

## Faculty of Education and Social Work

### Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire Report: 2010

Research higher degree graduates

*April 2011*

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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 Education and Social Work 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.

### Reliability of Statistical Data

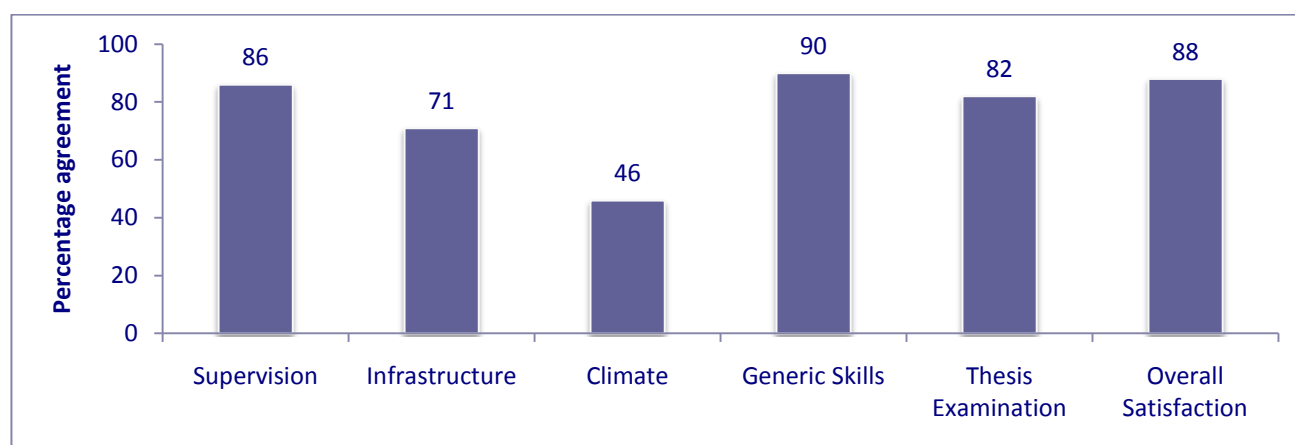
The following information on the reliability of statistical data should be taken into consideration when reading this report (see also *Attachment Three: Statistical data*):

- Since less than 20 graduates (domestic and international combined) replied to the PREQ, the results should be viewed with caution. The minimum sample size recommended for statistical analysis is 20
- Since less than 5 international graduates responded to the PREQ, the results are excluded from the report as they are likely to be unreliable. All data within this report is therefore displayed at a whole of Faculty level.

## 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. 13 domestic and 4 international graduates responded to the PREQ in 2010.

**Figure 1: Faculty of Education and Social Work: Percentage agreement results: PREQ 2010**



### Changes since 2009

- Comparisons with the 2009 results show that there has been
  - an increase in satisfaction with Supervision (+8%) Infrastructure (+1%); Climate (+10%)
  - no change in the results for Overall Satisfaction
  - a decrease in satisfaction with Generic Skills (-1%); and Thesis Examination (- 8%)

