

## Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning

### Student Research Experience Questionnaire Report : 2005 - 2009

September 2010

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### INTRODUCTION

Data on research higher degree students' perceptions of their research training experiences are gathered each year using the Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ). The purpose of the SREQ 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. Analysis of this data provides a comprehensive picture of trends in the student experience, and the performance of the Faculty in relation to two of the University's Key Performance Indicators for Research: Supervision, and Overall Satisfaction with the research higher degree; and other related areas: Infrastructure; Research Climate; and Generic Skills.

Written observations, from respondents to the survey, about their experiences provide evidence to support the Faculty SREQ 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 SREQ, with the addition of items that occur frequently in student comments.

### KEY RESULTS FOR 2009

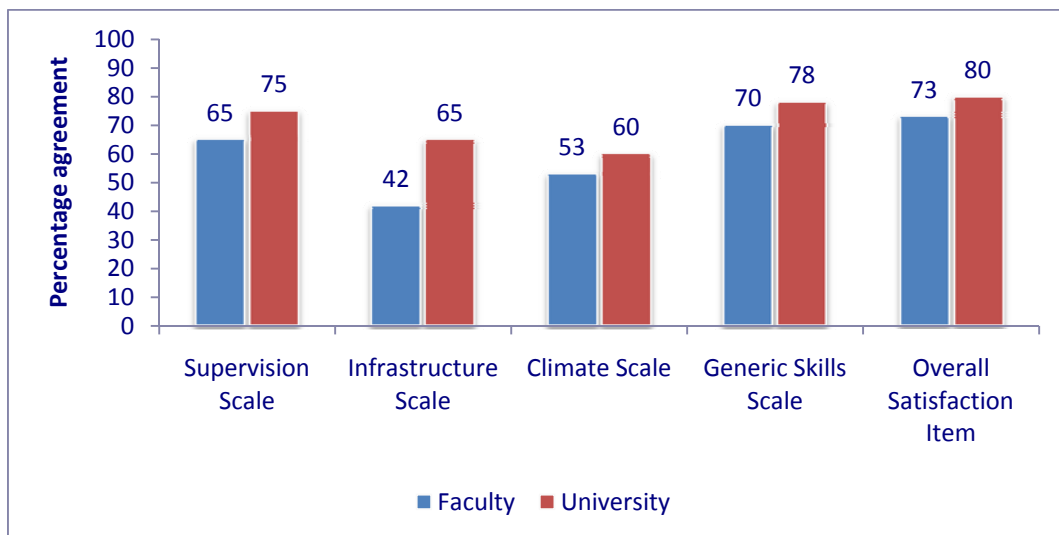
The following results are an indication of those areas of the student experience that were of significance to research higher degree students during 2009. The Faculty scores (percentage agreement results) reflect the experiences of respondents in relation to specific items in the survey; the qualitative 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.

#### 1 Quantitative data

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

58 research higher degree students (49 domestic and 9 international) responded to the 2009 SREQ.

Figure 1: Comparison of University and Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning: Percentage agreement results: SREQ 2009



As indicated in the above chart, Faculty scores are 7% - 23% below the University average for all scales. At a Faculty level since 2008 scores have increased by 3% in Climate, and decreased by 6% - 14% in the remaining scales<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> See Sections 1-5 of the report for details of trends in each SREQ Scale since 2005, and a comparison of the results for domestic and international students.

## 2 Focus of written observations SREQ 2009

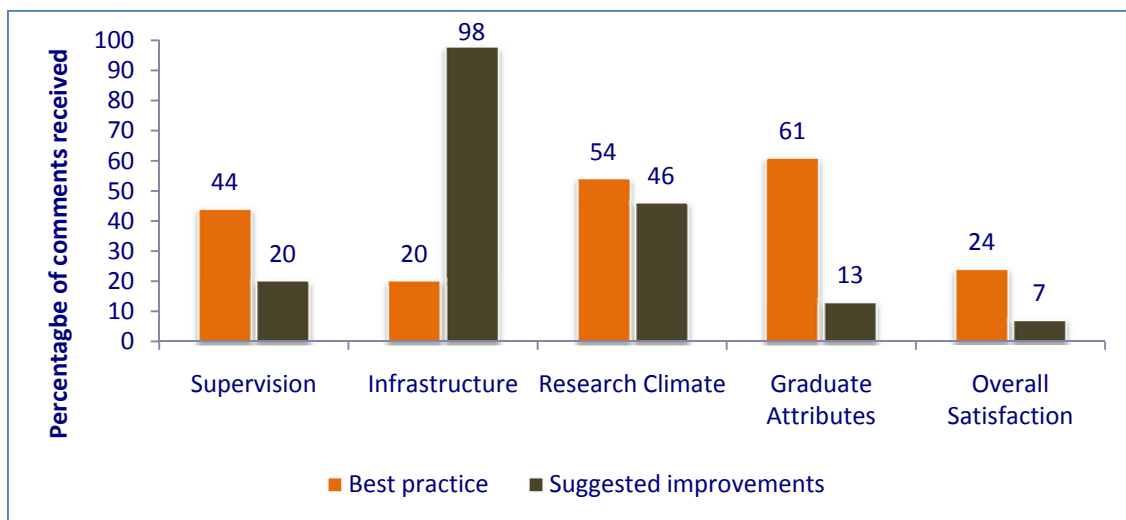
41 respondents to the 2009 SREQ (37 domestic students; 4 international students) answered the open question requesting comments on areas of best practice in their research higher degree experience; 45 respondents (41 domestic students; 4 international students) suggested areas in need of improvement.

**NB:** To ensure anonymity of respondents, the minimum sub-sample size for statistical reporting is 5. Therefore, in the body of the report, the analysis of the qualitative data for international students is included with the domestic students and expressed for the total number of respondents.

