

GUIDELINES FOR INDUCTION OF RESEARCH HIGHER DEGREE STUDENTS AT FACULTY/ SCHOOL/ DISCIPLINARY LEVEL

Induction and orientation for research higher degree students are important ways of ensuring that students get off to a good start with their study. While some commencing research students will have been studying at the university for years, many may be new to the University or returning after many years break from study or even be new to the country. In all cases, the experience of research study can be very different to coursework study, and can be much more like a staff experience. Research students often report feeling isolated and confused about what they should be doing, so an effective orientation and induction can help students by:

1. providing the information they need about policies and procedures that they will need to know
2. introducing them to the people and services that they may need to know
3. helping them to feel part of a research community

Some general orientation is provided each semester for all commencing postgraduate students at a University level (see Page 4 for more information). Many other services also provide induction and orientation information (Such as the International Student Support Unit, or the Library). It is also important that more local information is provided at the faculty, school, discipline or unit level.

What is induction?

Induction is the act or process of inducting somebody into a position or an organisation. This may include training or instruction. Checklists are used to define the areas of knowledge that are required to be completed before the induction process is completed.

What is orientation?

Orientation is the process of becoming accustomed to a new situation or set of surroundings. It is also a meeting at which introductory information or training is provided to somebody embarking on something new such as a new course of study. Orientation programs generally last for less than one day, and include generalist rather than specific information.

Benefits of Induction and Orientation

The following comments relating to the benefits of having an ongoing induction and orientation program for research higher degree students were received from respondents to the SREQ in 2009:

I think this is really the best university I have ever studied. If I have a problem, I can be sure that there is at least one person on campus who will be able to help me, and usually I even know who that person/ faculty/ centre/ organisation is within the university. This is because the Orientation was excellent

I think an orientation day (not just a 1hour meeting) would be useful to show new PhD students the library, meet librarians, explain what workshops and when they will be available, show around campus - what each building houses, where admin is, where deans office is etc with a map

Rationale for developing guidelines for faculty level induction and orientation programs

The induction program was poor. many services I only became aware of recently and informally, despite having attended the PG induction. A school/faculty/department induction would help
-Comment from postgraduate research student SREQ 2009

Recommendation 6 of the PhD review working party, stated that *there be a review by the SEG Research Training Committee of central and faculty-based induction processes with a view to identifying appropriate faculty and central responsibilities to best ensure efficiency and effectiveness.*

Faculties should carry out induction sessions at the start of each semester that ensure that:

(a) candidates have been supplied with a local induction kit containing a map of the campus, information on the discipline/department and its processes, relevant committees and a list of staff significant to the workplace and their contact details;

(b) candidates have received The University of Sydney "Services for Students" booklet and Postgraduate Studies handbook and have been made aware of learning and support organizations within the University including the Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association (SUPRA);

(c) OHS information and, where appropriate, training has been provided to candidates and has been read and understood by them. Such information should include emergency information, contact details of local OHS officers, the OHS website and relevant policies;

(d) The candidate is made aware of administrative requirements within the department/faculty relating to their candidature, such as attendance, use of university vehicles, application for fieldwork, special duties and other leave;

(e) Policies with respect to intellectual property, including questions of authorship and exploitation of inventions and other intellectual property, have been agreed

Recommendation 7 stated that Supervisors and candidates complete a Postgraduate Research Student Induction Checklist within the first three months of candidature, and the completion of this checklist be confirmed by the Postgraduate Coordinator.

The checklist should include confirmation that:

(a) a research agreement has been completed (see below);

(b) expectations of the role of supervisor and candidate have been discussed;

(c) the nature of the PhD and what is needed to complete an adequate thesis has been discussed;

(d) the following policies have been read and discussed:

(i) Code of practice for supervision of postgraduate research students

(ii) Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research

(iii) Research: Code of Conduct for Responsible Research Practice and Guidelines for Dealing with Allegations of Research Misconduct

(iv) Record Keeping Manual

(e) arrangements for afterhours access to buildings have been made if appropriate;

(f) facilities and resources for the candidate, including office/laboratory space, computer, stationery supplies, telephone and email, have been organised;

(g) the candidate has been introduced to colleagues within the department including the Head of discipline, Head of research area, appropriate administrative staff and other students in the research area;

(h) ethics issues and the appropriate approval process have been identified;

(i) any licenses, permits or permissions required to carry out the project have been identified along with the appropriate approval process.

