



Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ) Reports

2010 Faculty responses

Summary report 2

Communication strategies for disseminating SREQ reports

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Introduction

In response to the position paper Closing the Loop: disseminating the results and reports of the Student Research Experience Questionnaire (http://sydney.edu.au/graduate_studies_office/staff/) the SEG Research Training Committee endorsed the importance of ensuring that students were informed that their comments in these reports were being listened to, and acted upon. Accordingly, every faculty were asked to respond to their SREQ reports, and address the following issues:

- 1 Strategies and initiatives to improve the research higher degree student experience
- 2 Communication strategies for disseminating the SREQ reports to academic staff, research higher degree students and postgraduate administrative staff
- 3 Suggestions for improving the usefulness of the report
- 4 Overall response to the report

The aim of the reports was to provide the University with a range of strategies and initiatives that are being put in place to improve the research higher degree student experience.

All faculties provided responses to their SREQ reports, and these are available on the ITL SREQ website. In addition four summary reports have been compiled and made available on the Graduate Studies Office website.

This report is

Number 2: Communication strategies for disseminating SREQ reports

This report is divided into three sections:

1. Research higher degree students
2. Academic Staff
3. Postgraduate administrative staff

Each of the above sections delineates the communication strategies used for communicating the results of the SREQ reports to staff and students within each faculty. Faculty affiliations are provided in parentheses.

Responses to each of the strategies can be found in the faculty responses to the SREQ reports, which are available at http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/sreq.sreq_faculty.htm

Note

This was the first year in which reports were distributed beyond the Dean and Associate Dean within each faculty to include all academic staff, including postgraduate coordinators, all research higher degree students, and all administrative staff who were involved with research higher degree students. The response is rewarding and confirms the value of 'closing the loop'.

1 Research higher degree students

Faculties reported the following strategies for communicating with their research higher degree students:

- A major communication strategy to the Faculty's research higher degree (HDR) students is the holding of an annual Postgraduate Forum where the quantitative and qualitative responses are tabled and discussed. The forum is held on the Camperdown and repeated at the Cobbity Campuses. The forums are attended by 60-80% of the HDR cohort respectively. (*Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources*)
- A call for new and productive ideas was sent out to our research students via our student representative to our Research Training Committee. This call was the topic of a Postgraduate Research Students (PGRS) meeting. (*Architecture, Design and Planning*)
- Updates on Postgraduate Arts Research Centres (PGARC) developments are reported to the PGARC committee and via them to PGARC enrolled students. Notice of PGARC facilities is made available to all students upon enrolment via PG coordinators. Postgraduates were made aware of the changes to PRSS and Teaching Fellowship applications by Faculty wide email. (*Arts and Social Sciences*)
- HDR students may be aware that the questionnaire has been discussed and certain action taken through their representatives on the committees mentioned below. In fact, we appear to lack a routinely scheduled annual or semesterly meeting of all HDR students that might be used for the discussion of materials like this and of our responses to them, and this is a matter that itself will be thought through over the months ahead. (Currently, we meet all new HDRs for an initiation session at the start of each semester, but we do not call together the continuing students.) (*Conservatorium of Music*)
- All Business School HDR students are sent copies of the SREQ and specifically asked to send or make known their reactions to the report and to its format to the HDR administrative team or to the Discipline PhD Co-ordinators or to the Director of Doctoral Studies. It is emphasized that this communication is in the spirit of openness and a desire to improve the HDR program and the experience and progression of all HDR students. (*Sydney Business School*)
- The results have been communicated to all academic staff who supervise RHD students, to postgraduate administrative staff, and to RHD representatives through emails and discussion at Dentistry Postgraduate Studies Committee meetings. (*Dentistry*)
- We communicate information on SREQ and PREQ results to students via student representatives on the Division of Doctoral Studies committee. (*Education and Social Work*)
- The results have been communicated to the representatives of the HDR students through School committee meetings. To ensure these are communicated to all research students across the faculty, the Graduate School will produce a summary of the SREQ results (including information on the faculty's response) which will be placed on the Graduate School's website. Once this has been implemented an email will be sent to all HDR students to direct them to the website. (*Engineering and Information Technologies*)
- All current HDR students were directed to the SREQ results on the University website and sent an executive summary of the initiatives planned by the Faculty. (*Health Sciences*)
- Improve direct communication with students. Improve knowledge transfer opportunities (*Sydney Law School*)
- Sydney Medical School weekly newsletter: advertise seminars; report outcome of changed PRSS process; advertise orientation sessions; and introduce the Induction and Discussion template and its purpose when finalised. (*Sydney Medical School*)
- Sydney Nursing School holds two dedicated workshops and a week-long seminar (Research Week) for students each year. Dates for these events are made available to students by the end of July in the previous year. As one-third of our students reside outside New South Wales, Research Week is one of the only times research students are actually all together. For the first time during the 2011 Research Week (July 18th – 22nd) we programmed a dedicated 'Student Only' session of 1.5 hours for students to

