



The University of Sydney

Faculty of Economics and Business

The Research Training Experience
(Research Higher Degree Students)

Student Research Experience Questionnaire Report

Includes:

- *Executive summary: Key results for 2008*
- *Comparative results: Quantitative data 2002 – 2008*
- *Comparative results: Focus of written observations from respondents 2002 – 2008*
- *Focus of written observations from respondents: 2008*

With attachment:

Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (2006 – 2008)

- *Quantitative data 2006 – 2008 (2005 – 2007 graduates)*
- *Focus of written observations 2008 (2007 graduates)*

September 2009

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Executive summary

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 suggested improvements, during their research training experience.

The analysis of qualitative data reported in this document is based on written observations received from **all** respondents to the SREQ. Faculties are advised that if they are interested, it is possible to supply copies of the written observations in the following groupings¹:

- by subject matter: general (Quality of Supervision) to specific (Supervisor(s))
- by degree
- by code

Key results for 2008

The following results are an indication of those areas of the student experience that were of significance to research higher degree students during 2008. The KPI linked 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.

Quality of Supervision (Section 1, pp 10 – 12)

FACULTY SCORES

With the exception of 2005 (82%), faculty scores for the Supervision Scale have remained in the low to mid 70s percentage agreement since the beginning of the SREQ. The current score of 75% is marginally higher than the 2007 score (74%), and identical to the 2006 score. International students have rated their experiences 6-8% higher than their domestic counterparts for the past two surveys. The University average for the Supervision Scale is 75%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 42% of respondents who answered the open questions in the survey expressed satisfaction with their supervisor and/or co-supervisors
- 6% appreciated the freedom to pursue their own research and the flexibility of their working hours.
- Sample comment: *"Having a supervisor who is knowledgeable, experienced with supervision and who does not impose his own view of the thesis"*

Suggested improvements

- 39% of respondents to the SREQ, and who provided written observations suggested improvements to this area of their experience
- Of these, 26% were unhappy with various aspects of their supervision, including: the supervisor(s); feedback on their work; availability and frequency of meetings; and the need for evaluation of the supervision process.
- Sample comment: *"The supervision process can make or break the whole PhD experience and should be assessed from both perspectives, rather than simply as if it's the student's fault when a problem arises"*

¹ Please contact Rachel Symons (r.symons@usyd.edu.au or 9351 6560) to discuss your requirements.

Quality of Infrastructure (Section 2, pp 13 – 15)

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Infrastructure Scale have increased steadily over the past three years, and now sit at 68% agreement. International students continue to record considerably higher results than domestic students. In 2008 domestic students recorded 63% agreement with this Scale; international students recorded 82%. The University average for this scale is 64%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 39% of respondents were satisfied with this area of their experience
- 16% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the facilities provided by the Faculty (research centre; computers etc); whilst 13% were happy with library services and the availability of relevant electronic journals and databases.
- Sample comment: *"Facilities - carrel or desk and computer that is mine and do not need to share"*

Suggested improvements

- 37% of respondents suggested improvements in this area of their experience
- Funding and scholarships, including: PRSS availability; and funding for conferences was mentioned in 14% of comments received
- Physical facilities, including: office space; and computer resources; were referred to in 11% of comments received
- Sample comment: *"Either federal funding for research masters, because the expectation that a PhD takes 3 and a half years is inaccurate, rather it takes between 4 and a half to 5 years, or APA and IPA scholarships according to the proper length it takes to do a PhD"*

Research Climate (Section 3, pp 16 – 19)

FACULTY SCORES

With the exception of 2005 (60%), the Faculty Research Climate score has remained constant in the 50th percentile agreement since 2002. The current score of 55% is the highest since 2005. International students have consistently rated their experiences slightly higher than domestic students. The University average for the Climate Scale was 59%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 41% of respondents who provided written observations on their experiences expressed satisfaction with this area of their experience.
- 10% valued the opportunities to interact with other research higher degree students
- 11% felt part of a research community, and considered that this stimulated their work
- A supportive and welcoming work environment was experienced by 14% of respondents
- Sample comment: *"Enabling a sense of community with other researchers. There is probably no more important thing than this sense of community to keep one going"*

Suggested improvements

- 47% of respondents were dissatisfied with this area of their experience
- 14% thought that the more opportunities could be provided for interacting with their fellow students
- Opportunities for networking and collaborative projects; together with participation in the research culture of the faculty and an increase in seminars would be appreciated by 18% of respondents.
- The lack of a supportive work environment, and a feeling of isolation from staff and students within the faculty/ department was the focus of 14% of comments received.
- Sample comment: *"As a part-time PhD candidate, it is harder to feel part of the research group in my department. I don't really know many of them, don't know what they focus on, and have no idea of the teaching program. This is not a problem, just not ideal"*

Generic Skills (Section 4, pp 20 – 22)

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Generic Skills Scale have remained in the low 70s since 2002, and currently sit at 73% agreement. Currently, international and domestic students are experiencing similar outcomes. The University average for the Generic Skills Scale is 79%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 17% of respondents who answered the open questions in the survey considered that they were developing relevant generic skills
- 6% mentioned that their skills in problem solving, analysis, and written and oral communication had improved.
- 7% of respondents considered that their ability to work independently had been enhanced.
- Sample comment: *"Learning to think independently. Developing problem solving skills"*

Suggested improvements

- 7% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with this area of their experience, including: oral and written communication skills; organisational skills; and research skills.
- Sample comment: *"Degree structure should be altered to allow an apprenticeship in research training. Requires integrated research work in research methods and substantive content area as part of degree. Financial supports and degree time frames should therefore be extended to allow for this"*

Overall Satisfaction (Section 5, pp 23 – 24)

