

Faculty of Arts

Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire Report: 2010

Research higher degree graduates

March 2011

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NB: Since this report covers the period prior to the transfer of the School of Economics to the Faculty of Arts, the name of the faculty will be that in use in 2010. Future reports will refer to the Faculty as the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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INTRODUCTION

The PREQ is a national survey administered by the independent body, the Graduate Careers Council of Australia (GCA). It is a survey of research higher degree *graduates* of all Australian universities. PREQ results are reported at least a year after the research higher degree graduates actually finish their courses i.e. students who completed their research higher degree in 2009 would have completed the PREQ in 2010, with results reported in 2011. The purpose of the PREQ is to provide the University community with a basis for strategic, faculty level academic development and curriculum review to further enhance the quality of research higher degrees. The PREQ also provides data for benchmarking between similar programmes in different universities.

Written observations, from respondents to the survey, about their experiences provide evidence to support the University PREQ quantitative data results (percentage agreement scores), and provide detailed information about key issues in the Areas of best practice and Areas needing improvement, during their research training experience. The results are directly aligned with the scales and survey items used in the PREQ, with the addition of items that occur frequently in student comments.

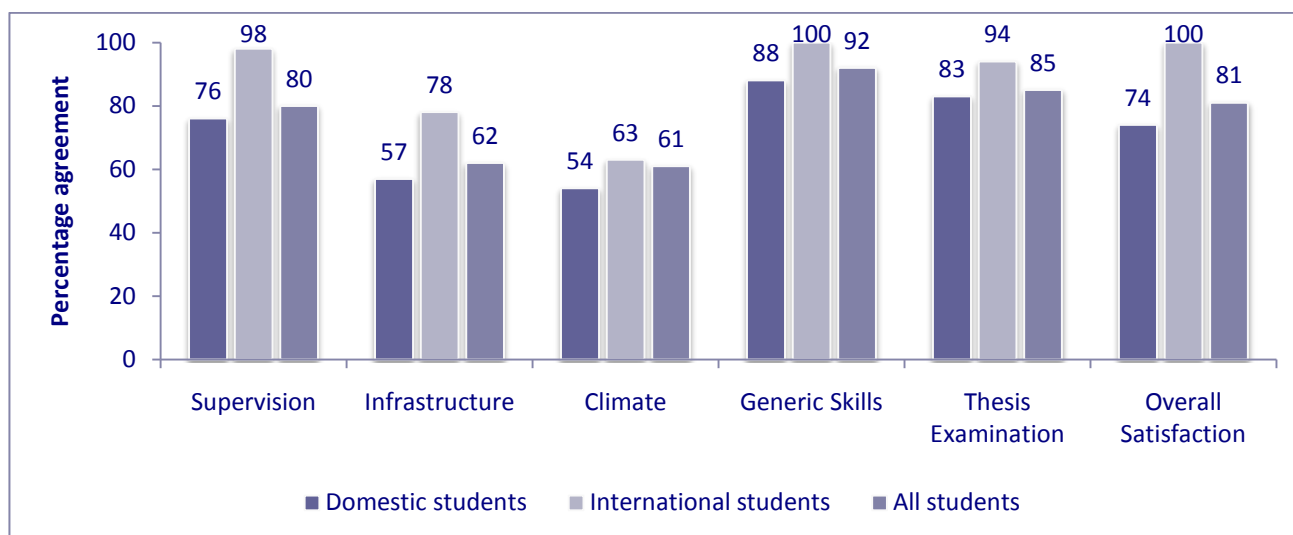
KEY RESULTS FOR 2010

The following results are an indication of those areas of the student experience that were of significance to research higher degree students in the Faculty of Arts who completed their degree during 2009. The quantitative data (percentage agreement results) reflect the experiences of respondents in relation to specific items in the survey; the qualitative data reflects the analysis of written observations provided by those respondents who answered the open ended questions on the best areas of their experience and those that were considered to be in need of improvement.

QUANTITATIVE DATA

The following chart shows the 2010 PREQ percentage agreement results (i.e. respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed with the survey items relating to each scale) for the Faculty, divided into domestic, international and all respondents. 53 domestic and 8 international graduates responded to the PREQ in 2010.

