

Faculty of Veterinary Science

Student Research Experience Questionnaire Report : 2005 - 2009

July 2010

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
INTRODUCTION.....	5
GLOSSARY	6
1 QUALITY OF SUPERVISION	7
2 QUALITY OF INFRASTRUCTURE.....	9
3 RESEARCH CLIMATE	11
4 GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES.....	13
5 OVERALL SATISFACTION	15
ATTACHMENT ONE: NOTES ON ANALYSIS AND COUNTING OF COMMENTS.....	17
ATTACHMENT TWO: SREQ SCALES: COVERAGE OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA.....	19

Report compiled by

*Rachel Symons
Quality Assurance Officer (Learning and Teaching)
Office of the DVC Education*

July 2010

rachel.symons@usyd.edu.au

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

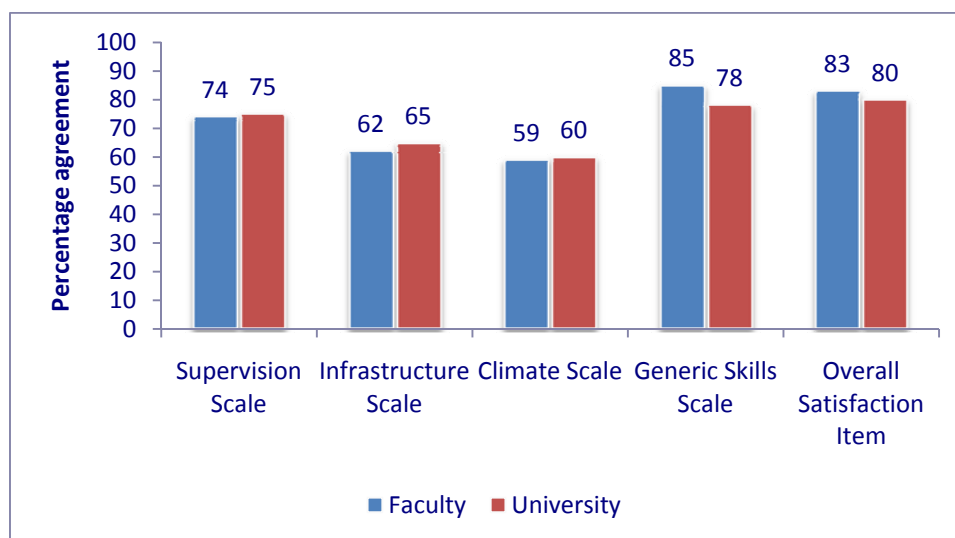
The following results are an indication of those areas of the student experience that were of significance to research higher degree students during 2009. The Faculty scores (percentage agreement results) reflect the experiences of respondents in relation to specific items in the survey; the qualitative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

55 research higher degree students (43 domestic and 12 international) responded to the 2009 SREQ.

Figure 1: Comparison of University and Faculty of Veterinary Science: Percentage agreement results: SREQ 2009



As indicated in the above chart, Faculty scores are similar to those for the University for Supervision, Infrastructure, Overall Satisfaction, and Climate, and significantly better for Generic Skills. Whilst at the University level, there has been little change over the past four years (2005 – 2009); at a Faculty level¹ results have steadily decreased in Supervision, Infrastructure, and Climate; are lower than the 2008 results, but identical with the 2007 result for Overall Satisfaction, and have remained steady for Generic Skills.

¹ 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. Please note that since the minimum number for reliable statistical analysis of SREQ results is 20, data for the international student experience in the following report should be interpreted with caution.