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Overall Satisfaction Item have remained in the high 70s and low 80s since 2002. The current score of 80% is higher than the 2007 score (77%) and identical to the 2006 score. The University score for the Overall Satisfaction Item is 80%. International students have rated this area of their experience higher than domestic students for the past two years.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 14% of respondents who answered the open questions expressed satisfaction with this area of their experience
- The majority of these (10% of comments received) were satisfied with their research, its topic, and its contribution to the field.
- Sample comment: *"Working on a research topic that I am interested in and feeling I'm making a practical and academic contribution by this research"*

Suggested improvements

- 9% of respondents were dissatisfied with their overall degree experience; in particular access to coursework
- Sample comment: *"More structured coursework for PhD students, instead of relying on student and supervisor to identify and enrol. (But understand this improvement is being made.)"*

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Quality Assurance Officer (Learning and Teaching)
September 2009

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Glossary

The following terms and phrases are used throughout the report

SREQ	Student Research Experience Questionnaire Administered to postgraduate research students annually, during second semester
PREQ	Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire Administered to graduates in the year after completion of studies
Supervision Scale Infrastructure Scale Climate Scale Generic Skills Scale	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"> • Supervision • Climate • Infrastructure • Generic Skills <p>Within the report, this naming convention is used to identify information relating to the analysis of the quantitative data (survey items)</p>
Faculty Scores Percentage agreement	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
Qualitative data Focus of written observations	Students' written observations received in response to open ended questions in the SREQ: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
Percentage of comments received	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.

Conceptual framework

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 Economics and Business between 2002 and 2008. The report also provides detailed information on the key issues highlighted in the analysis of the 2008 SREQ qualitative data.

Information is arranged by the SREQ Factor Scales (Supervision; Infrastructure; Climate; Generic Skills; and Overall Satisfaction), which, taken together, comprise the student experience of research training in the Faculty.

Focus of written observations from respondents

By examining the foci of the students' comments in the 2008 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.

Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ) 2006-2008

Faculty scores from the 2006 – 2008 Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ); together with a list of comments received in answer to the open response questions in the 2008 survey, are provided as an attachment to this report. The broad area(s) by which each comment has been analysed are indicated alongside each comment.

Notes

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 CEO and SCEQ. In aggregated 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 caution².

Number of respondents to the SREQ 2002 – 2008³

	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=
Domestic students	64	74	83	92	92	82	85
International students		12	20	18	19	18	29
Overall	64	86	103	110	111	100	114

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 2002 - 2008

Areas of best practice	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=
Domestic				80	68	69	61
International	61	63	71	5	14	14	22
Total				85	82	83	83

Suggested improvements	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=
Domestic				61	68	65	56
International	45	54	67	5	15	13	20
Total				66	83	78	76

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

NB: Separate qualitative data for international students did not become available until 2005

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 between 5 and 19 results should be viewed with caution. The minimum sample size recommended for statistical analysis is 20

Qualitative data only

Where the number of respondents who have supplied written observations on their experiences is between 5 and 10 results are excluded from the report as they lie within the lower range of statistics that should be viewed with caution. Results of the analysis of comments from international students in 2005 are incorporated into the total result.

² Retrieved from ITL SREQ website *Using the report page* at <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/sreq/reportpage.htm>

³ Data retrieved from the ITL SREQ website results and reports for the Faculty of Economics and Business on 07.09.09 <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/sreq/secure/rrr.cfm>

3 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.

4 Analysis of comments

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

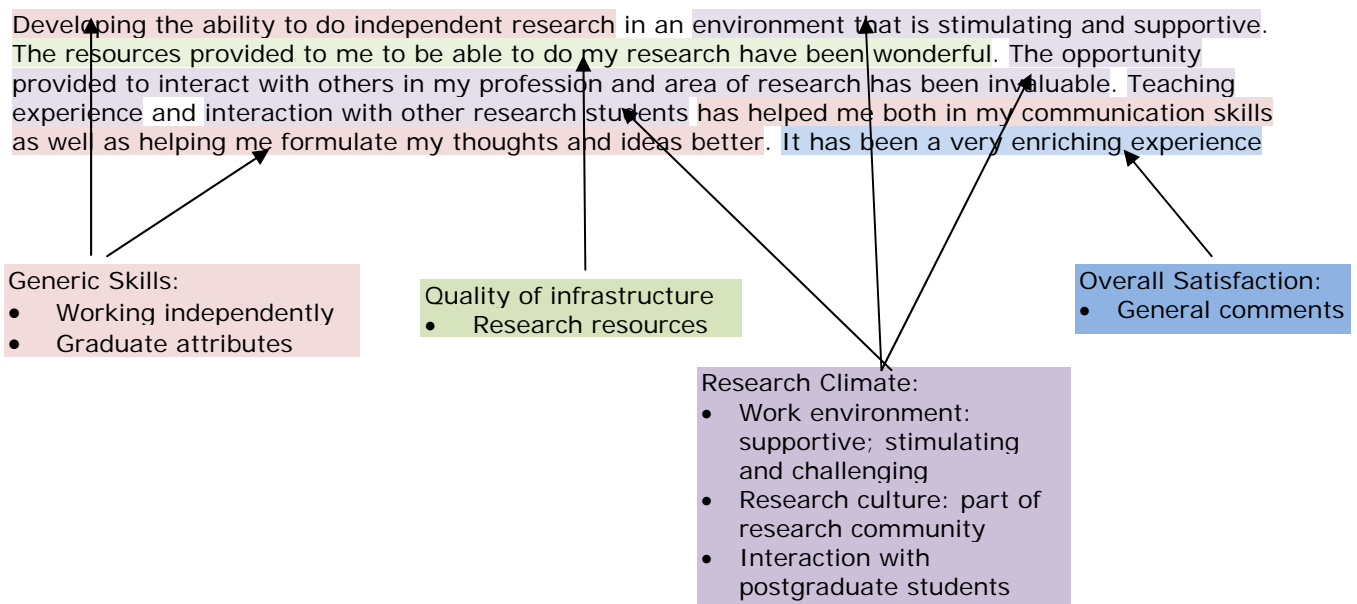
- Characteristics that define the area of the student experience
- SREQ survey items
- recurring themes in students' comments and have been developed over many years of analysing qualitative data from students' surveys.