## FOCUS OF WRITTEN OBSERVATIONS: 2010

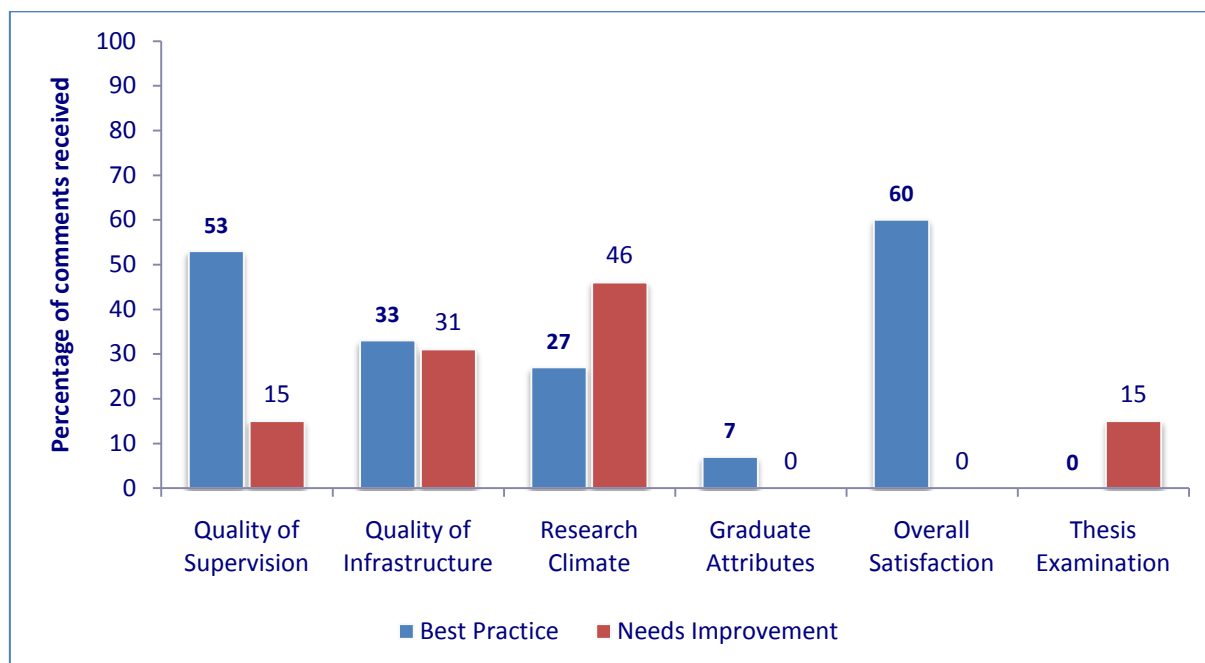
In addition to PREQ survey items, graduates are asked to provide written observations on areas of best practice and areas in need of improvement during their studies at the University. Of the 17 graduates who responded to the PREQ in 2010, 15 or 88% answered the question on areas of best practice, whilst 13 or 76% 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 Education and Social Work: Distribution of comments received: PREQ 2010



Tables showing the distribution of comments from 2007 – 2010 are at Attachment One: *Comparative tables: focus of written observations: 2007 – 2009*

### Key issues

#### Quality of Supervision

##### **Best practice**

- 53% of respondents were satisfied with the quality of supervision. Of these 47% were satisfied with their supervisor(s); whilst 7% were satisfied with the supervision process.
- *Sample comment: My supervisor who went above and beyond requirements*

##### **Needs improvement**

- 15% of respondents considered that improvements were required in this area of their experience.
- *Sample comment: No supervisor at all for one year at a crucial early stage.*

## Quality of Infrastructure

### **Best practice**

- 33% of respondents were satisfied with the quality of infrastructure. Of these 13% were satisfied with library services and resources, and 7% with facilities.
- *Sample comment: Fisher library and the staff*

### **Needs improvement**

- 31% of respondents were dissatisfied with the quality of infrastructure. Of these 15% expressed concern about funding and scholarships.
- *Sample comment: Funding to present at conferences, even the cost of presenting at Australian conferences is not covered by the PRSS funds available which was approximately \$1000*

## Research Climate

### **Best practice**

- 27% of respondents were satisfied with the prevailing research climate within the Faculty. Of these 7% 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**

- No respondents considered improvements were required in this area of their experience

## Overall Satisfaction

### **Best practice**

- Of the 60% of comments received that fell within the remit of Overall Satisfaction, 13% indicated that they were satisfied with their research and its contribution to the field of knowledge; whilst 27% considered the quality of the degree, including access to coursework to be of a high standard.
- *Sample comment: The coursework provided a really strong basis for the development of my research project. and helped me make ongoing connections*

### **Needs improvement**

- No respondents suggested improvements in this area of their experience.