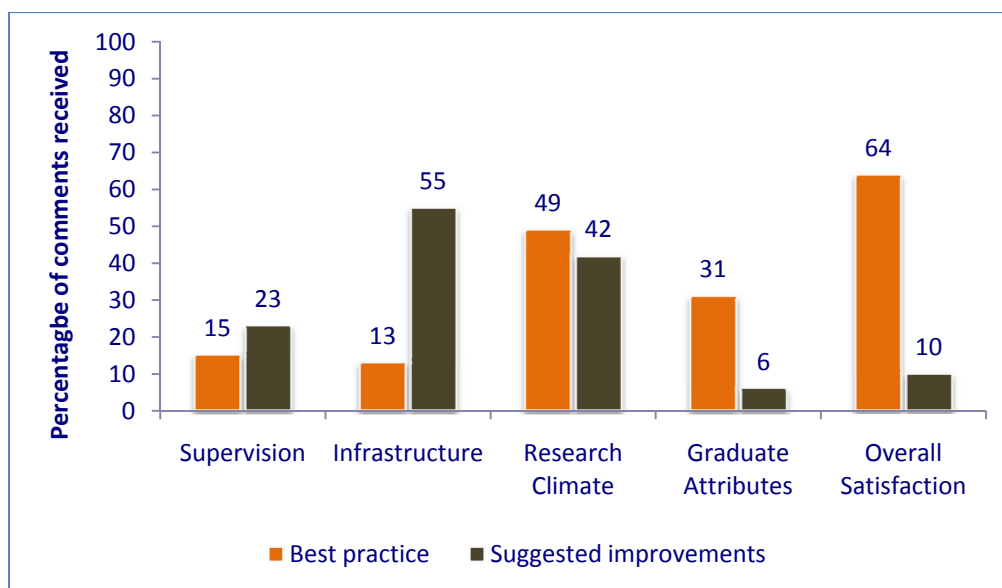
2 Focus of written observations SREQ 2009

38 respondents to the 2009 SREQ (31 domestic students; 7 international students) answered the open question requesting comments on areas of best practice in their research higher degree experience; 31 respondents (24 domestic students; 7 international students) suggested areas in need of improvement.

2.1 An overview

The following chart provides an overview of the research higher degree student experience of research training in the Faculty of Veterinary Science, 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.²

Figure 2: Faculty of Veterinary Science: Focus of written observations: SREQ 2009



2.2 Key issues

2.2.1 Quality of Supervision

- Comments relating to individual supervisors were evenly divided between those that were satisfied with the supervision they received and those that suggested improvements (10% of comments received each)
- A further 10% of respondents suggested improvements to the supervision process

2.2.2 Quality of infrastructure

- 13% of comments received expressed satisfaction with the infrastructure, including: administration, facilities, scholarships, library services and IT support
- Areas that were considered to be in need of improvement included: funding (26%); facilities (13% of comments received); and IT and technical support (6%).

2.2.3 Research Climate

- Respondents expressed satisfaction with: feeling part of a research community (21% of comments received); working in a supportive environment (10%); interaction with other research higher degree students (10%); and preparation for an academic or research career (8%).
- Conversely, respondents considered that improvements were needed in the same areas (work environment: 23%; interaction with other students: 6%; research community: 6%). In addition, students who were located off site experienced isolation due to their location (6%).

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

2.2.4 Graduate Attributes

- 18% of comments that fell within the remit of Graduate Attributes, referred to the development of tasks and abilities within the Research and Inquiry cluster e.g. research skills, analytical and critical thinking and problem solving.
- 6% of respondents suggested the running of programs introducing students to the basics of research.

2.2.5 Overall Satisfaction

- Over a third of comments received from respondents expressed satisfaction with their research and/or its contribution to the field.
- The flexibility of the program, allowing independent work on projects, was appreciated by 13% of respondents.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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

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

On the analysis and reporting of qualitative data

Ms Rachel Symons Quality Assurance Officer (Learning and Teaching), Office of the DVC Education

Phone: + 61 2 9351 6560

Email: rachel.symons@sydney.edu.au

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

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 Veterinary Science between 2002 and 2009. The report also provides detailed information on the key issues highlighted in the analysis of the 2009 SREQ qualitative data.

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.

Notes relating to the analysis and counting of comments are provided in attachments to the report.

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
Supervision Scale Infrastructure Scale Climate Scale Generic Skills Scale Overall Satisfaction Item	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• Infrastructure• Climate• Generic Skills• Overall Satisfaction Item Within the report, this naming convention is used to identify information relating to the analysis of the quantitative data (survey items)
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
Quality of Supervision Quality of Infrastructure Research Climate Graduate Attributes Overall Satisfaction	The University of Sydney Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ) is based upon categories used in the SREQ Taxonomy: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quality of Supervision• Quality of Infrastructure• Research Climate• Graduate Attributes• Overall Satisfaction 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).
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.

