

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS
STUDENT RESEARCH EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE (SREQ)
ANALYSIS OF OPEN RESPONSE COMMENTS 2004

Introduction

The following document provides an analysis of the comments received in answer to the SREQ open response comments from postgraduate research students in the Faculty of Economics and Business in 2004.

Students were asked to provide comments on the following:

- *What are the best aspects of your research higher degree experience? Please explain why these aspects are good.*
- *What aspects are most in need of improvement? Please explain why.*

Each comment received was analysed for subject content and categorised into aspects which are closely aligned with the following SREQ Scales and their characteristics:

- *Quality of Supervision*
- *Quality of Infrastructure*
- *Research Climate*
- *Generic Skills*
- *Overall satisfaction*

Comments which included more than one aspect (e.g. quality of supervision and infrastructure) were counted in all aspects mentioned.

Arrangement

1. Analysis of comments referring to the best aspects of the degree course
2. Analysis of comments referring to aspects that could be improved

Responses are ranked according to the percentage of comments received for each aspect. Sample comments have been provided for the aspects that received the most number of comments. Results from the previous years qualitative analysis are provided as a percentage. Only aspects that received 5% or more comments in 2004 are included in this report. To preserve student confidentiality, sample comments are only provided if there are six or more comments relating to that aspect in the responses. Comments which may possibly identify the student have not included in sample comments.

Attachment One: Categories and sub-categories for the analysis of SREQ Open Response comments

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1 Analysis of comments referring to the best aspects of the degree course¹

Students are happy with their supervision (2004: 48%)
(2003: 38%; 2002: 23%)

- My supervisor's international reputation, contacts and his consistent concern for my personal and academic welfare has been easily the most positive aspect of my research experience. Although he does not hand out praise without justification, he is always supportive and I feel when I reach a problem I can always ask for his assistance
- Supervision – my supervisor always makes time to see me and always actively engages in the material and provides good advice and guidance. I think this is essential for a PhD student
- The best aspect I have experienced so far is having Prof. XXX XXX as my supervisor who is sincerely concerned with my overall well-being while going through the PhD process. This "partnership" approach actually motivates me to work even harder ... other aspects can (may) be compromised but having a caring and supportive supervisor like him while providing intellectual guidance is one thing that will (has) make my PhD journey much more fruitful and meaningful.
- Supportive supervision – gives a sounding board to test my ideas and provides me with feedback on how I am going. Gives me direction and helps me clarify my thoughts

Students are satisfied with their research projects (2004: 17%)
(2003: 22%; 2002: 21%)

- Being able to concentrate for an extended period on a particular research problem; being able to read extensively; enjoying the writing phase
- I just love the research and the intellectual stimulation, and the fact that not being a commercial enterprise opens doors, as does the University brand
- The luxury of taking time out to think, write, and extend my knowledge and thinking capabilities
- Doing my research on a topic which interests

Students appreciate the physical facilities/ resources (2004: 15%)
(2003: 13%; 2002: 15%)

- Working in the carrels with other students.
- The carrel facilities are well maintained and easy for me to access
- Provision of a workstation/ carrel
- The postgraduate facility in the Business and Economics building was extremely good to work in

Students are stimulated/ challenged by their degree experience (2004: 13%)
(2002: 8%)

- My research and being part of the academic workforce while conducting my research. Because both are interesting and challenging. Something which even quasi-professional jobs in the field of social science can cease to be after some time
- Being challenged to develop ideas that are unique and bold.
- Academic stimulation
- The challenge of extensive research and the satisfaction of knowing you are really progressing

Generic attributes (analytical, problem solving etc) are being developed (2004: 11%)
(2003: 13%; 2002: 11%)

- Enhance analytical and problem solving skills. The statistical technique is much of high level of statistics, which allows me to get into details
- Analytical skill and more critical thinking
- Analytical and organisational skill. I acquired the skill to analyse the topic in detail or systematically
- My confidence has been growing as my work progressed, which is nice

¹ Number of comments received: 2004: 71; 2003: 73; 2002: 61)

Students appreciate the independent nature of research (2004: 11%)
(2003: 5%; 2002: 8%)

- The being supported to do independent research and really get into my own ideas
- Ability to work independently while pursuing a teaching career. This allows me to combine my teaching and research
- Ability to undertake research with more than adequate guidance and supervision that allows freedom to make research experience personal and personal development experience
- A high degree of self learning in necessary for a mature adult, good training to postgraduate student