Figure 1: Faculty of Arts: Percentage agreement results: PREQ 2010



Changes since 2009

- Comparisons with the 2009 results show that there has been
 - an increase in satisfaction with Infrastructure (+5%); Climate (+9%)
 - no change in the results for Overall Satisfaction
 - a decrease in satisfaction with Supervision (-2%); Generic Skills (-4%); and Thesis Examination (-4%)

FOCUS OF WRITTEN OBSERVATIONS: 2010

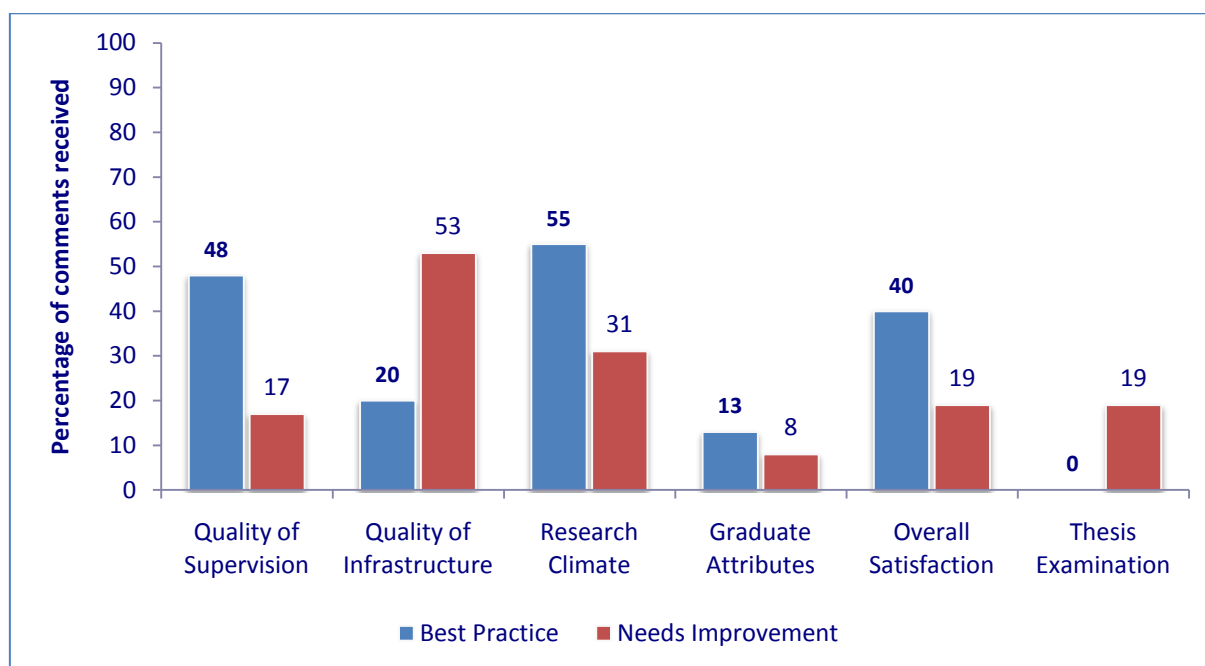
In addition to PREQ survey items, graduates are asked to provide written observations on areas of best practice and areas in need of improvement during their studies at the University. Of the 53 graduates who responded to the PREQ in 2010, 40 or 75% answered the question on areas of best practice, whilst 36 or 68% suggested improvements.

Each comment is analysed according to the *Taxonomy for analysing qualitative data from the SREQ and PREQ*, which is based on the Factors used in the SREQ and PREQ. Based on the premise that a comment is what is written by an individual respondent in response to one of the open response questions, and a tally in the statistics being a specific phrase or sentence referring to one aspect of the student experience, the total number of times an aspect is mentioned in any one set of comments is calculated as a percentage of comments received in the year of the survey. Therefore, if you add up the total percentage of comments received for each PREQ category, the total will always be more than 100.

Distribution of comments received

The following chart provides an indication of trends in the research higher degree student experience as indicated in their responses to the open questions in the 2010 PREQ. It demonstrates the relationship between areas of best practice, and areas in need of improvement. Results are reported as a percentage of the total number of comments received from all respondents who supplied written observations.