1 QUALITY OF SUPERVISION

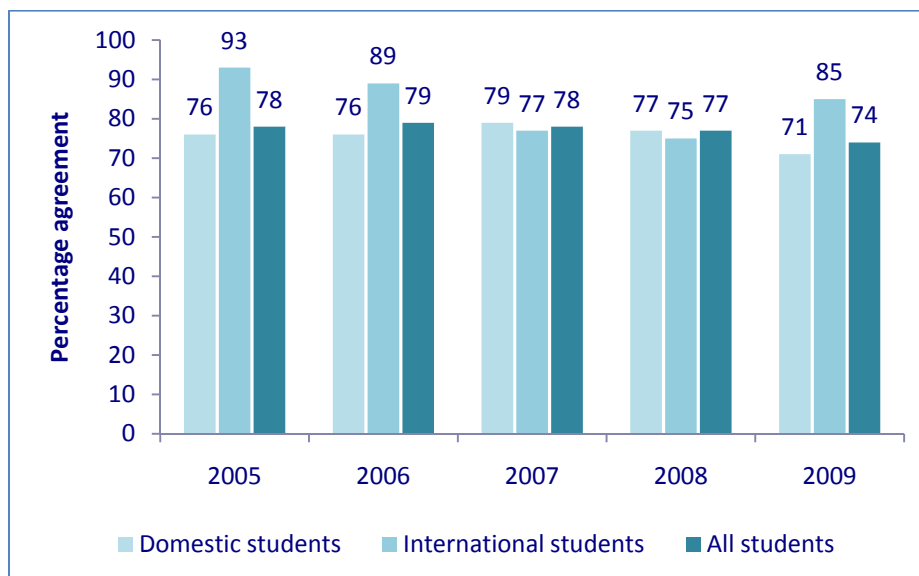
1.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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 2002–2009

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 2002 and 2009.

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<i>Areas of best practice</i>	Domestic				32%	22%	8%	13%
	International				17%	29%	17%	25%
	All	34%	29%	32%	28%	28%	23%	9%
<i>Areas needing improvement</i>	Domestic				16%	26%		25%
	International				27%	0%		14%
	All	28%	28%	32%	19%	19%	23%	23%

1.5 KEY ISSUES FOR RESEARCH HIGHER DEGREE STUDENTS (SREQ 2009)

1.5.1 Areas of best practice

	Domestic (n=31)	International (n= 8)	All (n= 39)
Supervisor(s)	6%	25%	10%

Sample comments

- *I receive good advice not just on my research but on my personal career goals which helps to keep my feet on the ground*
- *My supervisor has also advanced my training, travel opportunities and networking this has really made me happy in my PhD*
- *I have very good supervision*

1.5.2 Areas needing improvement

	Domestic (n=24)	International (n=7)	All (n=31)
Supervisor(s)	13%	0%	10%
Supervision process	8%	14%	10%

Sample comments

- *I feel that closer supervision is required, yet this may be an improvement that is unique to myself as I often feel insecure and afraid to begin something new alone*
- *Supervision is important in order to maintain direction of projects and to receive feedback and/or constructive criticism*
- *I am finding it very difficult to get any feedback from my supervisor. He is constantly 'too busy' and I never seem to rise to the top of the priority list!*