review SREQ feedback and discuss any other general concerns with a view to offering solutions for their identified problems or concerns. A final year PhD student was chosen to facilitate the group. (*Sydney Nursing School*)

- The results of the survey have been discussed with the postgraduate student representatives in the Faculty to identify possible solutions. This has been led by the Faculty postgraduate coordinator. A workshop is planned for Friday 5th August at which the findings from the SREQ will also be discussed. (*Pharmacy*)
- All School Post-graduate coordinators will meet with HDR candidates to review outcomes of SREQ survey, and include them in School responses to issues. If School agrees, issues discussed and actions suggested will also be workshopped at the Faculty Board of Postgraduate Research. (*Science*)
- The annual Postgraduate Progress Reviews provide an appropriate and effective opportunity for issues regarding the quality of student experience to be discussed directly with each candidate and their primary supervisor. The reviews take place after the SREQ has been implemented, thus students having previously given thought to their responses are given the opportunity for these to be addressed, in addition to any other comments during the review. (*Sydney College of the Arts*)
- Results of SREQ were made available to student representatives and electronically to all postgraduate students. Students were asked to forward any comments to their student representative and directly to the Sub-Dean of Postgraduate research. These comments were discussed at PERTC meetings. (*Veterinary Science*)

2 Academic staff

Faculties reported the following strategies for communicating with academic staff:

- Similarly [to research higher degree students], all Faculty staff attend their own session at the annual Postgraduate Forum where the SREQ report is tabled for discussion. (*Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources*)
- In an attempt to ensure that students get the message that we are listening to their feedback and acting upon it, we have requested that the student representative to our Faculty's Research Training Committee reports back to them about proposals forwarded and developments in response to their voiced concerns and suggested changes. (*Architecture, Design and Planning*)
- PGARC developments, postgraduate funding developments and developments in supervision policy are all discussed by the Postgraduate Research Student Committee, minuted, presented to the Dean's Executive for noting and comment, and then passed on to the Faculty board for noting and comment. Thus all academic staff are able to comment on such initiatives. (*Arts and Social Sciences*)
- The content of the SREQ and actions taken in relation to issues raised in the SREQ has been communicated to staff in a number of ways, including discussion at committees (Faculty Graduate Sub-Committee and SCM Learning and Teaching/Graduate Studies Coursework Committee). These have led to further discussion and the emergence of ideas for future development. SREQ data will also be included in a report to all staff at the next Academic Board meeting (which is open to all members of academic staff and typically quite well attended). (*Conservatorium of Music*)
- The results have been communicated to all academic staff who supervise RHD students, to postgraduate administrative staff, and to RHD representatives through emails and discussion at Dentistry Postgraduate Studies Committee meetings. (*Dentistry*)
- All Discipline Co-ordinators have read the report. The report is scheduled for discussion at the next co-ordinators meeting, in October, however we do not expect it to lead to any discussion that would not otherwise have occurred. This is for two main reasons: (i) there is no real surprise or unexpected finding in the report, and (ii) the report is a summary only and focuses on the frequency of students showing their approval. It does not really get into the heart of issues from the least satisfied or successful students. It is likely that there are some students reluctant to state or be completely honest in their criticism, and there are other dissatisfied students who really have little reasonable basis for their dissatisfaction. (*Economics and Business*)
- Academic staff assist the induction process for new RHD students to provide an opportunity to see how supervision is managed by different academic staff. Academic staff are also involved in the Faculty's bi-annual research student fora – chairing committees and providing constructive feedback on student presentations and generally supporting the research student experience. (*Education and Social Work*)
- The SREQ results have been reported on and discussed in the Faculty Research and Research Training Committee, Faculty Postgraduate Committee, and in School Board meetings. (*Engineering and IT*)
- The 2010 SREQ and links to the reporting website were sent to members of our Research Committee and Research Higher Degree Subcommittee and members were asked to review the report and provide feedback. These groups are made up of our Faculty Research Group Convenors and Postgraduate Coordinators, Associate Dean (Research and Innovation) and representatives of the Faculty and Faculty Research Group Administrators. (*Health Sciences*)
- Inform staff of student feedback and changes in the PG research program. Involve staff in PG research activities (*Sydney Law School*)
- Supervisors: SMS newsletter, as above [research higher degree students]. HoD/HoS: comments from Q52 of the 2010 SREQ will be distributed to HoS/HoD to familiarise them with the concerns of students. They will also be encouraged to give consideration to supervisory practices when conducting PM&D reviews and recommending staff for promotion. (*Sydney Medical School*)