## 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**

- 15% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the examination process, in particular the length of time it took.
- *Sample comment: The examination process- Not completely fair.*

### **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](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

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

### **ATTACHMENTS**

The following attachments are provided:

- 1 Comparative tables: Focus of written observations: 2007 – 2009
- 2 Comparison SREQ 2009 and PREQ 2010
- 3 Statistical data: number of respondents to the PREQ
- 4 Notes on the analysis and counting of comments
- 3 PREQ Scales: Coverage of quantitative and qualitative data

## 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	64%	79%	75%	53%
Areas needing improvement	57%	20%	63%	15%

QUALITY OF INFRASTRUCTURE	2007	2008	2009	2010
Areas of best practice	36%	0%	13%	33%
Areas needing improvement	29%	20%	63%	31%

RESEARCH CLIMATE	2007	2008	2009	2010
Areas of best practice	18%	29%	63%	27%
Areas needing improvement	43%	60%	88%	46%

GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES	2007	2008	2009	2010
Areas of best practice	27%	29%	13%	7%
Areas needing improvement	14%	20%	0%	0%

OVERALL SATISFACTION	2007	2008	2009	2010
Areas of best practice	55%	36%	63%	60%
Areas needing improvement	14%	30%	0%	0%

THESIS EXAMINATION	2007	2008	2009	2010
Areas of best practice	0%	0%	0%	0%
Areas needing improvement	14%	10%	0%	15%

## 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).

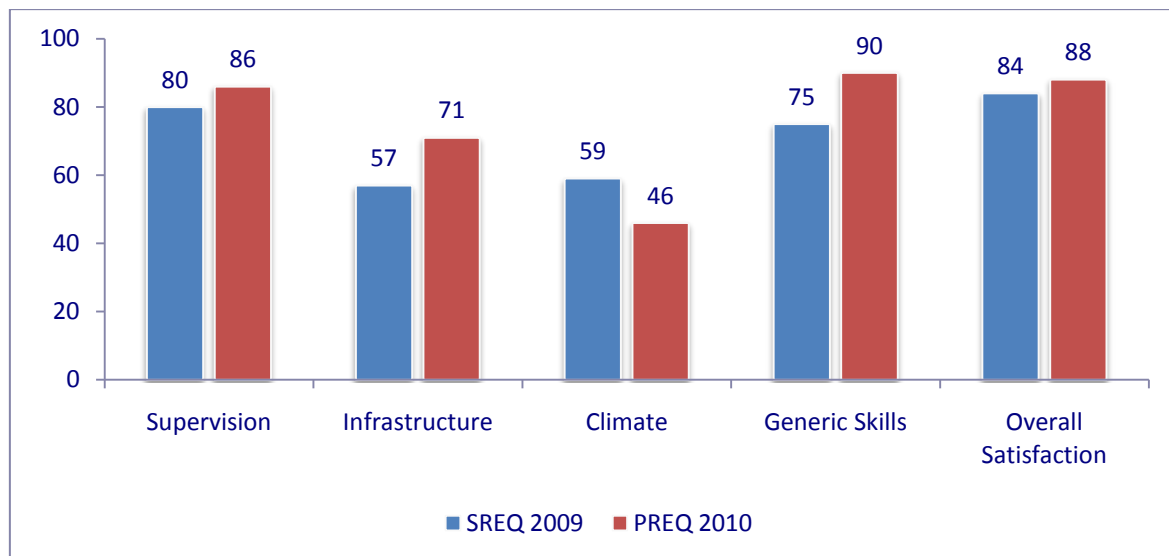
**NB:** Due to the differing lengths of time taken to complete a research higher degree, and the fact that results are reported by year of study, data relating to final year students responding to the 2009 SREQ is not available as a separate entity.