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

5 Counting of comments

Each comment is analysed according to the *Taxonomy for analysing qualitative data from the SREQ*⁴, 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 Research Climate (Work environment: supportive; stimulating and challenging; Interaction with postgraduate students; Research culture: part of research community); Quality of infrastructure: Research resources); Generic Skills (Working independently; Graduate attributes); and Overall Satisfaction: general comment); the highlighted phrases within the comment are counted ONCE in each of the relevant categories i.e. 8 aspects in one comment.



⁴ Available from Quality Assurance Officer (Learning and Teaching)

1 Quality of Supervision

Coverage

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.

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

Qualitative data analysis

There are 5 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

- Supervision (Supervisor/ Associate Supervisor; availability and frequency; evaluation of supervisor by student; feedback on work)
- Management of Candidature (guidance on thesis, literature review; topic etc; workload)
- Progress reports (value of process; structure)
- Flexibility of program
- Pressure to complete (e.g. within set time frame)

Summary

FACULTY SCORES

With the exception of 2005 (82%), faculty scores for the Supervision Scale have remained in the low to mid 70s percentage agreement since the beginning of the SREQ. The current score of 75% is marginally higher than the 2007 score (74%), and identical to the 2006 score. International students have rated their experiences 6-8% higher than their domestic counterparts for the past two surveys. The University average for the Supervision Scale is 75%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 42% of respondents who answered the open questions in the survey expressed satisfaction with their supervisor and/or co-supervisors
- 6% appreciated the freedom to pursue their own research and the flexibility of their working hours.

Suggested improvements

- 39% of respondents to the SREQ, and who provided written observations suggested improvements to this area of their experience
- Of these, 26% were unhappy with various aspects of their supervision, including: the supervisor(s); feedback on their work; availability and frequency of meetings; and the need for evaluation of the supervision process.

1.1 Comparative results: Quantitative data 2002–2008

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

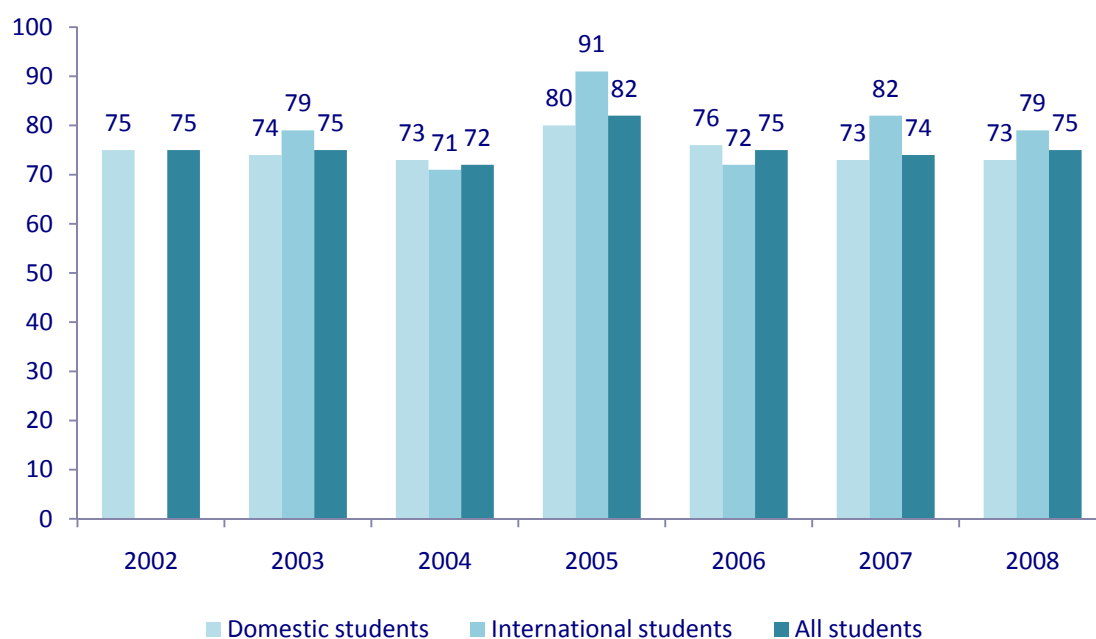


Figure 1: SREQ Supervision Scale: percentage agreement results: 2002 - 2008

1.2 Comparative results: Focus of written observations 2002–2008

The following table includes the percentage of comments received from respondents to the surveys, that can be classified as areas of best practice or areas for improvement under the heading of Quality of Supervision. The trends provide an indication of student satisfaction with this area of their experience between 2002 and 2008.

	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
Areas of best practice	Domestic				56%	57%	57%
	International				43%	43%	41%
	All	28%	49%	52%	67%	54%	53%
Suggested improvements	Domestic				22%	25%	46%
	International				13%	23%	20%
	All	27%	26%	27%	14%	20%	39%

1.3 Key issues for research higher degree students (SREQ 2008)

1.3.1 Areas of best practice

	Domestic (n=61)	International (n= 22)	All (n= 83)
Supervision			
- Satisfied with performance of supervisor(s)	48%	27%	42%
- Supervisor(s) available for regular meetings			
- Supervisor(s) provide feedback on work			
Flexibility of program			
- Freedom to pursue own research interests appreciated	7%	5%	6%
- Flexibility of working hours appreciated			

	Domestic (n=61)	International (n= 22)	All (n= 83)
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Sample comments: domestic students

- *Freedom to research independently but within bounds of good guidance and advice*
- *Supervision has been great, I regularly see them face to face and receive good guidance and support when needed*
- *Best aspects are that I have the best supervisor in the Faculty - XXX - considerate, motivating, inspirational and her guidance/knowledge invaluable*

