, the University should also provide:

¹⁸ Many students identified the need for a dedicated study space and the fact that the provision of this varies greatly across faculties. One student said, “The lack of study space for Arts research students is disgusting. ARC [Arts Research Centre] is not sufficient. Students need a secure area where they can leave their research tools (books, computers, etc). Every other faculty offers, and the majority of other universities provide their research students private and shared secure offices. This is the major reason why I am finishing my degree overseas.”

¹⁹ Only 48.4% of research students reported that they have a designated computer at uni, however 59% thought this was very important and 25.6% thought this was important. One student claimed, “Designated computer and exclusive study space is my number one concern and biggest failure of the uni.”

²⁰ Free printing is another area raised as an equity issue by survey respondents. It appears that the majority of research students do receive free printing however an unacceptably large number do not. 23.6% of survey respondents reported that they did not have access to free printing. One student said, “Postgrads generally receive free printing. MPharm Students do not.”

7. funds to cover expenses arising from field work, experiments, data collection and conference attendance (such funds shall be made available on an annual basis, and the amount available to each student in a department must be clearly stated on the departmental web site);²¹
8. adequate insurance coverage to enable necessary fieldwork/site research;
9. binding and other services required to produce copies of the thesis; and
10. funding for the costs associated with transferring the thesis to a digital format suitable for its incorporation into Australian Digital Theses (ADT) collections (in recognition of the importance of the ADT program).

Library services

Candidates shall be granted continuing access to library services for the period between submission of the thesis and conferral of their degree. Where deemed appropriate by the student's department, a student will be granted continuing access to library services during periods of suspension of candidature.

Examination

The University shall provide, in writing, explicit procedures for the examination of theses and ensure that the candidate is appraised of these prior to enrolment. This information must also be readily available during a student's candidature. These procedures shall:

1. detail the requirements of the particular research project;
2. specify the number of examiners, the steps to be followed in the examination process and the maximum period allowed for each step of the process;
3. outline what information is given to external examiners to assist them in examining the thesis; and
4. provide the student with access to an appeal process.

The university shall also inform the student when each step of the examination process is completed and the outcome of that step of the process.

²¹ Only 42.4% of research students responding to our survey felt that adequate funds for conference attendance and study related travel were made available, while a tiny 0.6% of respondents rated this issue as 'not important'.