**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 Education and Social Work:  
Comparison percentage agreement: SREQ 2009 and PREQ 2010**



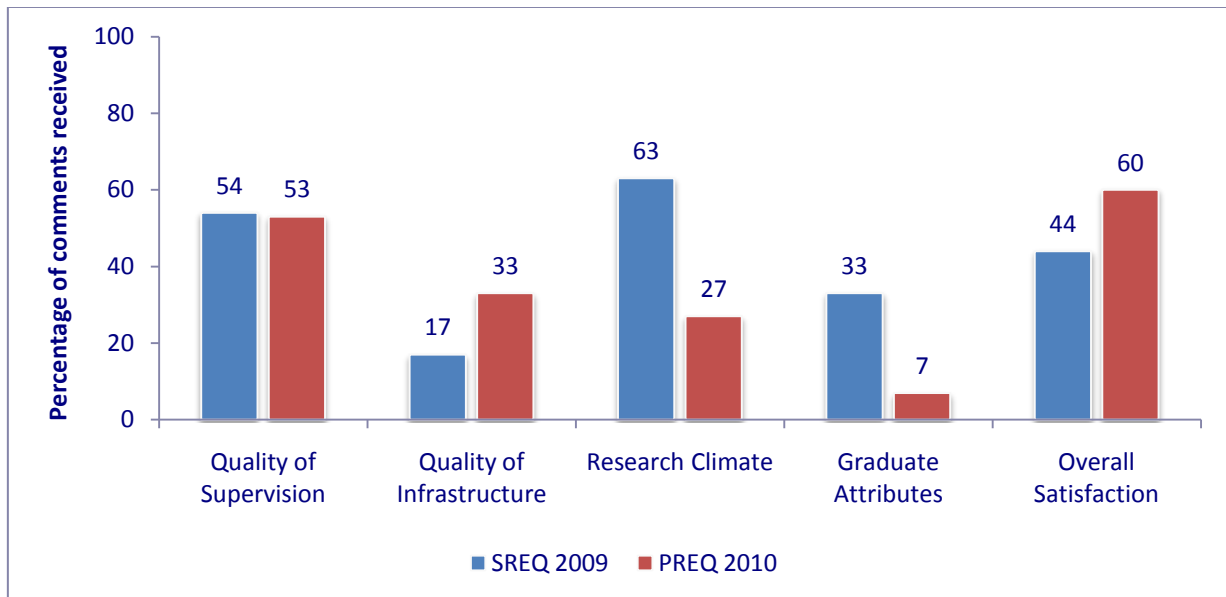
As indicated in the above chart, with the exception of Research Climate, results from the analysis of survey items are higher for graduates than for current students, particularly in the area of Infrastructure, and Generic Skills.

