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TEACHING @ SYDNEY

November 2012



A better climate for your RHD students

Ways of improving the learning climate for higher degree research students - that was the focus of a Sydney Teaching Colloquium session that brought together leaders, supervisors and students to share and exchange ideas.

Among the key strategies discussed were the following:

1. Create an ongoing program in which research students get together to discuss the challenges they are facing and possible solutions. An example was provided by Professor Anita Bundy and research students Nicola Hancock and Justin Scanlan, of the Faculty of Health Sciences. In a program called Participation in Everyday Life (PIEL), PhD students meet two hours a week to discuss anything from getting published to getting enough research participants.
2. Offer a course on thesis and dissertation writing, which links writing support with research supervision, and which provides particular support to students who are writing in English as an Additional Language, given the isolation they often experience. Dr Bronwyn Dyson spoke about piloting such a course in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.
3. Offer a course, or a series of courses throughout the degree, on research. Dr Arlie Loughnan spoke about a course in the Faculty of Law ('Legal Research 3') which students take towards the end of their candidature and which comprises a planning session before the start of semester and a presentation session at the end of semester, with students working in pairs in between these sessions to swap and comment on each other's work.
4. Create a student group focused on writing, editing and publishing their work. Research students Zoe Alderton and Johanna Petsche, of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, spoke about the benefits of being part of such a group themselves; this led to guest-editing a journal, which involved liaising with postgraduate and academic authors and referees.
5. Schedule gatherings well ahead of time so that research students who may be spread out geographically can take part. An example mentioned in a group discussion was the Sydney Nursing School's Research Week, which is planned well in advance so that research students can come together from different parts of the country and abroad for a week of seminars and other activities.

More ideas discussed included the following: getting research students involved in research communities via faculty and cross-faculty networks, conferences, professional

associations, or external collaborators; doing a training needs analysis to identify what skills and knowledge the students will require during their candidature and where they might develop these; and creating fora in which experienced supervisors share with colleagues and/or students their expertise in doing research.

For further information about this Colloquium session, please click [here](#). To discuss ideas for fostering research communities in your part of the University, please contact [Cynthia Nelson](#).

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