Sample comments: international students

- *I have two very kind supervisors who are willing to listen to me. Listen to my concerns. They can provide help to my requests on facilities access, literature search and data access*
- *My supervisor is great. World class scholar, good mentor, considerate and encouraging*
- *Supervisor: my supervisor is extremely helpful, always making sure I am on the track towards the research which deserves the degree.*

1.3.2 Suggested improvements

	Domestic (n=56)	International (n=20)	All (n=76)
--	---------------------	--------------------------	----------------

Supervision

- | | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|
| - Performance of supervisor(s) unsatisfactory | | | |
| - Supervisor(s) unavailable for regular meetings | 30% | 15% | 26% |
| - Supervisor(s) do not provide feedback on work | | | |
| - Process for evaluating supervisor performance suggested | | | |

Sample comments: domestic students

- *I require more 'hands-on' supervision. While I would not describe my supervision as poor, I would like my supervisors to take closer interest in what I am doing at any given moment, perhaps setting me deadlines or instructing me to do this or that*
- *The pressure to get students to complete within 3 years is compromising academic scholarship and students are starting to resist this but are under pressure from academic staff to complete the most straight forward and risk free thesis - hardly a good set up for ground breaking or even innovative scholarship*
- *When a problem arises with an existing supervision process, there needs to be a more transparent and supportive way of handling this and in facilitating the change process. The current process does not freely allow a student to openly give 'negative' feedback about supervision or problems, but on the contrary makes it possible for the supervisor to punitively use the annual review to punish students for so-called 'lack of progress'. Year by year, my research higher degree experience actually got worse and I honestly cannot think of any 'best aspects'. From the proposal stage, it seem to have gone downhill and has affected my confidence and impression of what academic research is like*

Sample comments: international students

- *Supervisors are too busy to meet. Reason: when you have difficulty, could not turn to for help*
- *I find the lack of structure difficult to deal with*
- *Lack of communication with supervisors*

2 Quality of Infrastructure

Coverage

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.

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

Qualitative data analysis

There are 5 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.

- Finance and funding (funding for resources, equipment etc; scholarships, PRSS, APA etc)
- Facilities (computer hardware and software; equipment; workspace, building, parking etc)
- Research resources (provided by faculty; provided by library)
- Support (IT; technical; laboratory)
- Administration (enrolment and admission; communication between faculty and students; general comments on administration (faculty and university)

Summary

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Infrastructure Scale have increased steadily over the past three years, and now sit at 68% agreement. International students continue to record considerably higher results than domestic students. In 2008 domestic students recorded 63% agreement with this Scale; international students recorded 82%. The University average for this scale is 64%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 39% of respondents were satisfied with this area of their experience
- 16% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the facilities provided by the Faculty (research centre; computers etc); whilst 13% were happy with library services and the availability of relevant electronic journals and databases.

Suggested improvements

- 37% of respondents suggested improvements in this area of their experience
- Funding and scholarships, including: PRSS availability; and funding for conferences was mentioned in 14% of comments received
- Physical facilities, including: office space; and computer resources; were referred to in 11% of comments received

2.1 Comparative results: Quantitative data 2002–2008

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



Figure 2: SREQ Infrastructure Scale: Percentage agreement results: 2002 - 2008

2.2 Comparative results: Focus of written observations 2002–2008

The following table includes the percentage of comments received from respondents to the survey, that can be classified as areas of best practice or areas for improvement, providing an indication of trends in students' perceptions of the quality of infrastructure between 2002 and 2008.

	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
Areas of best practice	Domestic				37%	32%	34%
	International				64%	36%	50%
	All	23%	22%	25%	45%	41%	39%
Suggested improvements	Domestic				53%	46%	38%
	International				60%	23%	35%
	All	44%	59%	45%	45%	54%	37%

2.3 Key issues for research higher degree students (SREQ 2008)

2.3.1 Areas of best practice

	Domestic (n= 61)	International (n=22)	All (n=83)
Facilities			
- Computers are provided by faculty	18%	9%	16%
- Workspace, office, provided by faculty			
- Equipment provided is up to date and functional			
Research resources			
- Research resources are provided by faculty	10%	23%	13%
- Library services satisfactory			

	Domestic (n= 61)	International (n=22)	All (n=83)
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Sample comments: domestic students

- *Good funding support which allows me to attend and present papers in world top conferences*
- *The resources provided to me to be able to do my research have been wonderful*
- *Additionally the resources provided to all students, provides a positive environment conducive to good research*

Sample comments: international students

- *The excellent work spaces that facilitate research students to study continuously including discuss with other postgraduate students*
- *Access to library and other research facilities and resources*
- *The best part is to have a really good library service team. They fill in your requirements on time and can borrow books from any part of the world*

2.3.2 Suggested improvements

	Domestic (n=56)	International (n=20)	All (n=76)
--	---------------------	--------------------------	----------------

Finance and funding

- | | | | |
|--|-----|-----|-----|
| - Funding for research unavailable | 14% | 15% | 14% |
| - Scholarships unavailable or unsatisfactory | | | |
| - PRSS, APA provisions unsatisfactory | | | |

Facilities

- | | | | |
|--|-----|----|-----|
| - Computers are not provided by faculty | 13% | 5% | 11% |
| - Workspace, office, not provided by faculty | | | |
| - Equipment provided is not up to date or functional | | | |
| - Would like a postgraduate common room | | | |

Sample comments: domestic students

- *Poor communication from academic coordinators re: the faculty's expectations and inconsistent and changing messages. It is important for expectations and goals to be clear and unchanging so students' efforts can be concentrated on research rather than administration*
- *Reimbursements of travel/conference costs - very long process through many different people*
- *The computers at the "hot desks" in the Faculty of Economics and Business research centre are sometimes not functional.*

Sample comments: international students

- *Funding per post graduate student should be increased and increased software support should be available*
- *The facilities in the PhD centre, there were very nosy people in the faculty and lack of privacy. IT support wasn't that good*
- *Facilities to ease communication should include a fax machine and pigeon holes*

3 Research Climate

Coverage

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.