The highlighted text above provided the impetus for the Graduate Studies Office to investigate what is currently happening within faculties to welcome research higher degree students, and to provide them with an induction program which would "establish a sense of belonging to the faculty, and a sense of cohesion as a group of research students"¹ Based on the results, this document seeks to provide guidelines for induction and orientation programs at both faculty/ school/ discipline and university level.

¹ Faculty of Economics and Business information for research higher degree students
http://sydney.edu.au/business/futurestudents/postgraduate_research_studies

Aims and objectives of an induction/ orientation program for research higher degree students

The aim of an induction program for research higher degree students is to set them off on the best possible start and equip them for their research candidature and beyond. It should prepare students to be fully participating members of their research communities. (Adams and Zander, 2004)

Effective induction of research higher degree candidates ensures that they have the requisite knowledge to participate effectively and safely in their departments and research teams. It also ensures that candidates are familiar with their rights and responsibilities, can easily access resources and facilities, and develop collegial relationships in their department or faculty. (PhD review working party, 2009)

From **Education and Social Work welcome letter** to research students:

Aim:

- *Orientation*
- *To provide a collegial and supportive environment*
- *Introduce students to key faculty staff*
- *Inform students of resource facilities*
- *Assist you to tackle your research study with confidence*

From the **SUPRA policy on entitlements for postgraduate students**

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;
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;
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;
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.

University wide orientation for postgraduate students

The Graduate Studies Office runs an orientation session for all postgraduate students (research and coursework) in the early weeks of each semester. It consists of a one-hour information session and a social function. All commencing postgraduate students are invited by email to attend that non-compulsory function. We find that it is often those students least familiar with the University and feeling most isolated that attend the function, for example international students, students commencing at the University for the first time or mature age students returning to study after a long break. Our satisfaction surveys have shown that a short-format information session is seen as interesting and relevant, with the opportunity to follow up in greater detail on any issues via the website or directly with the office concerned.

The program is as follows:

Welcome

Professor Marie Carroll, Director, Academic Affairs
Academic Policies and Intellectual Property
Associate Professor Peter McCallum, Chair, Academic Board <http://www.usyd.edu.au/ab/>

Ethics

Ms Rebecca Halligan, Director Research Integrity, Research and Innovation
<http://www.usyd.edu.au/ro/ethics/default.shtml>

Careers Centre & Planning Your Career

Ms Julie Doherty, Career Development Officer (Postgraduate) <http://sydney.edu.au/careers>

Student Services: Counselling, Disability Services & Learning Centre, International Student Services

Mr Paul O'Donohue, Senior International Student Counsellor,
International Student Support Unit
<http://www.usyd.edu.au/stuserv/issu/>

Accommodation Service

Mr Ben Alfred

Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

Dr Jim Richardson, ICT Relationship Manager for eResearch
<http://j.mp/mPwXN>

Library Services and Digital Thesis Submission

Ms Judy Reading, Faculty Liaison Librarian
<http://www.library.usyd.edu.au>

The Role of SUPRA (Sydney University PG Representative Association)

Mr John Nowakowski, SUPRA President
<http://www.supra.usyd.edu.au/>

University of Sydney Union

Mr David Mann, President, USU
<http://www.usu.usyd.edu.au/>

Safety on Campus

University Security Services

Postgraduate Opportunities

Mr Simon French, Director, Graduate Studies Office

Scholarships and PRSS

<http://sydney.edu.au/scholarships> - for all students
www.usyd.edu.au/ro/training/index.shtml - for research students

Commercialisation Training Scheme – Graduate Certificate

<http://www.usyd.edu.au/ro/training/commercialisation.shtml>

Write Site

<http://writesite.elearn.usyd.edu.au/>

Learning Centre PG program

http://sydney.edu.au/stuserv/learning_centre/index

Handbooks (including faculty and Postgraduate Studies Handbooks)

<http://sydney.edu.au/handbooks/index.shtml>

At Sydney student email newsletter

http://sydney.edu.au/current_students/life/at_sydney.shtml

Guidelines for a Faculty/ School/ Discipline level orientation program

The following guidelines are provided as an indication of what is achievable in an induction or orientation program, and are based on 'best practice' from within the University.