2 QUALITY OF INFRASTRUCTURE

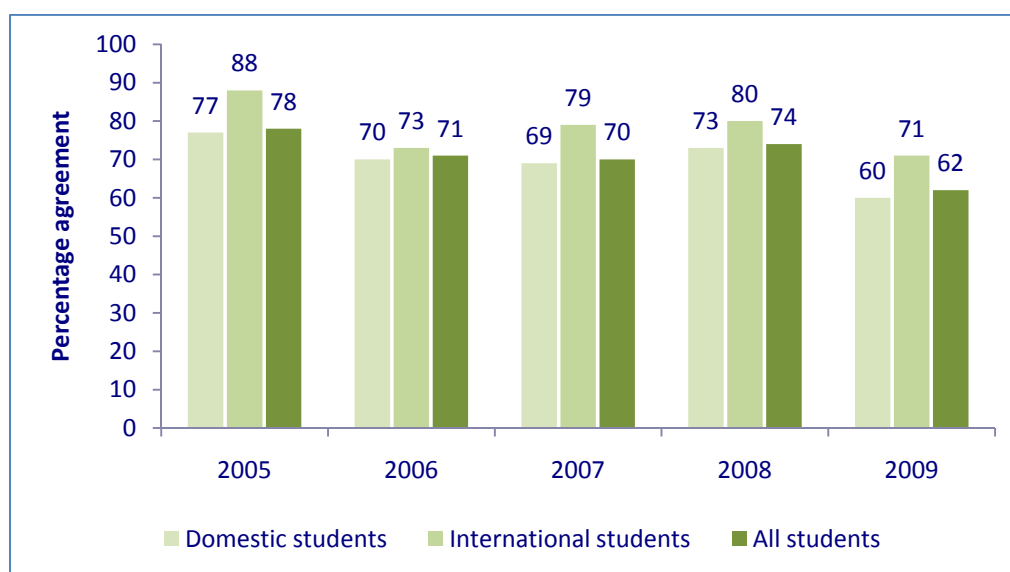
2.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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



2.4 COMPARATIVE RESULTS: FOCUS OF WRITTEN OBSERVATIONS 2002–2009

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 2002 and 2009.

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<i>Areas of best practice</i>	Domestic				22%	17%	18%	13%
	International				0%	0%	17%	13%
	All	21%	13%	25%	3%	17%	15%	18%
<i>Areas needing improvement</i>	Domestic				65%	50%		58%
	International				73%	50%		43%
	All	48%	65%	65%	75%	67%	50%	98%

2.5 KEY ISSUES FOR RESEARCH HIGHER DEGREE STUDENTS (SREQ 2009)

2.5.1 Areas of best practice

13% of respondents (5/39 comments received) were satisfied with the administration, facilities; funding; library services; and IT support.

Sample comments

- *Admin help: every time I have emailed admin or library staff (apart from supervisor) they have always replied practically immediately and been very helpful! it's amazing*
- *Having access to a APA as funding is not an issue*
- *generally there is good support available*

2.5.2 Areas needing improvement

	Domestic (n=24)	International (n=7)	All (n=31)
Facilities	13%	14%	13%
Finance and funding	25%	29%	26%
Support	8%	0%	6%

Sample comments:

- *Information about where to go to seek advice be it technical or otherwise since this can be difficult especially when just starting out*
- *Lack of funding for travel to seminars etc is a nuisance too*
- *The postgraduate room in the Gunn building is very old and poor and the kitchen facilities are terrible. They do not make for a pleasant working environment and so I often work from home instead but this then limits my interaction with other students*

3 RESEARCH CLIMATE

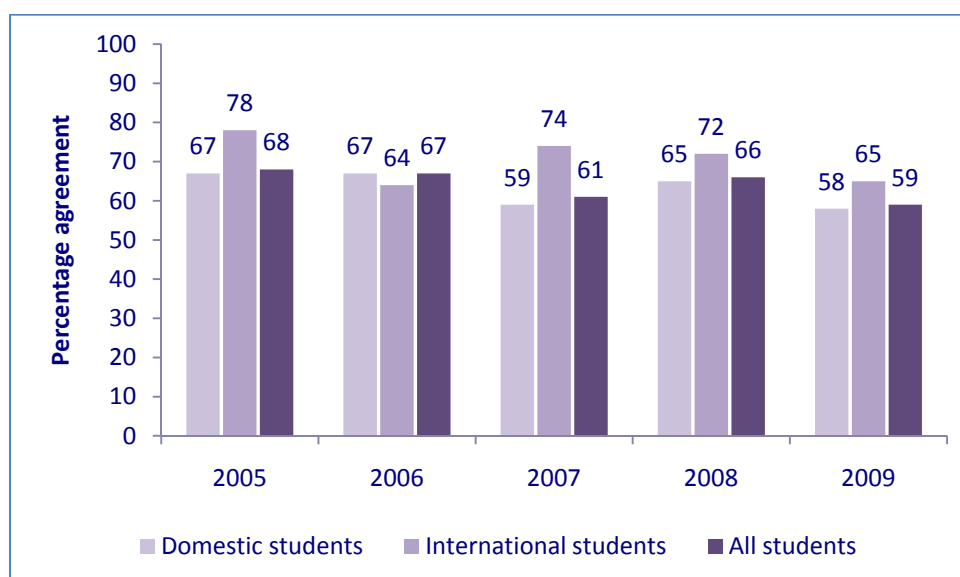
3.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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: 2002 - 2008



3.3 COMPARATIVE RESULTS: FOCUS OF WRITTEN OBSERVATIONS 2002–2009

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 2002 and 2009.