### 2.1 An overview

The following chart provides an overview of the research higher degree student experience of research training in the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning, as indicated in their responses to the open questions in the 2009 SREQ. It demonstrates the relationship between areas of best practice, and areas in need of improvement for each of the Scales. Results are reported as a percentage of the total number of comments received per student group.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 2: Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning: Focus of written observations: SREQ 2009



## 2.2 Key issues

### 2.2.1 Quality of Supervision

- Aspects of the Quality of Supervision that were considered to be of best practice by 44% of respondents to the SREQ in 2009 included: supervisor(s) –usefulness of meetings, support and expertise of individual supervisors (32% of comments received); and the Supervision process (10%)
- Aspects that were considered to be in need of improvement by 20% of respondents included: supervisor(s) (9%); and general comments on the supervision process (7%)

### 2.2.2 Quality of infrastructure

- Aspects of the Quality of Infrastructure that were considered to be of best practice by 20% of respondents included: research resources (10%); and physical facilities (7%)
- Aspects that were considered to be in need of improvement by 98% of respondents included: physical facilities (59%); funding, scholarships etc (22%); research resources (9%); and administration (7%).

### 2.2.3 Research Climate

- Aspects of the Research Climate that were considered to be of best practice by 54% of respondents to the SREQ in 2009 included: having contact with other research higher degree students (20% of comments received); being part of a research community (17%); and experiencing a supportive work environment (7%)
- Aspects that were considered to be in need of improvement by 46% of respondents included: the prevailing work environment – integration into faculty/ department, respect as a fellow researcher (20%); aspects of research community (15%); and career preparation (7%)

<sup>2</sup> See Attachment 1: note 4 for an explanation of the analysis and counting of comments

#### **2.2.4 Graduate Attributes**

- 61% of respondents to the 2009 SREQ mentioned the development or enhancement of tasks and abilities in four of the five University Graduate Attribute clusters: Communication skills (15% of comments received); Information literacy (5%); Personal and intellectual autonomy (5%); and Research and inquiry (37%).
- Aspects that were considered to be in need of improvement by 13% of respondents included: Communication skills (4%); Personal and intellectual autonomy (4%); and Research and inquiry (4%).

#### **2.2.5 Overall Satisfaction**

- The majority of the 24% of comments received which fell within the remit of Overall Satisfaction expressed satisfaction with the research project and/or its contribution to the field (17%).
- 7% of respondents raised concerns relating to staffing matters – the number of staff, more support for academic staff running courses, and the need for a professor in one of the disciplines.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

#### ***On the analysis and reporting of qualitative data***

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SREQ Faculty reports (2003 – 2009) are at: [http://www.usyd.edu.au/learning/evaluating/sreq\\_or.shtml](http://www.usyd.edu.au/learning/evaluating/sreq_or.shtml)

#### ***On SREQ and how to interpret results***

Staff of the ITL are available to provide support to faculties in the interpretation of the SREQ data and the development of strategic responses to address any issues identified

Phone: + 61 2 9351 3725

Email: [itl@sydney.edu.au](mailto:itl@sydney.edu.au)

SREQ results and reports are at <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/sreq/secure/rrr.cfm>

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **STUDENT RESEARCH EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE (SREQ)**

In 2002 the Institute for Teaching and Learning (ITL) began collecting data for The University community on research higher degree students' perceptions of their research training experiences. This data is gathered each year using a survey specifically developed for this task, the "Student Research Experience Questionnaire" (SREQ). The purpose of the SREQ 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 SREQ is based on a national survey of research higher degree students, the Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ). Some of the information gathered by the SREQ survey also contributes to two of the University's Key Performance Indicators for research. These KPIs are the quality of Supervision, and Overall Satisfaction with the research higher degree.

The survey gathers data on students' perceptions of the quality and frequency of supervision, intellectual and social climate, infrastructure, approaches to research, and generic skills development in their research higher degree, as well as their perceptions of the administration and student support services. The ITL analyses this data and provides a range of reports to staff and students of the university through this web site.

Students are asked to respond to statements using a five point Likert Scale to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement. As part of the questionnaires, students are also asked to comment on the following questions:

- *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*

Quantitative and qualitative data from the SREQ provide evidence of the success of University and Faculty initiatives to improve the overall student experience in general and the student experience of research training in particular.

### **FOCUS OF THE REPORT**

Based on the answers to the SREQ, this report seeks to provide an analysis of observable trends in the postgraduate research student experience in the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning between 2005 and 2009.

Information is arranged by the following areas of the research higher degree student experience: Quality of Supervision, Quality of Infrastructure, Research Climate, Graduate Attributes, and Overall Satisfaction, which, taken together, comprise the student experience of research training within the Faculty.

### **FOCUS OF WRITTEN OBSERVATIONS FROM RESPONDENTS**

By examining the foci of the students' comments in the 2009 SREQ, this report seeks to highlight areas that were of best practice in the students' experience, together with those that have been suggested as areas of improvement. The views of the research higher degree students, on their overall experience at the University, as received through the open response comments, are a valuable insight into what is important to them; what they consider to be areas of best practice; and what they consider are in need improvement.

It is important to remember, when looking at the results of the analysis of this data, 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, it could be interpreted that the students were happy with their experiences, and prefer to focus on commenting about areas in need of improvement.

**NB:** In 2010 a review of the taxonomy used in the analysis of comments from the SREQ was undertaken in conjunction with staff from the ITL. This resulted in reassignment of Flexibility of program and Pressure to complete from Supervision to Overall Satisfaction, and the realignment of aspects within Graduate Attributes to match the Clusters, Tasks and abilities within the University Graduate Attributes framework. The analysis of qualitative data from 2005 – 2008 has been updated to match the revised criteria. A list of the categories, sub-categories and components is at Attachment Two

Notes relating to the analysis and counting of comments are provided in Attachment One.

