

FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES
STUDENT RESEARCH EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE (SREQ)
POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENTS
ANALYSIS OF OPEN RESPONSE COMMENTS: 2005

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ), which evaluates the quality of research higher degree students' experiences, was introduced in 2002. As part of the questionnaire students are asked to provide comments on the best aspects of their university experience and those that could be improved.

Based on the responses to these questions, this document seeks to provide an analysis of the areas of best practice, and opportunities for improvement, in the experiences of postgraduate research students in the Faculty of Health Sciences in 2005.

Degree experience: areas of best practice

The aspects of degree experience which attracted most positive comments from postgraduate research students in 2005 were:

	% of comments received	
	2005	2004
Quality of supervision: supervisor	34%	33%
Overall satisfaction: satisfaction with research	17%	18%
Generic skills: research skills	15%	13%
Generic skills: graduate attributes	14%	12%
Generic skills: working independently	14%	11%
Research climate: supportive work environment	13%	6%

Degree experience: opportunities for improvement

The areas of degree experience which postgraduate research students considered most in need of improvement in 2005 were:

	% of comments received	
	2005	2004
Quality of supervision: supervisor	14%	16%
Research climate: student support: distance education/ external students	14%	12%
Quality of infrastructure: funding (not scholarships or PRSS)	12%	
Research climate: interaction with other research students	8%	9%
Research climate: seminars/ workshops	7%	3%
Administration and organisation: general	6%	7%

*Rachel Symons
Special Projects Officer and Executive Assistant
Office of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching)*

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1 Introduction

The Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ), which evaluates the quality of research higher degree students' experiences, was introduced in 2002. As part of the questionnaire students are asked to provide comments postgraduate research students are asked to provide comments on the following:

- What are the best aspects of your research higher degree experience?
- What aspects are most in need of improvement?

Based on the responses to these questions, this document seeks to provide an analysis of the areas of best practice, and opportunities for improvement, in the experiences of postgraduate research students in the Faculty of Health Sciences in 2005.

In 2005 82% of students who responded to the SREQ provided comments on the best aspects of their degree experience, and 67% on aspects that were considered to be in need of improvement. The substantial difference in the number of positive comments received compared to those expressing the opposite opinion, possibly indicates an overall satisfaction with the degree experience of postgraduate research students in the Faculty of Health Sciences.

2 Arrangement

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

Within each section, responses are ranked according to the percentage of comments received for each aspect. Sample comments are provided for the six aspects that received the highest percentage of comments. For comparison, results for the previous years qualitative analysis (2002 – 2004) are provided in brackets after the 2005 results.

Only aspects that received more than 5% of comments in 2005 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 that may possibly identify the student are not been included in the sample comments. Comments are transcribed exactly as they appear in the original documents.

3 Analysis of the comments: taxonomy and process

The manual analysis and evaluation method used by the University is based on an in-house taxonomy which allows for standardisation of reporting across the university and ease of comparison with the SREQ quantitative analysis reports. Within the taxonomy, categories used for the SREQ are identical to the SREQ factor scales, with the addition of Administration and organisation, Ethics Administration, Academic Board policies, International Office, and other administrative areas and support services¹. This taxonomy is under constant revision as the need to sub-divide categories and create new ones becomes apparent.

Each comment received is analysed according to the SREQ Taxonomy, with those including more than one aspect being counted in each aspect mentioned.

It should be noted, however, 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 that the students are happy with their experiences, and prefer to focus on commenting on areas in need of improvement.

¹ A copy of the taxonomy is provided as a separate document

4 Analysis of comments referring to the best aspects²

Quality of supervision: supervisor (2005: 34%)
(2004: 33%; 2003: 36%; 2002: 33%)

- My supervisor is excellent at guiding me when I find myself in unfamiliar territory. What can seem like an impossible problem to solve, can have a simple solution after a discussion with my supervisor.
- The best aspect of my RHD experience has been my relationship with my principal supervisor. She is incredibly knowledgeable in terms of my research topic and research process, she has been supportive and encouraging providing a good mix of independence and guidance as needed.
- Definitely supervision. My supervisor has an exceptional knowledge of the kind of research I am doing and is aware of the setbacks and frustrations that are run of the mill in cross cultural research. She has always been available when I needed assistance and has provided good advice while helping me think out problems on my own.
- Access to a supervisor who I respect for knowledge and encouragement and vision and thinking outside the square.