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Areas of best practice	Domestic				54%	56%	53%	39%
	International				33%	29%	67%	88%
	All	31%	33%	64%	45%	49%	52%	55%
Areas needing improvement	Domestic				43%	53%		42%
	International				36%	33%		43%
	All	62%	33%	24%	34%	42%	50%	37%

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

3.4.1 Areas of best practice

	Domestic (n=31)	International (n= 8)	All (n=39)
Research community	13%	50%	21%
Work environment	10%	13%	10%
Interaction with other research students	13%	0%	10%
Career preparation	3%	25%	8%

Sample comments

- *Interacting with other postgrads. Spending time with other postgrads helps to develop ideas and also provides a great support network.*
- *I really love being part of the faculty's research culture. I enjoy meetings and seminars with other researchers where we get to discuss each other's work*
- *Working alongside and being part of the Invasive Animals ARC. Because they are very supportive and organise many occasions to get together with students in the same field of research*

3.4.2 Areas needing improvement

	Domestic (n=24)	International (n=7)	All (n=31)
Work environment	17%	43%	23%
Interaction with other research students	8%	0%	6%
Research community	8%	0%	6%
Location and physical environment	8%	0%	6%

Sample comments: domestic students

- *Social interactions between postgraduate students, so many students are not interesting in social activities and do not see the value in interactions with other postgrads*
- *There can be time it feels isolating and 'stagnant', there should be avenues to highlight research interests, i.e. Faculty staff profile blurb, research interests etc*
- *Greater support and assistance is required for students who are located off-site and in my case, another state*

4 GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

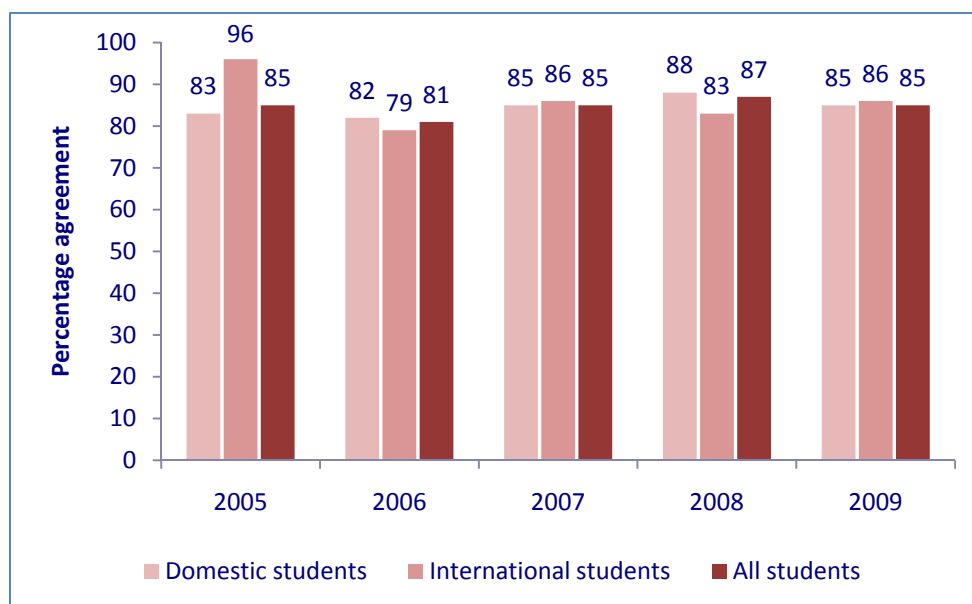
4.2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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 2002–2009

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 2002 and 2009.