- The 2010 SREQ results have been communicated to academic and professional staff in a number of ways since release.
 1. Faculty Meeting (all faculty): presentation on 16th May 2011
 2. Faculty Management Meeting (Dean, Associate Deans and Faculty Manager): individual agenda items June, July and August
 3. Research and Research Training Committee (membership includes representative from medicine, post doc and HDR students): presented and discussed 26th July 2011
 4. Research Support Unit team meetings (Associate Dean Research, Postgraduate Coordinator, Research Support Officer, Administrative Officer, Biostatistician): weekly agenda item May – August

An 'Opening and Closing the Loop' quality process for research includes reporting on SREQ results. The 'Opening the Loop: Research at Sydney Nursing School' was held on 11th February 2011 and reported on responses from the 2009 SREQ. Actions on the 2010 SREQ will be included in the 'Closing the Loop' presentation to be held in early December 2011. (*Sydney Nursing School*)

- This has been presented to and discussed a Faculty Research Committee meeting and will be disseminated more widely to academic staff. (*Pharmacy*)
- Place a greater emphasis on training of academic staff at Faculty Board of Post-graduate Research, in terms of sharing aspects of best practice in HDR candidature management. This began in the June 2011 meeting, where Schools presented practice in their annual progress review of HDR candidates. Outcomes to be communicated to School by post-graduate coordinator. (*Science*)
- The Director of the Graduate School and the SCA Executive Officer have planned a series of workshops to directly address supervisors' roles, responsibilities, and candidate management. These workshops will directly address the SREQ and the recommendations determined by the Director of the Graduate School and the Dean. The key areas of concern are addressed at the meetings of the Graduate School Committee. Where appropriate the Acting Director of the Graduate School has addressed issues directly with academic supervisors (*Sydney College of the Arts*)
- Results of SREQ were circulated electronically to academic staff and supervisors for discussion (*Veterinary Science*)

3 Postgraduate administrative staff

Faculties reported the following strategies for communicating with postgraduate administrative staff:

- Administrative staff attend both the student and staff sessions at the annual Postgraduate Forum. The staff are also present at the Postgraduate Studies Management Committee where this material so also tabled and this along with the forum feedback is used to develop new strategies and initiatives. When new initiatives are proposed the administrative staff are requested to provide feedback on the implementation and ongoing management. Although working in a team there is only one administrative staff member identified to support HDR students (*Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources*)
- During the rapid turnover in administrative staff that we have experienced in our Faculty over the last year, we have seized the opportunity to revise the duty statements for some staff members within our Student Administration Centre, which has allowed for the consideration of a position dedicated to handling the wide variety of administrative tasks relating to the candidature of students in the Architecture. Such a revised duty statement provides a specification for a Research Training Coordinator. (*Architecture, Design and Planning*)
- PGARC developments, postgraduate funding developments and developments in supervision policy are all discussed by the PGRSC, at which School representatives are present who pass on information to departments. The Associate Dean PG Research runs biannual information sessions at which up to date information on postgraduate issues and processes is communicated to postgraduate administrative staff. (*Arts and Social Sciences*)
- 1). I have personally briefed postgraduate administrative staff on matters revealed or perceived by HDR students that relate to their areas of duty and responsibility. The manager of the student administration office has a copy of the full report and the open response materials, and he and I have met to talk through items raised there. This has led to no new strategies being proposed this year, but to a better awareness of how students perceive (positively or otherwise) administrative actions undertaken on their behalves.