Overall satisfaction: satisfaction with research (2005: 17%)
(2004: 18%; 2003: 15%; 2002: 23%)

- 1. it is rewarding performing research which will change clinical approach to car for chronic disease 2. it is also rewarding working with younger students
- The opportunity to research a topic of professional interest and explore all the different dimensions without the constraints of trying to do this part time. The experience of designing and implementing a research project and theorising about the process to explain the results. This grounds professional practice in theory and research. It also provides the experience and analytical skills to embark on future projects.
- Being able to pursue a topic that mattered to me. A sense of achievement.
- the best aspect for me is that this research could be one of the first project applies complexity theory and holistic approach using web-based survey and qualitative method like ethnography.

Generic skills: research skills (2005: 15%)
(2004: 13%; 2003: 9%; 2002: 13%)

- I have been able to develop greater independent research skills, and have been forced thru necessity to increase my networking skills and confidence in arranging meeting with other specialists in my field
- The research learning circle process is very supportive, and I can see my progress and growth as a result of the RLC.
- Personal development as an independent researcher Working within a group very helpful for research skill development
- -the broad skills that I have learnt with respect to the process of research -appreciation of other research activities -my skills all round are maturing (eg communication, critical review of research)

² Number of comment received: 2005: 175; 2004: 190; 2003: 173; 2002: 151

Generic skills: graduate attributes

(2005: 14%)

(2004: 12%; 2003: 17%; 2002: 11%)

- The way my supervisors and co-researchers help me in difficult situations and improvement in my analytical thinking, writing skills, skill in reviewing literature are the best. These help me mould myself to a productive and enlightening future.
- The best aspects of my research higher degree experience were learning from my supervisors analytical and writing skills, which are helpful for independent research in future.
- The development of my writing skills - again helpful in my clinical and management role at work; I am more prepared (with literature back up) for lectures and presentations; development of research skills - I believe I contribute to my field now rather than go through the motions day to day.
- My best experiences are my trainings in problem solving capability and writing skills. My research project has been markedly advanced due to the improvement of my problem solving ability. My writing skill is improved which is helpful to my thesis writing.

Generic skills: working independently

(2005: 14%)

(2004: 11%; 2003: 8%; 2002: 12%)

- It is great to have the freedom to explore areas of interest to me in great detail and have the guidance to ensure that this process of discovery is rigorous and methodical.
- I'm at the stage where I'm enjoying working quite independently and there is plenty of support for me for data analysis
- The challenge of independent and self regulated work & discipline; and carving out a niche for new ideas within the field to be of benefit to society in the future academic & research workforce.
- Personal development as an independent researcher Working within a group very helpful for research skill development

Research climate: supportive work environment

(2005: 13%)

(2004: 6%; 2003: 8%; 2002: 7%)

- The best things are the learning experience involved, the skills I have and are still developing and the fostering environment from my supervisors and the School to which I am affiliated. These things make me feel as though I am progressing well, I am constantly improving myself, I am making good professional networks and I am thoroughly enjoying myself doing it!
- supportive culture within school and opportunities to discuss issues of interest and concern with both other research students and staff. It is helpful to discuss problems to find alternative ways to approach things. Formal interactions (groups) are also very useful in opening up new paths.
- I really enjoy the supportive environment that research colloquia offer.
- Learning and being part of a supportive research culture. This provides you with positive feedback and a sense of achievement.

Other aspects mentioned included:

	<i>2005</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2002</i>
Research resources: library	6%	8%	9%	11%
Research climate: challenging, stimulating	9%	7%	5%	7%
Research climate: part of research community: general	8%	6%	6%	7%
Research climate: seminars, workshops	5%	2%	3%	

5 Analysis of comments suggesting improvements³

Quality of supervision: supervisor (2005: 14%)
(2004: 16%; 2003: 18%; 2002: 20%)

- More structure supervision and guidance in the early years, as discipline needs regulation and accountability. The supervisor comes in handy when will power fails. Also, counselling for PhD journey - dealing with daily issues such as time invested, no regular income, juggling casual work with study (time management), goals planning etc. Need one consistent point of accountability, like a supervisor, not many who will forget your case over the years. Only my supervisor is quite busy already and I feel guilty taking up too much of their time with other issues besides research. Some kind of confidant or mentor would have been brilliant!
- Supervision, although I see my supervisor almost everyday I cannot have a meeting with him even once every 2-3 weeks. Some delays in supervision make me disappointed.
- Supervision of my supervisors. (After 5 months he did not see me even 30 minutes.
- In my research experience. Supervisors didn't give me enough support in my project. They didn't have any idea in my project and even understand my idea.