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<i>Areas of best practice</i>	Domestic				27%	24%	29%	29%
	International				75%	86%	67%	38%
	All	69%	35%	59%	68%	38%	33%	31%
<i>Areas needing improvement</i>	Domestic				8%	16%		4%
	International				0%	17%		14%
	All	21%	11%	8%	19%	6%	16%	6%

4.2 KEY ISSUES FOR RESEARCH HIGHER DEGREE STUDENTS (SREQ 2009)

4.2.1 Areas of best practice

	Domestic (n=31)	International (n=8)	All (n=39)
Research and inquiry	16%	25%	18%

Sample comments

- *a very good opportunity to develop specialised skills in my field and consider how these might be applied to broader research*
- *Achieving a broader knowledge in the field and ability to pass this knowledge onto relevant people/researchers. This is important in conveying my message thus making my research important*
- *Developing skills, feeling what research is like*

4.2.2 Areas needing improvement

6% of respondents (2/31 comments received) considered that improvements were required in the development of research and professional skills for example through programs introducing students to the basics of research covering things such as experimental design, research planning and other necessary research skills.

5 OVERALL SATISFACTION

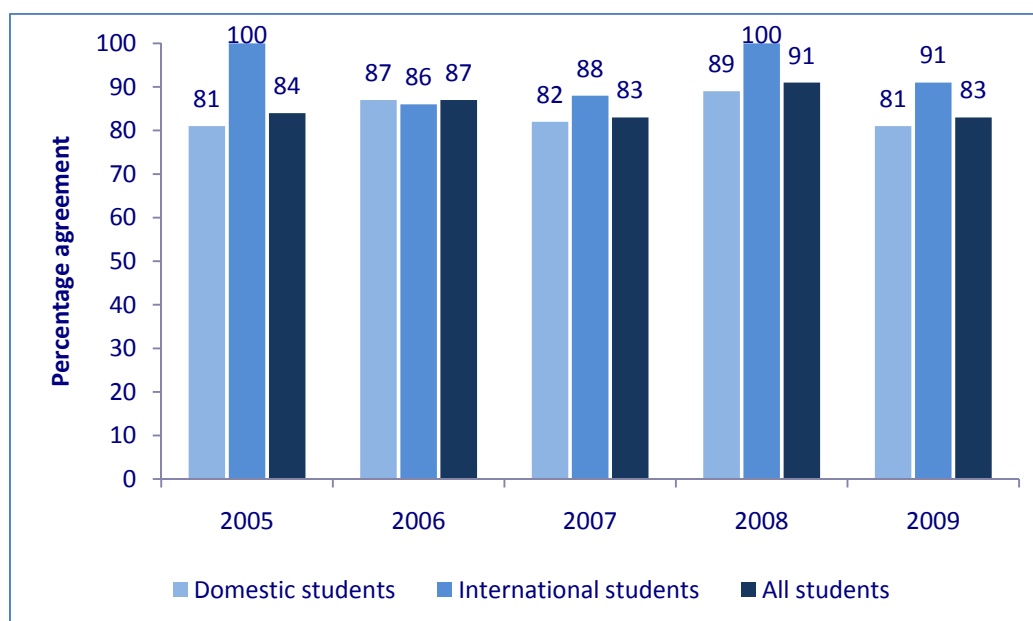
5.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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 2002–2009

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 2002 and 2009.

		2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<i>Areas of best practice</i>	Domestic					37%	41%	42%	58%
	International					42%	43%	0%	88%
	All	38%	31%	14%	35%	38%	42%	36%	64%
<i>Areas needing improvement</i>	Domestic					3%	11%		0%
	International					18%	0%		00%
	All	0%	0%	0%	3%	6%	9%	7%	0%

5.5 KEY ISSUES FOR RESEARCH HIGHER DEGREE STUDENTS (SREQ 2009)

5.5.1 Areas of best practice

	Domestic (n= 31)	International (n= 8)	All (n= 39)
Satisfaction with research	35%	50%	38%
Flexibility of program	19%	13%	13%

Sample comments

- *I enjoy the opportunity to work independently. This is because I can work on things at my own pace and organise my time the way I want to*
- *Able to follow paths of investigation in the literature - really satisfies my curiosity and drive to learn. Having the luxury of really thinking about animal behaviour is just lovely and for me, a complete indulgence!*
- *Planning and executing my own research: having a research idea in your mind, making a proposal out it, being supported by your supervisor, and having given an opportunity to execute yourself including financial and procurement matters gives you a sense of ownership and motivation. 'This is MY project'*

5.5.2 Areas needing improvement

No students provided comments suggesting improvements relating to their overall satisfaction with the degree experience.