Figure 2: Faculty of Arts: Distribution of comments received: PREQ 2010



Tables showing the distribution of comments from 2007 – 2010 are at Attachment One

Key issues

Quality of Supervision

Best practice

- 48% of respondents were satisfied with the quality of supervision. Of these 38% were satisfied with their supervisor(s); whilst 8% were satisfied with the supervision process.
- This represents the highest level of satisfaction with Supervision recorded since 2007, and a considerable increase since 2009, when 37% of comments received mentioned Supervision as an area of best practice.
- *Sample comment: The continuing encouragement and support from my principal supervisor*

Needs improvement

- 17% of respondents considered that improvements were required in this area of their experience. Of these, 11% were unhappy with the supervision process; and 6% with their supervisor.
- These results represent a decrease on comments suggesting improvements since 2008 (30% of comments received) and 2009 (19%), and is identical to the 2007 results.
- *Sample comment: Supervision. Supervisor had too many, was overseas a lot and spent much time writing submissions, at meetings etc. Did not read anything relevant to my research*

Quality of Infrastructure

Best practice

- 20% of respondents were satisfied with the quality of infrastructure. Of these 18% were satisfied with library services and resources.
- There has been a steady decrease in comments expressing satisfaction with infrastructure over the past four years (2007: 45% of comments received; 2008: 28%; 2009: 26%).
- *Sample comment: Funding for overseas travel for conferences and research*

Needs improvement

- 53% of respondents were dissatisfied with the quality of infrastructure, representing a decrease of 15% since 2009. Of these 31% expressed concern about workplace facilities; 11% about funding and scholarships; and 6% about funding and research resources.
- *Sample comment: Photocopying facilities were limited. Shared office space in Postgraduate Arts Research Centre was better than nothing, but doctoral research students really need their own space*

Research Climate

A general improvement in the research climate throughout the faculty is indicated by the concurrent increase in comments expressing satisfaction and decrease in those suggesting improvements

Best practice

- An increasing level of satisfaction with the prevailing research climate within the Faculty is indicated by the increasing number of respondents to the PREQ who express satisfaction with this area of their research higher degree experience. In 2010, 55% of respondents were satisfied with the prevailing research climate within the Faculty, an increase of 10% on the 2009 result, and the highest recorded since 2007
- Of these 25% were satisfied with the community, including attendance at conferences, seminars and networking; whilst 28% considered that they worked in a supportive and welcoming environment.
- *Sample comment: Seminar program for postgraduates gave us a chance to share our experiences and help iron out the wrinkles in our analysis*

Needs improvement

- 31% of respondents suggested improvements in this area of their experience. Of these, 11% would welcome improvements in the work environment; 8% would appreciate more interaction with their peers and students from other faculties; whilst 6% were dissatisfied with aspects of the community, and with career preparation.
- This represents a substantial decrease in comments received on this topic since 2006, when 56% of respondents suggested improvements in the research climate.
- *Sample comment: Being put in contact with other post grad students to help keep me motivated and supported*

Graduate Attributes

Best practice

- 13% of respondents were satisfied the development of graduate attributes. The majority of comments focused on the development of analytical and problem solving skills, critical thinking, and research skills (10%).
- *Sample comment: Learning to do research*

Needs improvement

- Traditionally fewer respondents to the PREQ comment unfavourably on this aspect of their experience, and this remains true for the 2010 cohort, with 8% considering that improvements were required in this area of their research higher degree experience.
- *Sample comment: presentation skill*

Overall Satisfaction

Best practice

- Of the 40% of comments received that fell within the remit of Overall Satisfaction, 23% indicated that they were satisfied with their research and its contribution to the field of knowledge; whilst 8% considered the quality of the degree, including access to coursework and practical aspects, to be of a high standard; and 8% appreciated the flexibility and independence of a research higher degree.
- *Sample comment: The ability to learn about a topic/field I am passionate about. Doing a PhD is a privilege*

Needs improvement

- 19% of respondents suggested improvements in this area of their experience. Of these, 8% expressed concern about the quality of the degree, suggesting improvements in the area of coursework; whilst 6% were concerned about staffing issues and resources which affected their degree experience.
- These results are similar to previous years.
- *Sample comment: I think there should be more coursework or at least the option of taking on more coursework*

Thesis Examination process

Best practice

- Whilst the quantitative data suggests a high degree of satisfaction with the thesis examination process, very few respondents choose to provide written observations on this aspect of their experience. In 2010, no students commented on best practice in this area of their research higher degree experience.