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

Qualitative data analysis

There are 5 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.

- Interaction with other research higher degree students (study related; social; support of peers)
- Research culture (part of research community; conference participation; networking)
- Work environment (integration into faculty/ department/ school; supportive environment; stimulating; induction/ orientation programme; respect as fellow researcher; support for students)
- Preparation for academia (e.g. availability of tutoring, lecturing)
- Location and physical environment

Summary

FACULTY SCORES

With the exception of 2005 (60%), the Faculty Research Climate score has remained constant in the 50th percentile agreement since 2002. The current score of 55% is the highest since 2005. International students have consistently rated their experiences slightly higher than domestic students. The University average for the Climate Scale was 59%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 41% of respondents who provided written observations on their experiences expressed satisfaction with this area of their experience.
- 10% valued the opportunities to interact with other research higher degree students
- 11% felt part of a research community, and considered that this stimulated their work
- A supportive and welcoming work environment was experienced by 14% of respondents

Suggested improvements

- 47% of respondents were dissatisfied with this area of their experience
- 14% thought that the more opportunities could be provided for interacting with their fellow students
- Opportunities for networking and collaborative projects; together with participation in the research culture of the faculty and an increase in seminars would be appreciated by 18% of respondents.
- The lack of a supportive work environment, and a feeling of isolation from staff and students within the faculty/ department was the focus of 14% of comments received.

3.1 Comparative results: Quantitative data 2004–2008

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



Figure 3: SREQ Climate Scale: Percentage agreement results: 2002 - 2008

3.2 Comparative results: Focus of written observations 2002–2008

The following table includes the percentage of comments received from respondents to the surveys, that can be classified as areas of best practice or areas for improvement, providing an indication of trends in the students experiences of the prevailing research climate in the faculty between 2002 and 2008, as indicated in the responses to open questions in the SREQ.

	SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
Areas of best practice	Domestic				57%	49%	46%
	International				50%	50%	27%
	All	36%	56%	46%	36%	56%	41%
Suggested improvements	Domestic				44%	54%	41%
	International				40%	62%	65%
	All	56%	35%	70%	68%	43%	47%

3.3 Key issues for research higher degree students (SREQ 2008)

3.3.1 Areas of best practice

	Domestic (n=61)	International (n= 22)	All (n=83)
Interaction with other research students			
- Opportunities are provided to discuss research with other students	10%	9%	10%
- Opportunities are provided for social contact with other students			
- Other students are supportive			

	Domestic (n=61)	International (n= 22)	All (n=83)
Research culture			
- Opportunities provided to participate at conferences	13%	5%	11%
- Networking opportunities available			
- Feel part of a research community			
- Seminar program provided by faculty			
Work environment			
- Research ambience stimulating, challenging			
- Satisfactory induction or orientation programme is provided	15%	14%	14%
- Feel part of / welcomed by the faculty/ department			
- Respected as a fellow researcher			
- Support is provided for students (especially part-time, external)			
- Presence of a supportive work environment			

Sample comments: domestic students

- *Finding a community of supportive and intellectually interesting post grads from Sydney university and other universities. The sense of achievement when I can see a community of related researchers coming together and sharing ideas gradually*
- *The discipline organises regular postgraduate seminars where we get to present an aspect of our research. This is very good for building confidence as much as anything else*
- *Being with other fellow researchers and students. It's just a good experience and it's stimulating and you can discuss some ideas with them*

Sample comments: international students

- *I could mingle around with other research students from different academic and culture backgrounds. We could learn not only about each other's research but also on our country of origin. This ultimately broadens my horizons*
- *Research centre: the research centre gives me many interactions with other PhD students, so that I don't feel alone, being able to discuss the things related to my topic with others*
- *Supportive research environment, including facilities, students and professors. All of these seem to be very useful in my research*

3.3.2 Suggested improvements

	Domestic (n=56)	International (n=20)	All (n=76)
Interaction with other research students			
- Opportunities are not provided to discuss research with other students	13%	20%	14%
- Opportunities are not provided for social contact with other students			
- Other students are not supportive			
Research culture			
- Opportunities not provided to participate at conferences	18%	20%	18%
- Networking opportunities unavailable			
- Do not feel part of a research community			
- Seminar program not provided by faculty			
Work environment			
- Research ambience is not stimulating, challenging			
- Induction or orientation programme unsatisfactory	11%	25%	14%
- Do not feel part of / welcomed by the faculty/ department			
- Are not respected as a fellow researcher			
- Support is not provided for students			
- Supportive work environment not present			

Domestic (n=56)	International (n=20)	All (n=76)
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Sample comments: domestic students

- *Integration into department's research activities. PhD students need to feel respected and although maybe not on par in terms of status with career academics, they are in the early stages of becoming academics*
- *Need to improve networking with other PhD candidates outside the normal program e.g. PhD circle - just PhD students to vent issues between themselves*
- *More social events so the research students can interact with each other and to create a more collegiate experience*

Sample comments: international students

- *It would be better if there were PhD seminars, where PhD students are required to present their progress so far. That would serve as an effective motivational tool*
- *Think some program designed for new research students are too broad to fit what the students need, but you have to take it, waste of money and time*
- *Maybe more chance to get together with other students (although I can see that the coordinator in my discipline really tries hard to offer these occasions). Because as an international student far from family, we really need support from others, like friends and staff in the discipline. Sometimes homesick could indeed affect the research progress, a lot!*

4 Generic Skills

Coverage

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

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

Qualitative data analysis

There are 8 sub-categories within *Generic Skills*, against which students comments are analysed. Each of these sub-categories may be further broken down into relevant aspects (or components) which are based on the SREQ survey items together with recurring themes in students' comments.