## GLOSSARY

The following terms and phrases are used throughout the report

<b>SREQ</b>	Student Research Experience Questionnaire Administered to postgraduate research students annually, during second semester
<b>Supervision Scale</b> <b>Infrastructure Scale</b> <b>Climate Scale</b> <b>Generic Skills Scale</b> <b>Overall Satisfaction Item</b>	The University of Sydney Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ) is based upon the items included in the nationally administered Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ). These items have been shown to cluster together to form factor scales: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Supervision</li><li>• Infrastructure</li><li>• Climate</li><li>• Generic Skills</li><li>• Overall Satisfaction Item</li></ul> Within the report, this naming convention is used to identify information relating to the analysis of the quantitative data (survey items)
<b>Faculty Scores</b> <b>Percentage agreement</b>	SREQ item responses are combined and reported in terms of the proportions of students who agreed or disagreed that their research higher degree experience was positive in the areas of: Supervision; Generic Skills; Infrastructure; Climate; and Overall Satisfaction
<b>Quality of Supervision</b> <b>Quality of Infrastructure</b> <b>Research Climate</b> <b>Graduate Attributes</b> <b>Overall Satisfaction</b>	The University of Sydney Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ) is based upon categories used in the SREQ Taxonomy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Quality of Supervision</li><li>• Quality of Infrastructure</li><li>• Research Climate</li><li>• Graduate Attributes</li><li>• Overall Satisfaction</li></ul> Within the report, this naming convention is used as headings for each section of the report, and to identify information relating to the analysis of the qualitative data (written observations).
<b>Qualitative data</b> <b>Focus of written observations</b>	Students' written observations received in response to open ended questions in the SREQ: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What are the <b>best</b> aspects of your research higher degree experience? Please explain why these aspects are good</li><li>• What aspects are most in need of <b>improvement</b>? Please explain why</li></ul>
<b>Percentage of comments received</b>	The number of times an aspect is mentioned within written observations of respondents received from respondents is presented as a percentage of the total number of comments received from respondents to the SREQ in any particular year.
<b>Key issues</b>	As a general rule, only those aspects which receive over 5% of comments from the <u>whole</u> cohort (i.e. domestic and international combined; all respondents per degree) are considered significant enough to be included as key issues in the report.

# 1 QUALITY OF SUPERVISION

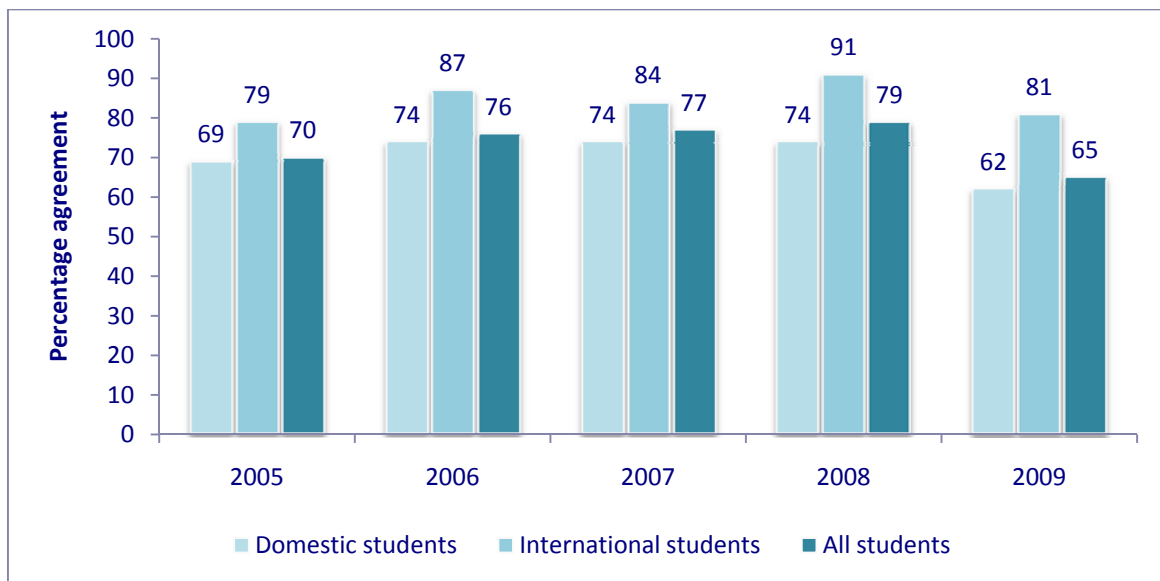
## 1.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The *Supervision Scale* covers aspects of supervision including: supervision being available when needed; understanding by the supervisor(s) of difficulties; provision of additional information relevant to the thesis topic by the supervisor; provision of guidance in topic selection and refinement; provision of helpful feedback on progress; provision of good guidance in literature search; and overall satisfaction with quality of supervision.

## 1.2 COMPARATIVE RESULTS: QUANTITATIVE DATA 2005–2009

The following graph shows the proportion of students who either agreed or strongly agreed with relevant Supervision Scale survey items in the SREQ between 2005 and 2009.

Figure 3: SREQ Supervision Scale: percentage agreement results: 2005 - 2009



## 1.3 COMPARATIVE RESULTS: FOCUS OF WRITTEN OBSERVATIONS 2005–2009

The following table shows the percentage of comments, received from respondents to the survey, which can be classified as either areas of best practice or areas for improvement, providing an indication of trends in the focus of students' comments relating to the Quality of Supervision between 2005 and 2009.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<i>Areas of best practice</i>	Domestic	40%	23%	45%	
	International		23%	25%	40%
	<b>All</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>43%</b>
<i>Areas needing improvement</i>	Domestic	29%	32%	20%	
	International		23%	0%	0%
	<b>All</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>15%</b>

## 1.4 KEY ISSUES FOR RESEARCH HIGHER DEGREE STUDENTS (SREQ 2009)

### 1.4.1 Areas of best practice

	All (n=41)
<b>Quality of Supervision</b>	<b>44%</b>
- Supervisor(s)	32%
- Supervision process	10%

#### Sample comments

- *The quality of research supervision and research expertise of my supervisor has helped my research tremendously*
- *I have the best support from my supervisor. S/he does not only try to help me to solve my research problems, but s/he also has taught me how to be a good researcher and scholar*
- *My supervisor – s/he gets it! My supervisor not only understands the topic s/he understands the process. S/he is very generous with her knowledge. S/he is also patient and non-judgemental. My supervisor has the ability to provide constructive criticism. I always come away with something useful from speaking with them*
- *Support from supervisor is strong and positive*