2). Meanwhile, we have finally moved to an online application process which we believe will improve efficiency overall and set a positive and professional tone for students from their initial contact with the faculty all the way through to formal enrolment. Results from this should begin to appear in the SREQ 2012. (*Conservatorium of Music*)
- The results have been communicated to all academic staff who supervise RHD students, to postgraduate administrative staff, and to RHD representatives through emails and discussion at Dentistry Postgraduate Studies Committee meetings. (*Dentistry*)
- Our School's administrative staff responsible for HDR courses are a highly dedicated and responsive team. They are very familiar with the contents of the SREQ report, and very engaged with students' needs and reactions. They play an important role because students feel that they can go to their office without jeopardizing any relationships with supervisors or their Disciplines. This is a very effective structure that gives two separate and in some ways independent points of formal contact and support for students in the School. (*Sydney Business School*)
- Postgraduate administrative staff are part of the Doctoral Studies committee so see and comment on the SREQ reports. (*Education and Social Work*)
- The SREQ results have been communicated to postgraduate administrative staff through School Board meetings and through the minutes of the Faculty Research and Research Training Committee. (*Engineering and IT*)
- The SREQ report was circulated to Faculty research postgraduate administrative staff for review and comment. (*Health Sciences*)
- Improve administrative responsiveness to students and efficiency of administration generally. Reduce load on administrative staff through redefining job descriptions (*Sydney Law School*)

- The centralised student administration in SMS means communication of issues occurs at staff meetings and informally due to the close proximity of staff. Administrative procedures but not staff issues were identified in the SREQ. (*Sydney Medical School*)
- All research student data, including SREQ results are located on a 'research share' drive which may be accessed by all members of the Research Support Unit team and Faculty Management. The Research Support Unit team consists of the Associate Dean (Research), the Director of Research Students and Research Development (role of Postgraduate Coordinator), one FTE Research Support Officer and 0.3 FTE Administration Officer. In addition to assisting with preparation, analysis and presentation of SREQ results to faculty meetings (such as 16th May), the team works together with the Faculty Research and Research Training Committee to identify metrics for research student strategies and to determine how KPIs for research student experience can be met. Mostly this is achieved by actioning items through the weekly Research Support Unit team meetings. (*Sydney Nursing School*)
- Some postgraduate administrative staff attend the Faculty Research Committee meeting and are aware of these issues. (*Pharmacy*)
- High-level of effective and regular communication between Director, Post-graduate Research and Faculty administrative staff essential for effective management and to avoid delayed response to critical issues. Faculty to maintain a dedicated HDR management appointment at a level appropriate for responsibility in management aspects, to heighten awareness of issues and increase empathy for HDR candidates. (*Science*)
- The Postgraduate Manager is responsible for the collation of responses to the annual Postgraduate Reviews and thus is well aware of any long-standing or emerging issues. The Postgraduate Manager is also embedded in the lines of communication between the Director of the Graduate School, the Dean and other relevant academic staff members with regard to the SREQ and the strategies and initiatives put into place. The administrative processes with regard to postgraduate study at SCA is centralised and compact, which facilitates communication. (*Sydney College of the Arts*)
- With regard to campus infrastructure, the Facilities Manager is included in all relevant discussion appropriate to improving the student experience. This discussion usually revolves around provision of studio space, campus access and technical facilities.
- Various key postgraduate administrative staff have had the opportunity to read the document and have participated in summation of a needs analysis to improve the student experience. (*Veterinary Science*)