- Graduate Attributes (includes: problem solving, analytical skills, oral and written communication, presentation, and planning)
- Technical skills (statistics, thesis/ academic writing, disciplinary, and training in use of equipment)
- Research skills
- Publishing skills (writing for publication; opportunities for publication provided)
- Collaboration with other researchers
- Expansion of knowledge base (i.e. on research topic and associated subjects)
- Working independently
- English language skills for NESB/ international students (proficiency, support with academic writing, proof reading etc)

Summary

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Generic Skills Scale have remained in the low 70s since 2002, and currently sit at 73% agreement. Currently, international and domestic students are experiencing similar outcomes. The University average for the Generic Skills Scale is 79%.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 17% of respondents who answered the open questions in the survey considered that they were developing relevant generic skills
- 6% mentioned that their skills in problem solving, analysis, and written and oral communication had improved.
- 7% of respondents considered that their ability to work independently had been enhanced.

Suggested improvements

- 7% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with this area of their experience, including: oral and written communication skills; organisational skills; and research skills.

4.1 Comparative results: Quantitative data 2002–2008

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

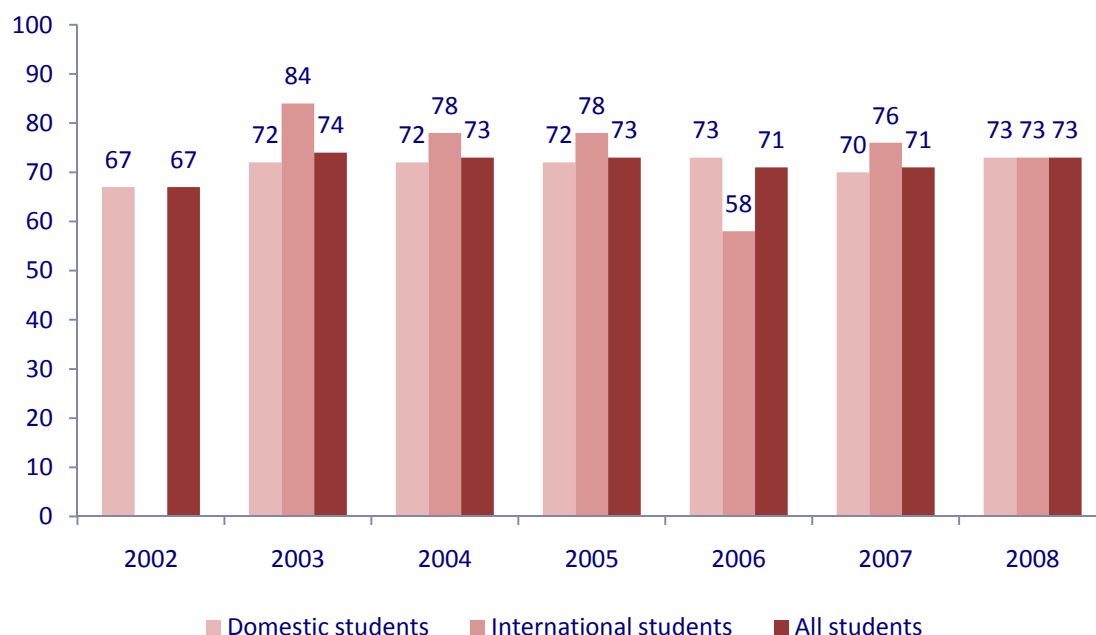


Figure 4: SREQ Generic Skills Scale: Percentage agreement results: 2002 - 2008

4.2 Comparative results: Focus of written observations 2002–2008

The following table includes the percentage of comments received from respondents to the surveys, that can be classified as areas of best practice or areas for improvement, providing an indication of trends in the development of Generic Skills by respondents between 2002 and 2008.

		SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
Areas of best practice	Domestic					21%	22%	20%
	International					36%	57%	9%
	All	34%	25%	30%	22%	23%	28%	17%
Suggested improvements	Domestic					7%	3%	9%
	International					13%	0%	0%
	All	13%	13%	6%	8%	8%	3%	7%

4.2 Key issues for research higher degree students (SREQ 2008)

4.2.1 Areas of best practice

	Domestic (n=61)	International (n=22)	All (n=83)
Graduate Attributes			
- Problem solving skills are being developed	8%	0%	6%
- Analytical skills are being developed			
- Oral and written communication, and presentation skills are being developed			
Working independently			
- Ability to plan own work developed	8%	5%	7%
- Ability to learn independently developed			

Domestic (n=61)	International (n=22)	All (n=83)
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Sample comments: domestic students

- *Teaching experience and interaction with other research students has helped me both in my communication skills as well as helping me formulate my thoughts and ideas better*
- *My PhD research helps me develop my own independent thinking and sharpen my analytical skills!*
- *Developing problem solving skills*
- *The ability to think independently*

Sample comments: international students

- *Supporting courses organised by Department and Faculty to build up necessary research skills*
- *Become more independent and patient. I learnt it from my supervisor through the research process. It is not only good to my research progress but also benefits my life.*

4.2.2 Suggested improvements

7% of students (i.e. 5/76 comments received) who responded to the SREQ indicated that they would appreciate more help in attaining research skills and writing for publication. Due to the low number of comments, and to protect student confidentiality, no sample comments are provided

5 Overall Satisfaction

Coverage

This single item asks students about their overall level of satisfaction with their research higher degree experience.