### 1.4.2 Areas needing improvement

	All (n=45)
<b>Quality of Supervision</b>	<b>20%</b>
- Supervisor(s)	9%
- Supervision process	7%

#### Sample comments

- *Access to supervision can be difficult to organise and is at best sporadic. Frequency and quality of supervision/level of Faculty interest could be improved*
- *Variety of research skills of supervisors. Many have limited research experience, more teachers who happen to have PhD (from decades ago and are not up to date, or forgot everything)*
- *My supervisor has too many commitments and at times tells me s/he won't be able to read chapters for 1 or 2 weeks*
- *Would like more supervisor guidance although, that said, whenever I really push for it I do tend to get it*

## 2 QUALITY OF INFRASTRUCTURE

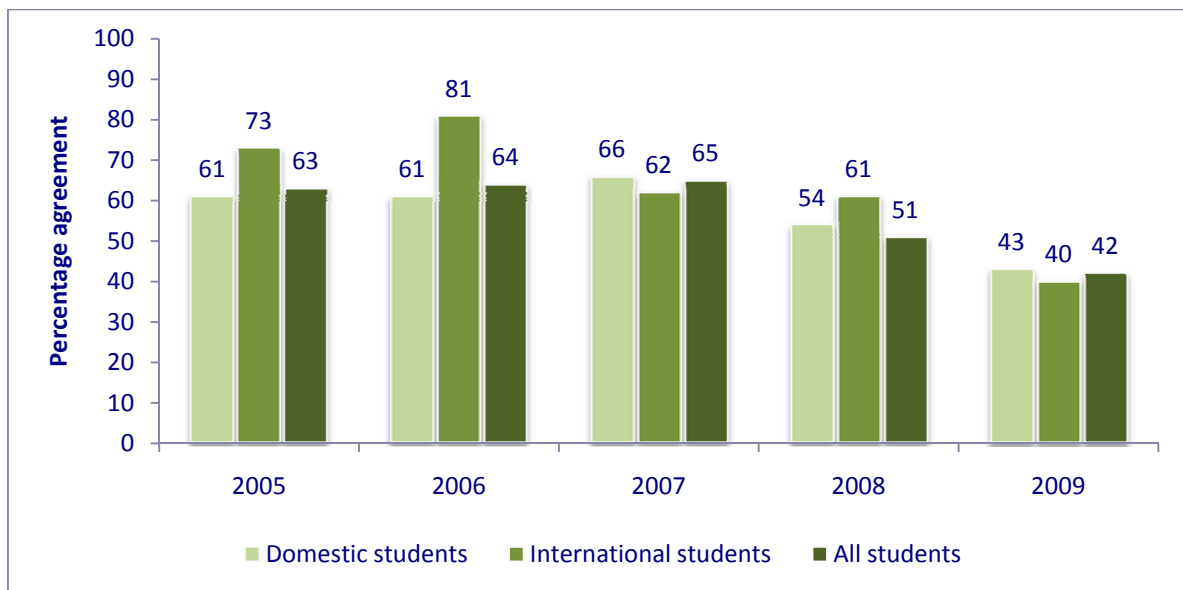
### 2.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The *Infrastructure Scale* covers aspects of the infrastructure available to research students, including: access to a suitable working space; access to technical support; access to a common room; access to necessary equipment; access to computing facilities and resources; appropriate financial support; and overall satisfaction with the quality of services and facilities.

### 2.2 COMPARATIVE RESULTS: QUANTITATIVE DATA 2005–2009

The following graph shows the proportion of students who either agreed or strongly agreed with Infrastructure Scale survey items in the SREQ between 2005 and 2009.

Figure 4: SREQ Infrastructure Scale: Percentage agreement results: 2005 - 2009



### 2.3 COMPARATIVE RESULTS: FOCUS OF WRITTEN OBSERVATIONS 2005–2009

The following table shows the percentage of comments, received from respondents to the survey, which can be classified as either areas of best practice or areas for improvement, providing an indication of trends in the focus of students' comments relating to the Quality of Infrastructure between 2005 and 2009.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Areas of best practice	Domestic	33%	50%	29%	
	International		23%	8%	27%
	<b>All</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>28%</b>
Areas needing improvement	Domestic	82%	61%	57%	
	International		62%	30%	85%
	<b>All</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>65%</b>

## 2.4 KEY ISSUES FOR RESEARCH HIGHER DEGREE STUDENTS (SREQ 2009)

### 2.4.1 Areas of best practice

	All (n=41)
<b>Quality of Infrastructure</b>	<b>20%</b>
- Research resources	10%
- Physical facilities	7%

#### Sample comments

- Desk and computing facilities
- Library assistance, especially the Liaison Librarian is very helpful
- library support
- Access to laboratory and equipment, access to professors

### 2.4.2 Areas needing improvement

	All (n=45)
<b>Quality of Infrastructure</b>	<b>98%</b>
- Facilities	59%
- Finance and funding (incl. scholarships)	22%
- Administration	11%
- Research resources	9%

#### Sample comments

- *Poor financial support/immediate prospects: as a researcher you know you bring the money in to the faculty, but feel you are forgotten and that the money is focused on academics, administration and undergraduates. There is little financial support offered, so you are out of pocket, and there is little employment opportunity offered within the faculty*
- *Outdated buildings - renovation overdue. Lack of quality break-out spaces in building computer setup and onsite email access with own laptop too complicated*
- *There is an accommodation issue - not just for research students but for a whole-of-building problem. However, the proposed policy was to introduce arbitrary classification of students to decide whether they are entitled to dedicated desk space. This is not linked to a whole-of-building approach and appears to me as being discriminatory*
- *There is greater crowding of researchers as the space is at premium. For researchers who work mainly with textual evidence, storage of materials is problematic*