- 1 Faculties should ensure that candidates are given an orientation or induction program early in their candidature. To cater for part-time candidates, it can be useful to run orientation programs in the late afternoon or early evening to ensure all candidates are able to attend. Alternatively, separate sessions can be run for part-time candidates. (*Best practice manual, 2009*)
- 2 To cater for students who commence in second semester, or who may have missed the sessions in first semester, programs should be offered every semester. (*Best practice manual, 2009*)
- 3 Whilst intended in the main for commencing students, programs should also be offered to continuing students who require a refresher.
- 4 When running orientation programs, it should be remembered that not all research higher degree students undertook their previous degrees at the University of Sydney.
- 5 One way of providing a supportive environment for new research higher degree students is to send them details of the induction or orientation program in a 'welcome' letter, which sets out the purpose of the induction program.

Welcome to the Faculty of We hope you find your period of candidature stimulating, enlightening and rewarding. Every semester the faculty arranges an induction program.

Who is it for?

- All incoming research higher degree students
- Research students who are interested in a refresher

Aim:

- Orientation
- To provide a collegial and supportive environment
- Introduce students to key faculty staff
- Inform students of resource facilities
- Assist you to tackle your research study with confidence (*Education and Social Work*)

- 6 Orientation programs may include the following:
 - a. A welcome function – introducing research higher degree students to each other and the faculty/ department/ school in an informal atmosphere
 - b. A walking tour of the faculty, including facilities such as Access Lab, research higher degree students' room(s), staff room, faculty office, utility room, other useful offices.
 - c. Induction seminars e.g. on being a research student in the faculty; managing supervisor-student relations
- 7 Students may be provided with a 'survival' guide or information package containing a welcome to the faculty, details of faculty requirements, useful contacts, administration, scholarship and other relevant information, together with relevant University policies. This should be written in a positive, welcoming style. For example:

Welcome to the Faculty/ School. We hope that the information in this guide will make it easier for you to figure out where to find things, what you need to know, how things work in the School/ Faculty and who to contact if you need more information. (School of Public Health)

Welcome to the Faculty/ School. The purpose of this information booklet is to assist you in understanding the workings of the Faculty/ School and to inform you about who to ask if you have problems (Pharmacy)

- 8 Information packages may be made available online and/or to download in pdf format. If the document is in print, arrangement may be either alphabetically or thematically. It is a good idea to provide an introduction to the arrangement, pointing out important areas if necessary. For example:

This document contains a lot of information. An alphabetical list of subject headings follows. But if you only read one thing, we think this should be about emails so please read that chapter. (School of Public Health)

- 9 Ideally, orientation or induction handbooks and other information aimed at research higher degree students should be produced as separate items, not included in information for all students (undergraduate and postgraduate) or all postgraduate students. Similarly orientation session should be aimed at the research higher degree group not the postgraduate group (research higher degree and coursework combined) as they have different requirements.

Suggestions for faculty / department orientation day programmes

There are three objectives that orientation programs should meet:

1. Welcoming research higher degree students to the faculty or department and introducing them to members of staff (academic and professional). Students value meeting member of academic staff, and this is important to feeling a part of discipline community. This is reflected in the 'research climate' scores of the SREQ satisfaction questionnaire. It is also important to know the local professional staff, who are often vital in getting things done.
2. Introducing them to other research higher degree students, including students who have already commenced their candidatures. Sharing experiences can be a big support, and helps build a sense of community and reduce feelings of isolation.
3. Introducing them to the services, facilities and other infrastructure available to them at a faculty rather than a university level.
4. Use clear English, spoken at a moderate pace. Try and be aware of local idioms, and avoid or explain where necessary. We are welcoming more international research students, and it
5. Don't forget to let students know about Student Services, such as Disability Services, Counselling, Careers, and so on. Accommodation is a particularly significant issue for postgraduate students, so it is useful to know that there is an Accommodation Service.

References

Adams, K and Zander, A (2004) Postgraduate induction: emerging evidence from a discipline based program. *Proceedings of the Australian Universities Quality Forum*
http://www.auqa.edu.au/files/publications/auqf2004_proceedings.pdf

Manual of best practice for the administration of research higher degree candidature. May 2009
http://www.usyd.edu.au/graduate_studies_office/about_us/BestPractice/HDR_Admin_BestPracticeManual.pdf

Survival guide for postgraduate research students. School of Public Health: February 2010
http://sydney.edu.au/medicine/public-health/current/research/survival_guide.pdf

Postgraduate research induction booklet. Faculty of Pharmacy
http://www.pharm.usyd.edu.au/documents/2010Pharmacy%20Postgraduate%20Induction%20Booklet_May.pdf

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