SREQ Survey items

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

Qualitative data analysis

There are 3 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
- Satisfaction with research (topic, contribution to field)

Summary

FACULTY SCORES

Faculty scores for the Overall Satisfaction Item have remained in the high 70s and low 80s since 2002. The current score of 80% is higher than the 2007 score (77%) and identical to the 2006 score. The University score for the Overall Satisfaction Item is 80%. International students have rated this area of their experience higher than domestic students for the past two years.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Areas of best practice

- 14% of respondents who answered the open questions expressed satisfaction with this area of their experience
- The majority of these (10% of comments received) were satisfied with their research, its topic, and its contribution to the field.

Suggested improvements

- 9% of respondents were dissatisfied with their overall degree experience; in particular access to coursework

5.1 Comparative results: Quantitative data 2002–2008

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

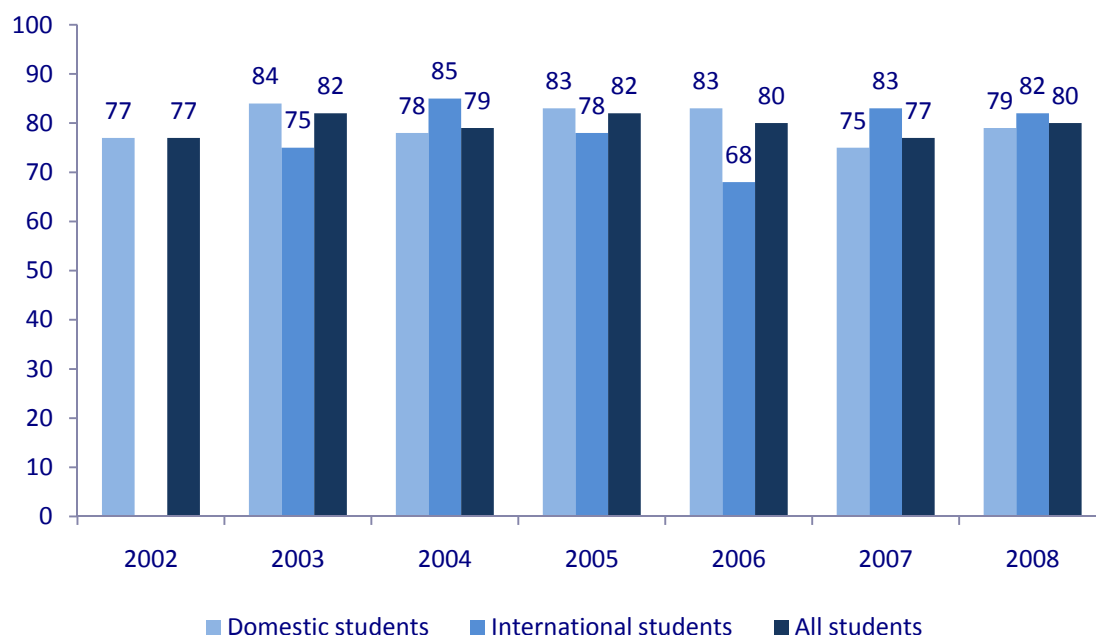


Figure 5: SREQ Overall Satisfaction Item: Percentage agreement results: 2002 - 2008

5.1 Comparative results: Focus of written observations 2002–2008

The following table includes the percentage of comments received from respondents to the survey, that can be classified as areas of best practice or areas for improvement, providing an indication of trends in research higher degree students' overall satisfaction between 2002 and 2008.

		SREQ 2002	SREQ 2003	SREQ 2004	SREQ 2005	SREQ 2006	SREQ 2007	SREQ 2008
Areas of best practice	Domestic					25%	19%	16%
	International					14%	7%	9%
	All	21%	22%	17%	9%	23%	17%	14%
Suggested improvements	Domestic					3%	5%	5%
	International					7%	15%	20%
	All	0%	0%	6%	5%	4%	6%	9%

5.2 Key issues for research higher degree students (SREQ 2008)

5.2.1 Areas of best practice

	Domestic (n= 61)	International (n= 22)	All (n= 83)
Satisfaction with research			
- Research topic will contribute to field	11%	5%	10%
- Researching topic that have always been interested in			
- Research is worthwhile			

Domestic (n= 61)	International (n= 22)	All (n= 83)
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Sample comments: domestic students

- *Contributing knowledge or information directly to those who can make good use of it*
- *Working on a research topic that I am interested in and feeling I'm making a practical and academic contribution by this research*
- *The opportunity to deeply explore an interesting area of research*
- *Believe topic will contribute to 'body of knowledge' and may prove significant continually finding source material never reported upon and hitherto confidential/suppressed*

Sample comments: international students

- *Getting multiple perspectives on my topic as well as social science research*
- *The prestige of Sydney University. Helpful supervisor and department*

5.2.3 Suggested improvements

9% of students (i.e. 7 /76 comments received) who responded to the SREQ considered that improvements were needed in this area of their experience.

Sample comments: domestic students

- *Access to postgraduate coursework that is relevant and difficult i.e. can't be accessed in an undergraduate degree or masters Some way to encourage myself to do more work.*
- *I feel that the coursework is too intrusive and distracting*

Sample comments: international students

- *Courseworks, which could boost our research ability. Longer duration, which could lead to better quality and top journal publication*
- *I suggest that postgraduate students should compulsorily take some coursework at higher levels of academic training*
- *More structured coursework for PhD students, instead of relying on student and supervisor to identify and enrol. (But understand this improvement is being made.)*
- *The structured component of the programme (e.g. induction, coursework, seminars etc.) could be improved to facilitate the speed at which the thesis is completed and to improve the quality of the research output*

Attachment A Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ 2008)

The survey

In 2002 the Institute for Teaching and Learning (ITL) began collecting data for The University community on research higher degree graduates' perceptions of their research training experiences. This data is gathered each year using a national survey specifically developed for this task, the "Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire" (PREQ). 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.