### 3 RESEARCH CLIMATE

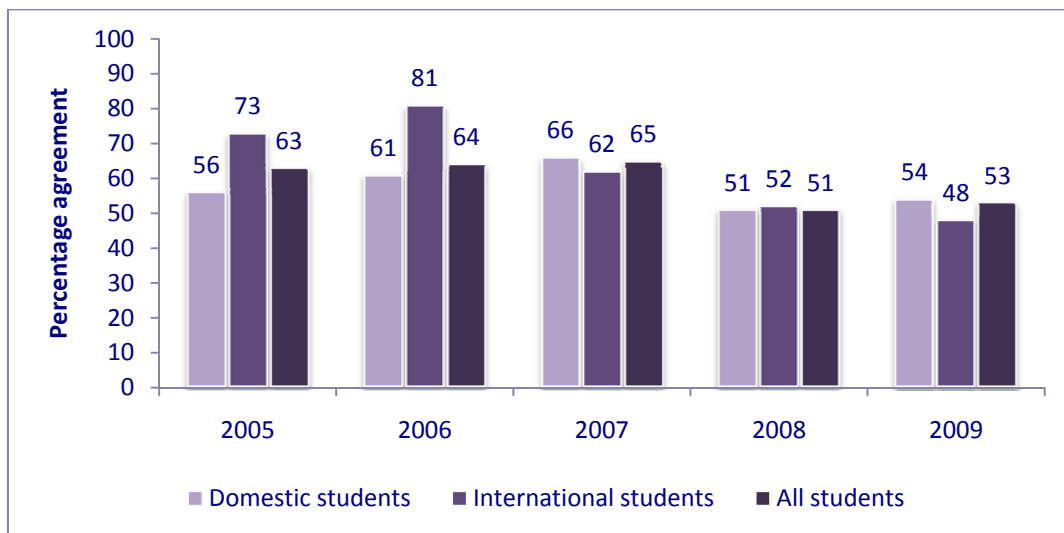
#### 3.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The *Climate Scale* covers aspects of the prevailing research climate in a students' school/ department, including: opportunities for social contact with other postgraduate students; integration into the school/ department community; opportunities to become involved in the broader research culture; perception of other research students as supportive; feelings of isolation within the school/ department; encouragement of interaction with other research students; provision of a good seminar programme; stimulation of personal work by the prevailing research ambience; provision of a supportive work environment; and feeling respected as a fellow researcher.

#### 3.2 COMPARATIVE RESULTS: QUANTITATIVE DATA 2005–2009

The following graph shows the proportion of students who either agreed or strongly agreed with Climate Scale survey items in the SREQ between 2005 and 2009.

Figure 5: SREQ Climate Scale: Percentage agreement results: 2005 - 2008



#### 3.3 COMPARATIVE RESULTS: FOCUS OF WRITTEN OBSERVATIONS 2005–2009

The following table shows the percentage of comments, received from respondents to the survey, which can be classified as either areas of best practice or areas for improvement, providing an indication of trends in the focus of students' comments relating to Research Climate between 2005 and 2009.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<i>Areas of best practice</i>	Domestic	57%	57%	53%	
	International		31%	58%	60%
	<b>All</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>55%</b>
<i>Areas needing improvement</i>	Domestic		36%	46%	43%
	International		85%	80%	15%
	<b>All</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>35%</b>

### 3.4 KEY ISSUES FOR RESEARCH HIGHER DEGREE STUDENTS (SREQ 2009)

#### 3.4.1 Areas of best practice

	All (n=41)
<b>Research Climate</b>	<b>54%</b>
- Interaction with other students	20%
- Work environment	7%
- Research community	17%

#### Sample comments

- *Sharing space with local and international research students with diverse research interests - this leads to learning more about cultures other than my own, social chatting, discussion about the Faculty and its faults which can minimise stress as the Fac of Architecture is broken; exchange of information and ideas; mentoring opportunities for me and to me*
- *Conference attendance: exposes me to others in my field and opens up potential contact networks of like interests*
- *Good environment in faculty, friendly and supportive academic staff and fellow students*
- *Weekly seminars with research group to present our projects and receive feedback*

#### 3.4.2 Areas needing improvement

	All (n=45)
<b>Research Climate</b>	<b>46%</b>
- Work environment	20%
- Research community	15%
- Career preparation	7%

#### Sample comments: domestic students

- *There are many, many problems in the Fac of Architecture - lack of transparency, accountability, lack of communication, lack of information, poor induction, no equitable provision of teaching opportunities, little recognition of the students in terms of representation and supporting the ability of the students to be involved in representation*
- *Poor Research culture: A feeling of disappearing into the woodwork as offices are hidden away and you only get to know the people in your office*
- *Very less interaction with the other staff members in the department. You are an unknown entity*
- *The Fac of Architecture seems to be in disarray. There have been some managerial changes and there is a new Assoc Dean Research and a Director of Research Training - the latter is responsible for the research students and answers to the Assoc Dean Research. .... Recently the DRT announced that the Faculty would adopt a policy for the support of pg research students. He was reluctant to circulate the policy. The policy was based upon the SUPRA suggested policy. As such, the DRT thought that there had been enough consultation with the research students as SUPRA had written most of the document that the Faculty would adopt. However, he did support a circulation of the policy when we requested it. The draft policy is devoid of anything useful as a faculty policy to support research students. The Fac needs to recognise that to bring about change it should work with all its stakeholders. Research students in the Faculty are getting angry*