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 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 caution³.

Number of respondents to the SREQ 2005 – 2009⁴

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=
Domestic students	43	46	48	56	43
International students	6	14	8	12	12
Total	49	60	56	68	55

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

		2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<i>Date of survey</i>		n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=	n=
<i>Areas of best practice</i>	Domestic students				38	41	41	38	31
	International students	29	48	44	2	12	7	6	8
	Total				40	53	48	44	39
<i>Areas of improvement</i>	Domestic students				31	37	38	39	24
	International students	29	46	37	1	11	6	4	7
	Total				32	48	44	43	31

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:

Qualitative data

Where the number of respondents is less than 5, results are excluded from the report as they are likely to be unreliable. For 2005, written observations received for both open questions are shown as a total; for 2008, written observations on areas of improvement are shown as a total, those for areas of best practice are separated into domestic and international.

Quantitative and qualitative data

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

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

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

⁴ Data retrieved from the ITL SREQ website results and reports for the Faculty of Veterinary Science on 19.09.09 and 01.07.10 <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/sreq/secure/rrr.cfm>

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:

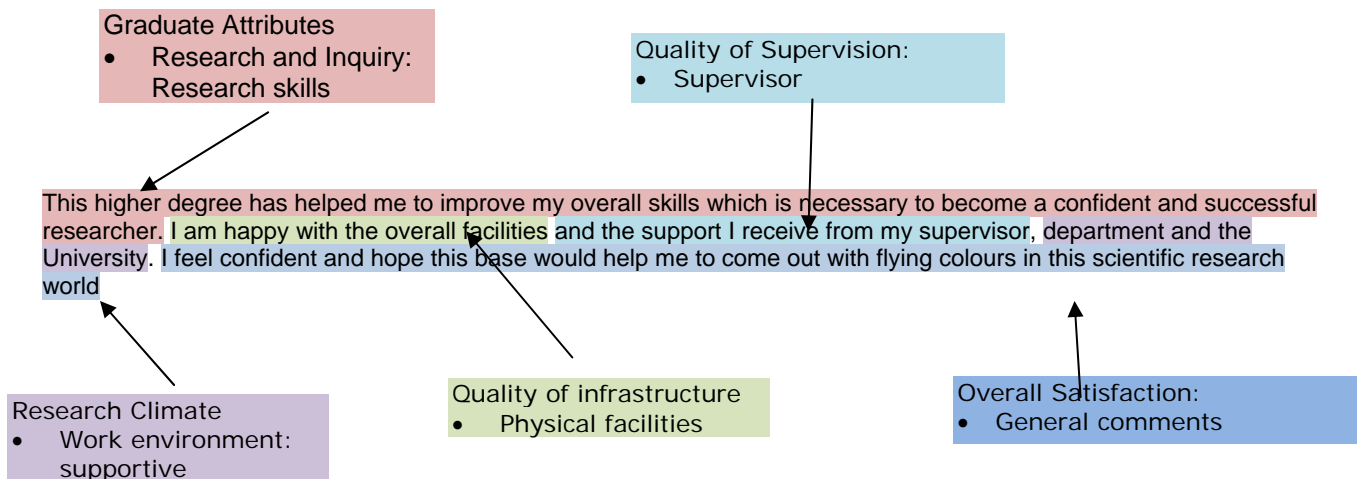
- Characteristics that define the area of the student experience
- SREQ survey items
- recurring themes in students' comments and have been developed over many years of analysing qualitative data from students' surveys.

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*⁵, 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); Quality of Infrastructure (Physical facilities); Research Climate (Work environment: supportive); and Graduate Attributes (Research and Inquiry: research skills); and Overall Satisfaction (General comments) the highlighted phrases within the comment are counted ONCE in each of the relevant categories i.e. 5 aspects in one comment.



⁵ 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 7 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