Needs improvement

- 19% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the examination process, in particular the length of time it took.
- This result represents an increase on previous years and is the highest recorded.
- *Sample comment: The examination process (took 12 months to complete).*

COMPARISON WITH STUDENT RESEARCH EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE (SREQ) 2008

Since it is possible that final year respondents to the 2009 SREQ might also have responded to the 2010 PREQ after they graduated, comparative quantitative and qualitative data relating to the SREQ 2009 and the 2010 PREQ is appended to this report (Attachment Two).

FOR MORE INFORMATION

On the analysis and reporting of qualitative data

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Reports on the current student experience (SREQ) are available at
http://sydney.edu.au/learning/evaluating/research_higher_degree_reports.shtml

On the PREQ and how to interpret results

Staff of the ITL are available to provide support to faculties in the interpretation of the PREQ data and the development of strategic responses to address any issues identified
Phone: + 61 2 9351 3725
Email: itl@sydney.edu.au

PREQ results and reports are at <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/preq/reports.cfm>

ATTACHMENT ONE: COMPARATIVE TABLES: FOCUS OF WRITTEN OBSERVATIONS: 2007 – 2009

The following tables show the percentage of comments received relating to areas of best practice and areas needing improvement from respondents to the PREQ 2007 – 2010

QUALITY OF SUPERVISION	2007	2008	2009	2010
Areas of best practice	32%	44%	37%	48%
Areas needing improvement	17%	30%	19%	17%

QUALITY OF INFRASTRUCTURE	2007	2008	2009	2010
Areas of best practice	45%	28%	26%	20%
Areas needing improvement	50%	54%	68%	53%

RESEARCH CLIMATE	2007	2008	2009	2010
Areas of best practice	36%	23%	45%	55%
Areas needing improvement	56%	35%	43%	31%

GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES	2007	2008	2009	2010
Areas of best practice	0%	10%	13%	13%
Areas needing improvement	0%	8%	16%	8%

OVERALL SATISFACTION	2007	2008	2009	2010
Areas of best practice	64%	38%	58%	40%
Areas needing improvement	28%	14%	16%	19%

ATTACHMENT TWO: COMPARISON SREQ 2009 and PREQ 2010

Since it is possible that final year respondents to the 2008 SREQ might also have responded to the 2009 PREQ after they graduated, the following comparative data is provided as an indication of the relationship between areas of the research higher degree student experience that were of importance whilst current students (SREQ 2008) and upon graduation (PREQ 2009).

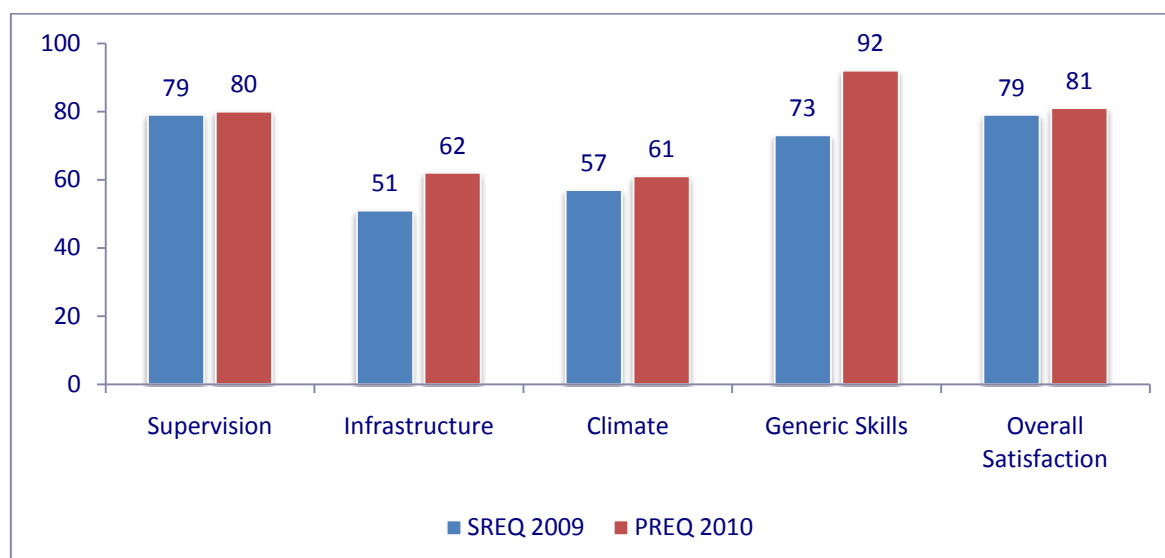
NB: Due to the differing lengths of time taken to complete a research higher degree, and the fact that results are reported by year of study, data relating to final year students responding to the 2009 SREQ is not available as a separate entity.