Research climate: student support: distance education/ external students (2005: 14%)
(2004: 12%; 2003: 10%; 2002: 8%)

- Supervision of students at distance. While the uni seems committed in principle, there is no infrastructure to support. For example, if I were located on campus, I'd have access to workstations, computers, libraries, meeting rooms, seminars, etc., etc. As a distance ed student, I have to supply everything myself. Also, there's an unstated expectation that distance ed students will attend every colloquium and seminar. This represents a significant cost, both financially and in terms of time spent travelling. While the faculty might say this isn't true, there is enormous informal pressure on students to attend and little effort to investigate alternate delivery.
- - access to IT/ equipment for students at a distance - provision of reading material, notes of tuts/presentations that are provided to postgraduate students on the main campus (i.e. generic workshops - witting skills etc.)
- As a distance student it is difficult to be 'involved' in the University research community. Costs of attending seminars, colloquiums etc in terms of travel and accommodation are prohibitive on more than a twice yearly basis
- Developing research links for distance student, difficult. Difficulty feeling 'part of' postgraduate cohort when distance study. Lack of use of facilities included in student fees for distance students.

Quality of infrastructure: funding (not scholarships or PRSS) (2005: 12%)
(*New topic in 2005; previously included in Funding: scholarships*)

- Financial support - there hasn't been any in 4 years except refund for postage/stationery used to recruit participants for a clinical trial.
- Financial support - I had to work full time throughout my PhD candidature. I was fortunate to have worked for an employee who supported me while I wrote most of the thesis Without this support I would be still writing rather than submitting my thesis shortly.
- Financial assistance for post graduate student is insufficient as it only helped fund a small portion of my research
- Access to more funding for equipment or for hiring of equipment (an oldie but a goodie).

³ Number of comment received: 2005: 143; 2004: 152; 2003: 153; 2002: 143

Research climate: interaction with other research students (study related) (2005: 8%)
(2004: 9%; 2003: 10%; 2002: 17%)

- Interaction with other PhD students, not just within the school but in other schools. Allows for extra support and social functions/interactions. It is never goof going about something on your own, peers/friends in the same level can be beneficial and supportive.
- 1)Encouragement of peer network or mentoring by advanced students. Frequently I have struck unexpected hurdles/problems which I had no awareness of, and I assume my Supervisors simply don't realize some of their students don't know all the processes or steps involved in some of their research work. Having a closer network of colleagues, or better still a student mentor would be helpful and guiding on another level.
- More interaction with other postgraduate students would be good.
- As an external part-time student I find it difficult to interact very much with other research candidates. The colloquia that have been put on however are good to hear where others are up to and to cross-fertilise ideas.

Research climate: seminars/ workshops (2005: 7%)
(2004: 3%; 2003: 6%; 2002: 10%)

- Lack of seminars/ continuing education opportunity. So far, in the first 2 months there have been no lectures/ seminars/ conferences/ research forums in my area of research. I feel very isolated and feel a real lack of contact with researchers in my field because my research is very different from most of the research at the school.
- My school provides 2x 1-2 day research training days each year and academic writing classes intermittently throughout the year - these are fantastic and it would be great if three or four 1 day workshops could run over the year, with focus days on stats, research design/methodology, writing for publication/thesis and so on - this could benefit students looking to enrol in the next semester as well.
- More discussion with staff and other research students re problems in an informal forum would be useful and feel supportive i.e. a focus on problem solving rather than presenting results.
- Demonstrated appreciation of the difficulties of family, full time work, social commitments and part time study. Demonstrated? e.g., seminars topic, social opportunities

Administration and organisation: general (2005: 6%)
(2004: 7%; 2003: 10%; 2002: 3%)

- Poor communication between various schools and student administration - enrolment details not forwarded on. Late receiving of coursework materials makes it difficult to catch-up, also some texts are difficult to access quickly particularly if at a distance from the university
- Better funding and staffing of administration areas, both within the faculty and university wide, would enable good staff to work better and with less stress.
- Administration. As a student overseas, the administration process has created systematic difficulties, whilst the staff have been very helpful.
- University Administration regarding correct marks and acknowledgement for these corrections.

**Faculty of Health Sciences: Analysis of student experience:
Postgraduate research students: 2005**

Other aspects mentioned included:

	<i>2005</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2002</i>
Generic skills: technical skills	5%	11%	9%	13%
Quality of infrastructure: physical facilities: workspace, buildings etc	5%	8%	10%	15%
Quality of infrastructure: physical facilities: computing facilities	5%			
Research climate: part of research community (general comments)	5%	2%	5%	1%