The survey gathers data on students' perceptions of the quality and frequency of supervision, intellectual and social climate, infrastructure, approaches to research, quality of thesis examination, and generic skills development in their research higher degree. The ITL analyses this data and provides a range of reports to staff and students of the university through their web site⁵

The ITL use responses obtained from graduates of the University of Sydney who completed their courses in the previous year (i.e. the 2008 reports are for students who completed in 2007). As an example: the 2008 reports are for graduates who completed their degree in 2007.

Quantitative data 2006 – 2008 (2005 – 2007 graduates)

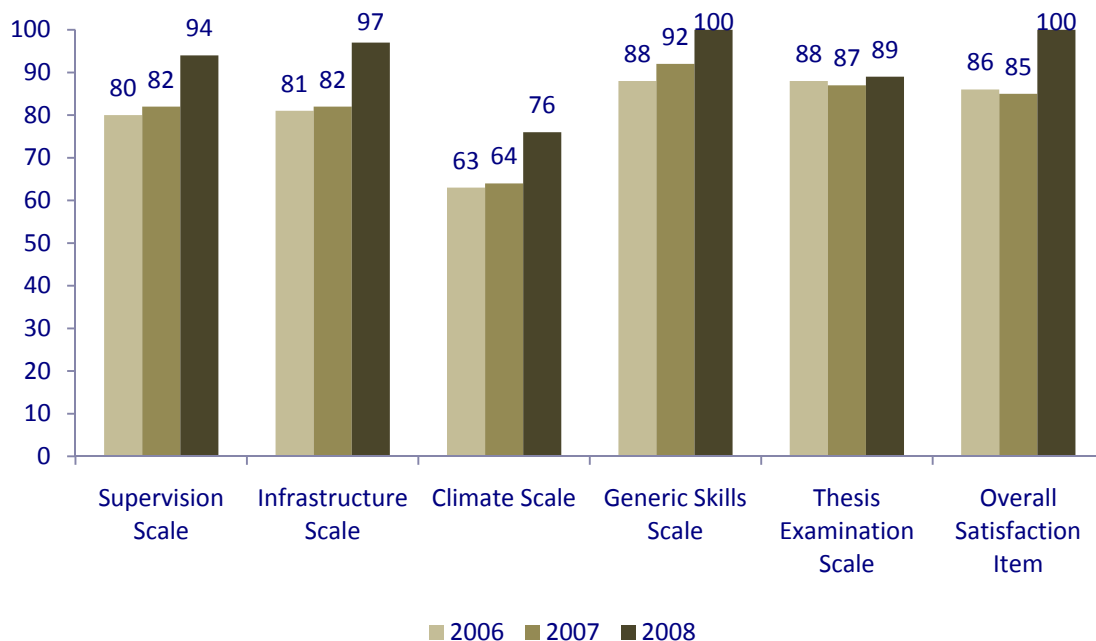


Figure 6: PREQ Factor Scales: 2006 - 2008

NB: In 2006 - 2008 13-14 graduates from the Faculty of Economics and Business responded to the PREQ. Since this is below the minimum number recommended for statistical analysis of PREQ data (20) the results in the above graph should be viewed with caution.

⁵ For more information on the PREQ, and results and reports 2002 - 2008 see <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/preq/>

Focus of written observations 2008 (2007 graduates)

The following written observations were received from research higher degree graduates in response to the open questions in the 2008 PREQ. The broad area(s) by which each comment has been analysed is indicated in the second column.

Areas of best practice

COMMENT	AREAS OF RESEARCH TRAINING EXPERIENCE
Excellent supervisor, supportive faculty, excellent funding, industry support ????	<i>SUPERVISION CLIMATE INFRASTRUCTURE</i>
Finishing :).	<i>OVERALL SATISFACTION</i>
Developing wider analytical skills.	<i>GENERIC SKILLS</i>
My superior was excellent. Publishing and presents at conferences.	<i>SUPERVISION CLIMATE</i>
The support and supervision.	<i>SUPERVISION CLIMATE</i>
Research freedom.	<i>SUPERVISION</i>
Resources made available by The University of Sydney. For example, librarian sourcing of documents; access to ejournals from off campus; provision of postgraduate study centre and computer in faculty.	<i>INFRASTRUCTURE</i>
Good access to research materials plus facilities when required. Flexibility of the research program.	<i>INFRASTRUCTURE SUPERVISION</i>
Great supervision and the reputation of my university.	<i>OVERALL SATISFACTION SUPERVISION</i>
Exposure to an international peer group of researchers. Many opportunities to share ideas and results at international forums.	<i>CLIMATE</i>
I thoroughly enjoyed all aspects of my PhD research program. My supervisor was outstanding and extremely supportive.	<i>OVERALL SATISFACTION SUPERVISION</i>
Supervision and research funding.	<i>SUPERVISION INFRASTRUCTURE</i>
Supervisor experience and analytical skills.	<i>SUPERVISION GENERIC SKILLS</i>
Research skills, intellectually challenging.	<i>SUPERVISION CLIMATE</i>

Suggested improvements

COMMENT	AREAS OF RESEARCH TRAINING EXPERIENCE
Assistant supervisor was not experienced at supervising and needed to learn to balance criticism with encouragement.	<i>SUPERVISION</i>
Connecting with Department and School of Industrial Relations and Political Science was limited. No effective connection with school academics.	<i>CLIMATE</i>
Facilitating social atmosphere and connection among research students across all disciplines.	<i>CLIMATE</i>
Guidelines required for authorship of published work during candidacy. Too many supervisors advancing their own career through students' work. Borders on intellectual dishonesty at times.	<i>SUPERVISION</i>
I think the critical annual review could have been done for regularly, even if it was informal. The more feedback you can get from a breadth of sources, the better.	<i>SUPERVISION</i>
Perhaps a quicker examination process.	<i>THESIS EXAMINATION</i>
Social, networking opportunities.	<i>CLIMATE</i>
Zero opportunities to converse with fellow like-minded PhD students.	<i>CLIMATE</i>