## 4 GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

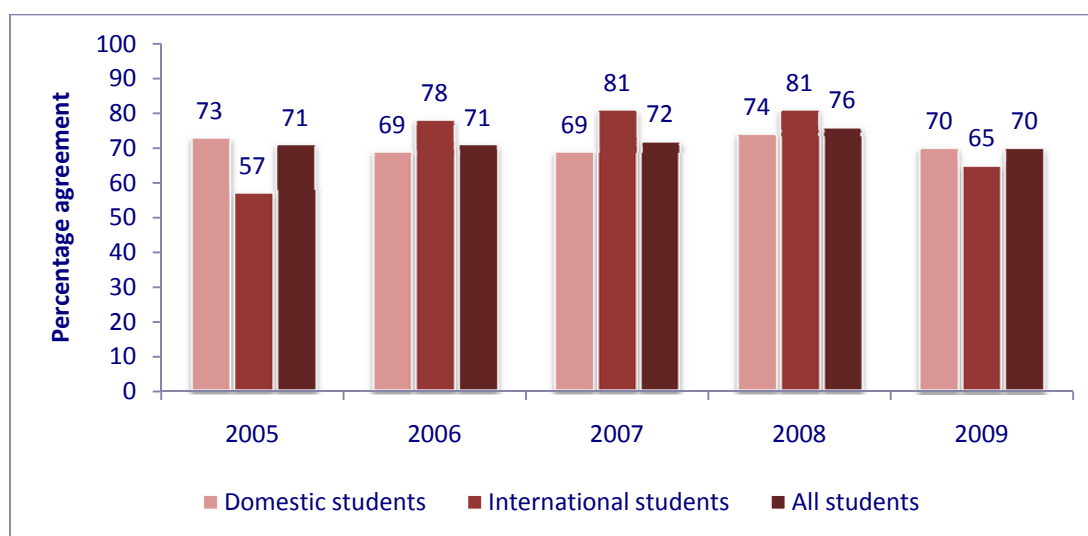
### 4.2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The *Generic Skills* scale reflects the extent to which students perceive their studies to have fostered the development of the generic skills recognised by the university as being a valuable outcome of university education, in addition to discipline specific skills and knowledge. Skills include problem solving; oral and written communication; development of ideas and their written presentation; collaboration with other researchers; analytical skills; planning; confidence in tackling unfamiliar problems; and ability to learn independently

### 4.3 COMPARATIVE RESULTS: QUANTITATIVE DATA 2005–2009

The following graph shows the proportion of students who either strongly agreed or agreed with Generic Skills Scale survey items in the SREQ between 2005 and 2009.

Figure 6: SREQ Generic Skills Scale: Percentage agreement results: 2005 - 2009



### 4.4 COMPARATIVE RESULTS: FOCUS OF WRITTEN OBSERVATIONS 2005–2009

The following table shows the percentage of comments, received from respondents to the survey, which can be classified as either areas of best practice or areas for improvement, providing an indication of trends in the focus of students' comments relating to the expansion of Graduate Attributes between 2005 and 2009.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<i>Areas of best practice</i>	Domestic	37%	30%	21%	
	International	31%	50%	1%	
	<b>All</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>23%</b>
<i>Areas needing improvement</i>	Domestic	4%	0%	11%	
	International	15%	40%	8%	
	<b>All</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>10%</b>

#### 4.4 KEY ISSUES FOR RESEARCH HIGHER DEGREE STUDENTS (SREQ 2009)

##### 4.4.1 Areas of best practice

	All (n=41)
<b>Graduate Attributes</b>	<b>44%</b>
- Research and inquiry	37%
- Communication skill	15%

##### Sample comments

- *Self-learning and skill accumulation - research tests ones abilities and biases, improves skills such as reading and writing techniques, more careful use of the English language, learning more and more and more about an area of interest means that one becomes knowledgeable - that's exciting!*
- *The way of critical thinking allows me to see many aspects differently- in a more pragmatic direction*
- *The best aspect is to improve my overall academic ability such as problem solving skills, developing new ideas and written communication skills etc*
- *Developing problem-solving skills. This is important to be successful in own research topic and can be applied in future career development*

##### 4.4.2 Areas needing improvement

	All (n=45)
<b>Graduate Attributes</b>	<b>13%</b>

##### Sample comments

- *I believe that I still need to improve my oral communication in presenting my idea. I have faced many situations where I have to present my research since I started my PhD. However I still spend a unnecessarily long time in preparation*
- *Faculty statistical and research methodology support*
- *Writing skills as a methods to express ideas properly and effectively*
- *My own motivation and self-discipline*

## 5 OVERALL SATISFACTION

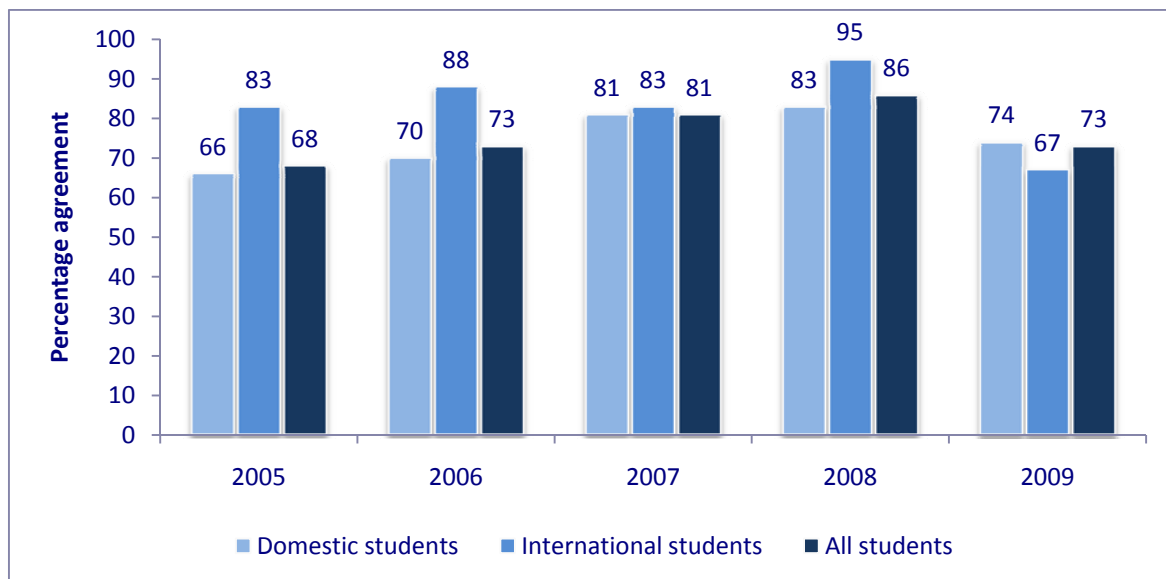
### 5.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This single item asks students about their overall level of satisfaction with their research higher degree experience. In the analysis of the qualitative data, additional aspects, which are not covered in other areas of the survey, but which contribute to the overall satisfaction of the research higher degree student experience area included e.g. satisfaction with research, quality of degree (pressure to complete, flexibility of program), and reputation of the university/ faculty.