Students appreciate the interaction with other PhD students (2004: 10%)
(2003: 2%; 2002: 11%)

- Meeting semi-regularly with other PhD students to discuss our work (something begun in the initial first year seminars but continued by us
- Good support from fellow postgraduates as well
- The relationships I have formed with other research students. We formed a support group that met regularly. The support and feedback of this group was invaluable. We met each other during the Economics and Business Faculty induction program, which was excellent
- The peer support group

Other aspects included:

- Students feel part of a research community (2004: 7%) (2003: 5%)
- Availability of research resources/ library services (2004: 7%) (2003: 8%; 2002: 7%)

2 Analysis of comments referring to aspects that could be improved²

Students are dissatisfied with some aspects of their supervision (2004: 18%)
(2003: 22%; 2002: 18%)

- I do not feel that my supervisor has adequately engaged intellectually with my research. For example, I do not thin he has read any literature that I have referred to outside of his interest area
- There tends to be a haphazard approach to supervising the research. No distinct process can be seen
- Supervisors should be involved actively with the students research. For the effective research this is vital
- Another area for improvement is supervision. When I have my supervisors attention it is great but they clearly have so many other things to do that I have to take a low priority

Students would appreciate opportunities to interact with fellow RHD students (2004:15%)
(2002: 9%)

- It would be good if there was more interaction of an intellectual nature between research students. Quite aside from social interaction.
- If you are really looking for more work, you could perhaps develop better social networks amongst research students and maybe organise a research students society that'll organise a few events once in a while
- It would have been nice to meet all PhD's in my area at the beginning of my candidature. Maybe also some introduction of the faculty. Especially as I was new to this university
- I'm a part-time student and have very little interaction with PhD candidates, activities that are organised for PhD students tend to be during the day make it difficult for me to attend. I think social interaction with other PhDs would be good

² Number of comments received: 2004: 67; 2003: 54; 2002: 45)

Students do not feel part of the Faculty/ Department/ School (2004: 12%)

- Everything. Often felt alone, isolated and out of the loop. Be it from problems with the discipline itself I don't know but I received very little guidance or assistance.
- Feeling like you belong to the department community. Generally I have felt isolated and not part of the department
- Not a lot of interaction with the faculty (except supervisor)
- Another area for improvement is contact with the rest of the department. Because we've been shoved in a different building I don't see other academics in my department, and so miss random opportunities for any kind of exchange.

Students do not feel supported by the faculty/ department (2004: 10%)

(2002: 4%)

- I consider the discipline to be introverted and not really interested in involving PhD students in joint research or discipline activities; further, it does not seem to make any real effort to promote interaction between its PhD students, facilitate PhD seminars, or to inform students of research-related conferences, job vacancies, or publication opportunities.
- Guidance, especially in the beginning, not much help from senior members of staff
- Although excellent, the postgraduate support group could improve in this way that (if possible) aspects of the program much more closely with where students are at.
- The department needs to let us know what is available to us to help us along with our studies

Students are unhappy with the physical facilities provided (2004: 9%)

(2003: 17%; 2002: 18%)

- The postgraduate research centre in the faculty of Economics is a great place to have privacy and get work done, but it is difficult to talk and make friends –because of the lack of sound privacy, even a whisper can disturb other people, so it is unpleasant in that regard.
- Access to suitable working place: we were promised access to a kernel [sic], but after 6 months it still didn't materialize.
- Security around carrel area. Why: my carrel has been broken in and my laptop has been stolen which has got one and a half years PhD work. Although I can recover some data, I lost a huge amount of my intellectual property
- Workspace could be improved. The overcrowding and open plan section are distracting

University/ Faculty administration could be improved (2004: 9%)

(2003: 7%; 2002: 9%)

- The administrative support is very poor in the school. Everything takes forever to be done. Even enrolment took more than one month
- The admin support – everything takes ages to be done, and often students are being pushed around, with emails not answered
- Highly bureaucratic administration processes e.g. complex and wordy forms, advisors, enrolment papers etc
- The admin provided was very poor. Late enrolment processing, errors in enrolment processing, errors in postgraduate research processing. XX XX was particularly unreliable.