NB: Since the SREQ does not include the Thesis Examination Scale, data relating to this aspect of the research higher degree student experience is omitted from this comparison.

QUANTITATIVE DATA

The following chart compares the 2009 SREQ and 2010 PREQ percentage agreement results (i.e. respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed with the survey items relating to each scale) for the University.

Figure 3: Faculty of Arts: Comparison percentage agreement: SREQ 2009 and PREQ 2010



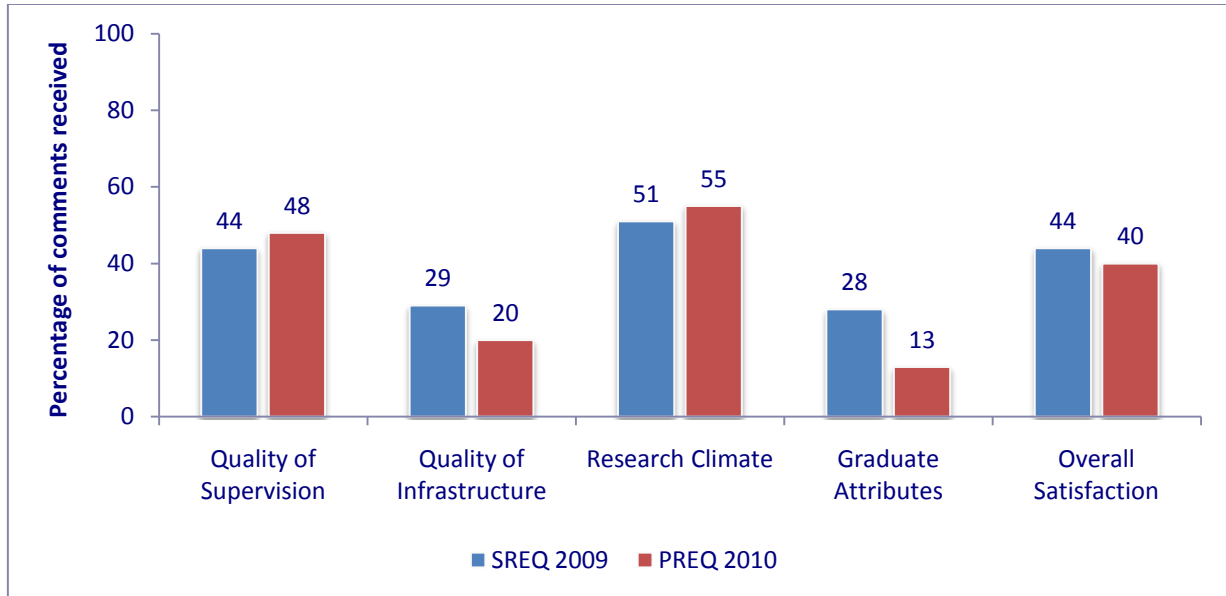
As indicated in the above chart, results from the analysis of survey items are higher for graduates than for current students, particularly in the area of Infrastructure, and Generic Skills.

FOCUS OF WRITTEN OBSERVATIONS

The charts on the following pages provide a comparison between the results of the analysis of qualitative data from the 2009 SREQ (current students) and that from the 2010 PREQ (graduates who were students in 2009). They provide an indication of the importance of areas of best practice (Figure 4) and areas in need of improvement (Figure 5) in the research higher degree student experience.

Areas of best practice

Figure 4: Areas of best practice: Comparison SREQ 2009 and PREQ 2010



Areas needing improvement

Figure 5: Areas needing improvement: Comparison SREQ 2009 and PREQ 2010