### 5.3 COMPARATIVE RESULTS: QUANTITATIVE DATA 2005–2009

The following graph shows the proportion of students who either strongly agreed or agreed with the Overall Satisfaction item in the SREQ between 2005 and 2009.

Figure 7: SREQ Overall Satisfaction Item: Percentage agreement results: 2005 - 2009



### 5.4 COMPARATIVE RESULTS: FOCUS OF WRITTEN OBSERVATIONS 2005–2009

The following table shows the percentage of comments, received from respondents to the survey, which can be classified as either areas of best practice or areas for improvement, providing an indication of trends in the focus of students' comments relating to overall satisfaction with the degree experience between 2005 and 2009.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<i>Areas of best practice</i>	Domestic	27%	50%	34%	
	International		46%	8%	20%
	<b>All</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>30%</b>
<i>Areas needing improvement</i>	Domestic	14%	11%	6%	
	International		8%	0%	23%
	<b>All</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>10%</b>

## 5.4 KEY ISSUES FOR RESEARCH HIGHER DEGREE STUDENTS (SREQ 2009)

### 5.4.1 Areas of best practice

	All (n=41)
<b>Overall satisfaction</b>	<b>24%</b>
- Satisfaction with research	17%

#### Sample comments: domestic students

- *An opportunity to further pursue a line of research from my undergraduate degree. To be supported while I research a topic area that I enjoy. Working towards a specialisation in an area that can make a real difference*
- *The 'thrill of the chase' - sense of satisfaction in discovering new material that reinforces and extends my research hypothesis. Sense that I am significantly adding to a body of knowledge*
- *The Assoc Dean Research is also head Professor for the planning discipline. He appears to be working very hard to bring transparency and improved communication to his areas of responsibility. He is an asset to the Faculty.*
- *Ability to carry out my research independently - as time frames for completing areas of the research such as field trips have become more flexible since moving to part time*

### 5.4.2 Areas needing improvement

	All (n=45)
<b>Overall satisfaction</b>	<b>7%</b>
- Staffing issues and resources	7%

#### Sample comments

- *Number of staff*
- *More support for academic staff running course*
- *Need a professor in our discipline*

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

### 1 QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

#### Minimum sample size for reporting

The minimum recommended sample size for SREQ reporting is 20 valid responses. This is the same convention applied to reporting the CEQ and SCEQ. In degrees where less than 20 valid responses have been received a report is still provided however a warning message notes that the results should be interpreted with caution<sup>3</sup>

#### Number of respondents to the SREQ 2005 – 2009

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=
Domestic students	44	43	34	46	49
International students	6	8	13	19	9
Total	50	51	47	65	58

### 2 QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of the qualitative data is based on responses to the open questions received from respondents to the SREQ.

#### Number of respondents who answered the open questions SREQ 2005 - 2008

	Date of survey	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
		n=	n=	n=	n=	n=
Areas of best practice	Domestic students	35	30	30	38	37
	International students	3	13	12	15	4
	Total	38	43	42	53	41
Areas of improvement	Domestic students	32	28	28	35	41
	International students	3	13	10	13	4
	Total	35	41	38	48	45

n=the number of comments received in answer to the relevant 'open response' question

### 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. No qualitative data for international students is provided for 2005 and 2009; results are presented as a total (domestic and international combined)

#### Quantitative and qualitative data

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

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from ITL SREQ website Using the report page at <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/sreq/reportpage.htm>

#### 4 ILLUSTRATIVE SAMPLE COMMENTS

Comments are recorded as they appear in the original documents. However, minor spelling, grammatical and transcription errors have been corrected. [sic] indicates that the word appears exactly as provided by the student, and that it is not possible to ascertain an exact interpretation of the original meaning. 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. Supervisor(s) names, where included by the respondent, have been replaced by XXX, YYY or ZZZ.

#### 5 ANALYSIS OF COMMENTS

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

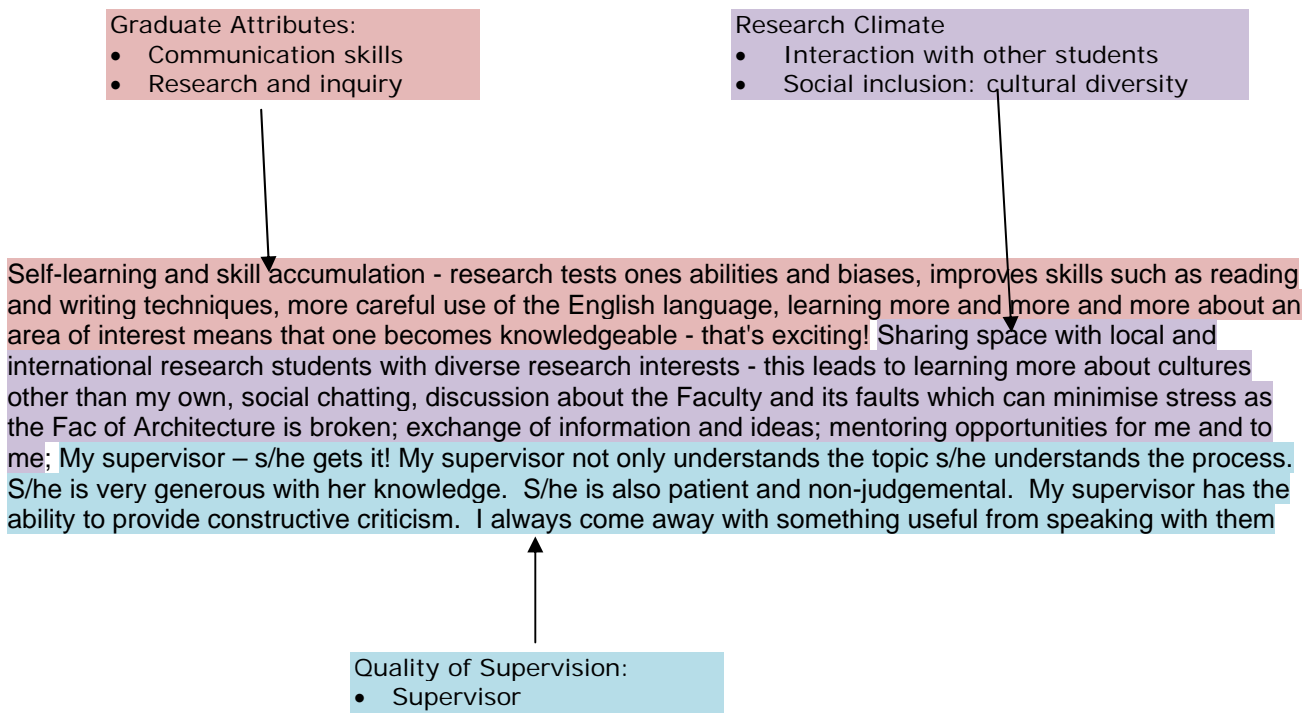
- Characteristics that define the area of the student experience
- SREQ survey items
- recurring themes in students' comments and have been developed over many years of analysing qualitative data from students' surveys.