Other aspects mentioned included:

- | | | |
|--|------------|------------------------|
| • Guidance on management of candidature | (2004: 7%) | (2002: 7%) |
| • Funding/scholarships | (2004: 7%) | (2003: 9%; 2002: 7%) |
| • Research resources/ library | (2004: 7%) | (2003: 9%; 2002: 4%) |
| • Seminars/ workshops | (2004: 7%) | (2002: 7%) |
| • Support for part-time/ external students | (2004: 7%) | (2003: 13%; 2002: 14%) |
| • Enrolment | (2004: 6%) | (2003: 9%; 2002: 4%) |
| • Induction/ orientation program | (2004: 6%) | (2003: 2%) |

3 Categories and Sub categories used in analysis of SREQ open response comments³

Category	Sub category	Includes
Quality of Supervision	Supervision	Supervisor Supervision in general, including processes in place for feedback regarding satisfaction/ dissatisfaction with supervisor
	Management of candidature	Guidance on management of candidature; steps in the process
	Progress reports	Progress reports/ processes in place Value of the reporting process Structure of reporting process
	Flexibility of program	Compared to undergraduate/ postgraduate coursework Working hours etc
	Pressure to complete	Pressure to complete on time (i.e. within time frame set by APA). Workload
	Feedback from supervisor	Feedback on drafts, papers, presentations, seminars; final thesis
Quality of Infrastructure	Funding/ Scholarships	APA, UPA and other scholarships; PRSS Funding for research within faculty/ department etc
	Physical resources	Physical facilities available to postgraduate research students including workplace, computers – provided by University/ Faculty Building maintenance
	Industry facilities	Physical facilities provided by industry partner/ CRC etc
	IT support	Support available for computer hardware and software
	Research resources/ library	Electronic resources such as databases, online journals Interlibrary loan for hard-copy resources Services provided by library
	Technical and Lab support	Support available in laboratories; technician availability for experiments etc
	Resource issues	Issues which affect experience e.g. staffing and funding within department which may reduce face to face time with supervisor, or lack of supervisor due to retirement etc
Overall satisfaction	Satisfaction with research	Comments on research projects; benefits of research etc
	General comments	With university, location, etc

³ NB: Not all categories appear in responses for individual faculties.

Category	Sub category	Includes
Research climate	Challenging and stimulating	Is the research stimulating, challenging Do they feel motivated by supervisor etc
	Induction/ orientation program	Induction/ orientation program for new students, particularly those who start mid year or who come from another university
	Cultural diversity	Part of a culturally diverse student group
	Isolation: off main campus	Issues relating to students situated off main campus/ at training hospitals
	Interaction with other postgraduate research students	Opportunities to interact with other postgraduate research students Feelings of isolation from other students
	Collaboration and networking	Provision of opportunities to collaborate and network with other researchers, academics etc (university, national, international)
	Conference presentations	Opportunities to present at international and national conferences
	Research community	Part of research community/ culture within faculty/ school/ department Part of research community outside university
	Part of faculty/ school/ department	Acceptance by faculty/ department/ school Inclusion in meetings, social events etc Part of communication cycle
	Support of faculty/ school/ department	Support of faculty/ department/ school for their research etc
	Seminars, workshops	Presence of, frequency of seminar or workshop program for postgraduate research students Cross faculty involvement in seminars
	Field work, practical aspects	Field work – help with collecting data etc Practical aspects e.g. in hospitals
	Interaction with industry	Industry partnerships Support from industry in research
	Teaching opportunities/ preparation for academia	Teaching and/or tutoring opportunities offered/ available
	Location/ physical environment	Does not include buildings – location of campus, university etc
	Relevance to future/ current work/ career	Will the research be useful in the future to their careers Is it useful in their present work environment
	Support for part-time/ distance education/ external students	Support for students studying externally or part-time; recognition of difficulties faced/ access to resources etc
	International student experiences	Experiences, support for international students
Coursework component	Issues relating to coursework component of some research degrees e.g. Research Methods	

Category	Sub category	Includes
Generic skills	Graduate attributes, skills	Development of Graduate attributes e.g. communication, analytical, problem-solving skills
	Technical skills	Development of technical skills e.g. statistical skills, thesis/ academic writing, subject specific skills; use of laboratory equipment
	Research skills	Training in research methods; Development of research skills
	Expand knowledge base	Acquisition of new knowledge
	Work independently	Ability to work independently on project compared to structured work of undergraduate degree
	English language for NESB students	Development of English language proficiency Help in academic writing Specific support e.g. proof reading of thesis etc
Administration and organisation	Administration and organisation	Administration and organisation of research higher degree program
	Communication	Between administration and faculty; between support services; between staff and students
	Enrolment	Enrolment process
Other	Ethics administration	
	Equity	Harassment, discrimination etc
	Academic Board policies	Academic Honesty; Intellectual Property