### 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.

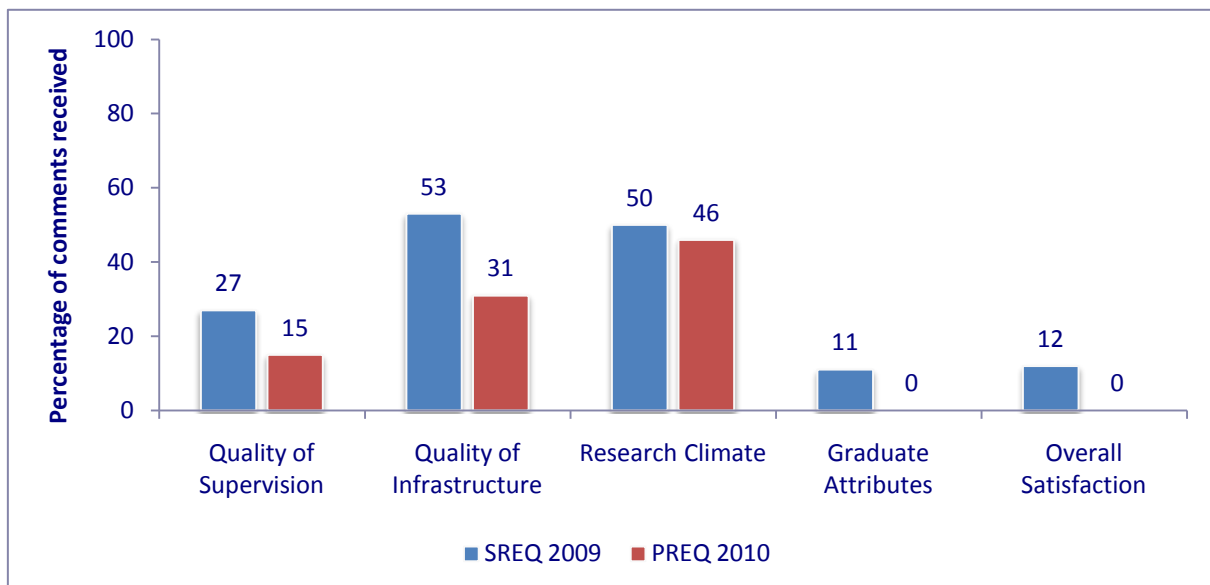
**Areas of best practice**

**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**



## ATTACHMENT THREE: STATISTICAL DATA

### 1 QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

<b>Number of respondents to the PREQ 2007 – 2010</b>				
	2007	2008	2009	2010
	n=	n=	n=	n=
Domestic students	16	14	8	13
International students	2	0	0	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>17</b>

### 2 QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of the qualitative data is based on responses to the open questions received from **ALL** respondents to the SREQ from the Faculty of Education and Social Work

<b>Number of respondents who answered the open questions PREQ 2006 – 2010</b>					
	Date of survey	2007	2008	2009	2010
		n=	n=	n=	n=
<i>Areas of best practice</i>	Domestic students	10	12	6	11
	International students	1	2	2	4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>15</b>
	<i>% who provided comments</i>	61%	100%	100%	88%

<i>Areas of improvement</i>	Domestic students	7	10	6	9
	International students	0	0	2	4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13</b>
	<i>% who provided comments</i>	39%	71%	100%	76%

### 3 RELIABILITY OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA

The following information on the reliability of statistical data in the above tables should be taken into consideration when reading this report:

#### Quantitative and Qualitative data

Where the number of respondents is less than 5, results are excluded from the report as they are likely to be unreliable. Written observations (qualitative data) received for both open questions are shown as a total.

#### Quantitative and qualitative data

Where the number of respondents is between 5 and 20 results should be viewed with caution. The minimum sample size recommended for statistical analysis is 20

## ATTACHMENT FOUR: NOTES ON ANALYSIS AND COUNTING OF COMMENTS

### 1 ANALYSIS OF COMMENTS

The components of categories and sub-categories used in the analysis of qualitative data are based on:

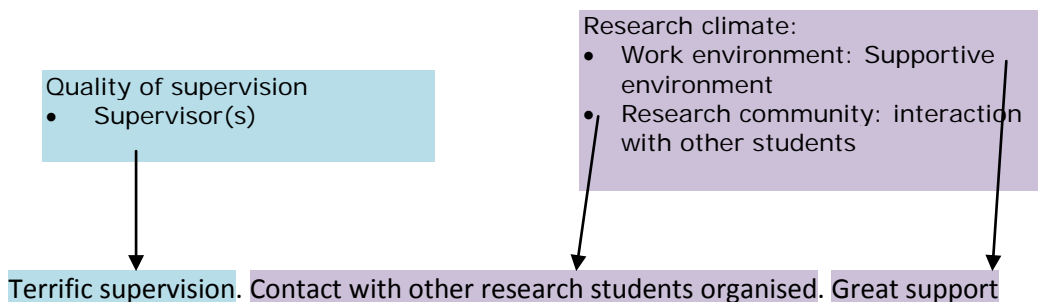
- Characteristics that define the area of the student experience
- PREQ survey items
- recurring themes in students' comments and have been developed over many years of analysing qualitative data from students' surveys.