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

#### 6 COUNTING OF COMMENTS

Each comment is analysed according to the *Taxonomy for analysing qualitative data from the SREQ*<sup>4</sup>, which is based on the Factors used in the SREQ. 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 (Supervisor); Research Climate (Interaction with other students, and Social inclusion) and Graduate Attributes (Communication skills, and Research and inquiry), the highlighted phrases within the comment are counted ONCE in each of the relevant categories i.e. 5 aspects in one comment.



<sup>4</sup> Available from Quality Assurance Officer (Learning and Teaching)

## ATTACHMENT TWO: SREQ SCALES: COVERAGE OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA

The University of Sydney Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ) is based upon the items included in the nationally administered Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ). These items have been shown to cluster together to form factor scales: Supervision, Climate, Infrastructure, and Generic Skills. These items, together with recurring themes in students' 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 SREQ.

### 1 SUPERVISION SCALE/ QUALITY OF SUPERVISION

#### 1.1 SREQ Survey items

- 1 Supervision is available when I need it
- 5 My supervisor(s) make(s) a real effort to understand difficulties I face
- 13 My supervisor(s) provide(s) me with additional information relevant to my topic
- 18 I am given good guidance in topic selection and refinement
- 22 My supervisor(s) provide(s) helpful feedback on my progress
- 26 I have received good guidance in my literature search
- 36 Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of my supervision

#### 1.2 Qualitative data analysis

There are 4 sub-categories within *Quality of Supervision*, against which students' 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 SREQ survey items together with recurring themes in students' 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*)
- IP and plagiarism

### 2 INFRASTRUCTURE SCALE/ QUALITY OF INFRASTRUCTURE

#### 2.1 SREQ Survey items

- 2 I have access to a suitable working space
- 6 I have good access to the technical support I need
- 10 I have access to a common room or a similar type of meeting place
- 12 I am able to organise good access to necessary equipment
- 19 I have good access to computing facilities and services
- 28 There is appropriate financial support for research activities
- 35 Overall I am satisfied with the quality of the services and facilities

#### 2.2 Qualitative data analysis

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

- Administration (*enrolment and admission; communication between faculty and students; general comments on administration (faculty and university); postgraduate coordinator*)
- 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 grants*)
- Research resources (*provided by faculty; provided by internal and external libraries and archive centres*)
- Student support services (*Ethics Office; Research Office; International Office etc*)
- Support (*IT; technical; laboratory*)
- Resource issues that affect students' overall experience (*under-resourced infrastructure at a faculty level*)

### 3 CLIMATE SCALE/ RESEARCH CLIMATE

#### 3.1 SREQ Survey items

- 3 The department / school provides opportunities for social contact with other postgraduate students  
8 I feel integrated into the department's / school's community  
15 The department / school provides opportunities for me to become involved in the broader research culture  
16 I feel that other postgraduate students in my department / school are supportive  
20 I tend to feel isolated within this department / school  
23 Interaction with other postgraduate students is actively encouraged in this department / school  
24 A good seminar program for postgraduate students is provided  
25 The research ambience in the department / school or faculty stimulates my work  
29 I feel that this department / school provides a supportive working environment  
31 I feel respected as a fellow researcher within my department / school

#### 3.2 Qualitative data analysis

There are 7 sub-categories within *Research Climate*, against which students 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 SREQ survey items together with recurring themes in students' comments.

- Social inclusion (*cultural diversity; equity, discrimination, and harassment*)
- Research 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, 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 (e.g. availability of tutoring, lecturing); general comments*)

### 4 GENERIC SKILLS SCALE/ GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

#### 4.1 SREQ Survey items

- 4 My research has further developed my problem-solving skills  
7 Doing my research has helped to develop my written communication skills  
9 I have learned to develop my ideas and present them in my written work  
11 As a result of my research, I have developed the ability to work collaboratively with other researchers  
14 My research has sharpened my analytical skills  
17 Doing my research has helped to develop my oral communication skills  
21 Doing my research has developed my ability to plan my own work  
27 As a result of my research I feel confident about tackling unfamiliar problems  
30 As a result of my research I have developed the ability to learn independently

#### 4.2 Qualitative data analysis

There are 5 sub-categories within Graduate Attributes, against which students 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*)
- 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 OVERALL SATISFACTION**

### **5.1 SREQ Survey item**

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

### **5.2 Qualitative data analysis**

There are 8 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*)
- Pressure to complete (*i.e. within time frame set by APA conditions etc*)
- Satisfaction with research (*topic, contribution to field*)
- Flexibility of the program (*freedom to follow own research; choose own topics; compared to undergraduate degree; flexible working hours*)
- Practical aspects of the degree (*field work, interviews etc*)
- Reputation/ prestige of university/ faculty/ department/ academic staff
- Quality of students