Together, they represent the range of features of each aspect which are considered to be essential to student satisfaction with their research training experience

### 2 COUNTING OF COMMENTS

Each comment is analysed according to the *Taxonomy for analysing qualitative data from the SREQ/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. As a general rule, only those aspects which receive over 5% of comments from the whole cohort (i.e. domestic and international combined) are considered significant enough to be included as specific issues in the report.

For example, the following comment is counted as ONE COMMENT RECEIVED; but as it is mentioned in Quality of Supervision (Supervisory team); Overall satisfaction (Satisfaction with research); and Research Climate (Research community: general comments *and* Interaction with other research higher degree students), the highlighted phrases within the comment are counted ONCE in each of the relevant categories i.e. 4 aspects in one comment.



## ATTACHMENT FIVE: PREQ SCALES: COVERAGE OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA

The University of Sydney Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ) survey items have been shown to cluster together to form factor scales: Supervision, Climate, Infrastructure, Generic Skills and Thesis Examination, and the Overall Satisfaction Item. These items, together with recurring themes in graduates' comments are used as the basis for categories, sub-categories and components for the analysis of qualitative data. This attachment lists the relevant survey items and sub-categories and components used in the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data from the PREQ.

### 1 SUPERVISION SCALE/ QUALITY OF SUPERVISION

#### 1.1 PREQ Survey items

- Supervision was available when I needed it
- My supervisor(s) made a real effort to understand difficulties I faced
- My supervisor(s) provided me with additional information relevant to my topic
- I was given good guidance in topic selection and refinement
- My supervisor(s) provided helpful feedback on my progress
- I received good guidance in my literature search

#### 1.2 Qualitative data analysis

There are 4 sub-categories within *Quality of Supervision*, against which graduates comments are analysed. Each of these sub-categories may be further broken down into relevant aspects (or components) of the research student experience of Supervision. The components of these sub-categories are based on the PREQ survey items together with recurring themes in graduates' comments:

- Supervisor(s) (*supervisor/ associate supervisor; usefulness of sessions with; availability and frequency of meetings with; feedback on work; understanding and empathy*)
- Supervision processes within faculty (*general comments on supervision; evaluation of supervisors by faculty; training*)
- Management of Candidature (*guidance on thesis, literature review; topic etc; workload; progress reports; help with writing the thesis*)
- IP and plagiarism

### 2 INFRASTRUCTURE SCALE/ QUALITY OF INFRASTRUCTURE

#### 2.1 PREQ Survey items

- I had access to a suitable working space
- I had good access to the technical support I need
- I was able to organise good access to necessary equipment
- I had good access to computing facilities and services
- There was appropriate financial support for research activities

#### 2.2 Qualitative data analysis

There are 7 sub-categories within *Quality of Infrastructure*, against which graduates comments are analysed. Each of these sub-categories may be further broken down into relevant aspects (or components) of the research graduates' perceptions of the quality of infrastructure. The components of these sub-categories are based on the PREQ survey items together with recurring themes in graduates' comments.

- Administration (*enrolment and admission; communication between faculty and graduates; general comments on administration (faculty and university); graduation; enrolment; postgraduate coordinator; ethics process*)
- Facilities (*common room; workspace, buildings, etc; computer hardware and software; equipment; transport and parking*)
- Finance and funding (*funding for resources, equipment etc; scholarships and grants; travel and conference funding*)
- Research resources (*provided by faculty; provided by internal and external libraries and archive centres*)
- Student support services (*Research Office; International Office etc*)
- Support (*IT; technical; laboratory*)

### 3 CLIMATE SCALE/ RESEARCH CLIMATE

#### 3.1 PREQ Survey items

- The department provided opportunities for social contact with other postgraduate graduates
- I was integrated into the department's community
- The department provided opportunities for me to become involved in the broader research culture
- A good seminar program for postgraduate graduates was provided
- The research ambience in the department or faculty stimulated my work

#### 3.2 Qualitative data analysis

There are 7 sub-categories within *Research Climate*, against which graduates comments are analysed. Each of these sub-categories may be further broken down into relevant aspects (or components) of the student experience of the prevailing research climate within the faculty. The components of these sub-categories are based on the PREQ survey items together with recurring themes in graduates' comments.

- Social inclusion (*cultural diversity; equity, discrimination, and harassment*)
- Research culture/ community (*internal and external to faculty /general comments; faculty seminars, workshops, and discussion groups; networking/ collaborating; participation in conferences; opportunities for and encouragement to publish*)
- Work environment (*challenging and stimulating; induction/ orientation programme; integration into faculty/ department/ school; isolation (emotional); respect as fellow researcher; supportive environment; support for part-time, distance, international students*)
- Interaction with other research higher degree students (*academic; social; support of peers*)
- Location and physical environment
- Interaction with industry partners e.g. ARC projects
- Career preparation (*academic/research (e.g. availability of tutoring, lecturing); industry/ government; general comments*)

### 4 GENERIC SKILLS SCALE/ GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

#### 4.1 PREQ Survey items

- My research further developed my problem-solving skills
- I learned to develop my ideas and present them in my written work
- My research sharpened my analytical skills
- Doing my research developed my ability to plan my own work
- As a result of my research I feel confident about tackling unfamiliar problems

#### 4.2 Qualitative data analysis

There are 5 sub-categories within Graduate Attributes, against which graduates comments are analysed. These match the five main University Generic Graduate Attributes. The components of these sub-categories are allied to the skills and abilities for each attribute provided in the University policy framework for Graduate Attributes.

- Communication (*oral communication; written communication; presentation*)
- Ethical, social, professional understanding (*collaboration/ team work; ethical, social, cultural understanding; professional skills including academic*)
- Information literacy (*retrieval and use of information; computing skills e.g. using endnote, searching databases etc; referencing*)
- Personal and intellectual autonomy (*independent learning; planning own work; intellectually curious; new ways of thinking, etc*)
- Research and inquiry (*analytical, critical, problem solving; expanding knowledge base; creativity and imagination; statistical skills; research skills*)

## 5 THESIS EXAMINATION SCALE/ PROCESS

### 5.1 PREQ Survey items

- The thesis examination process was fair
- I developed an understanding of the standard of work required
- I understood the required standard for the thesis
- I was satisfied with the examination process
- I understood the requirements of thesis examination
- The examination of my thesis was completed in a reasonable time.

### 5.2 Qualitative data analysis

There are 5 sub-categories within Thesis examination process. The components of these sub-categories are based on the PREQ survey items together with recurring themes in graduates' comments.

- Examiners
- Feedback from examiners
- Marking (*including time taken to examine thesis*)
- Process (*including comments on whole process; individual elements are analysed according to other sub-categories*)
- Standard of thesis (*understanding of*)

## 5 OVERALL SATISFACTION

### 5.1 PREQ Survey item

Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of my research higher degree experience.

### 5.2 Qualitative data analysis

There are 9 sub-categories within Overall Satisfaction. They represent the range of aspects of the postgraduate research student experience which are considered to have a major influence on the quality of the research degree experience, and which are not covered elsewhere.

- General comments
- Quality of degree/ program (*length; inclusion of coursework, etc; practical components*)
- Pressure to complete (*i.e. within time frame set by APA conditions etc*)
- Satisfaction with research (*topic, contribution to field*)
- Writing and completing (*the process of completing the thesis and submitting for examination; finishing*)
- Flexibility of the program (*freedom to follow own research; choose own topics; compared to undergraduate degree; flexible working hours*)
- Reputation/ prestige of university/ faculty/ department/ academic staff
- Quality of fellow students (*calibre; education level etc*)