

# GREAT EXPECTATIONS



## A GUIDE TO SUPERVISION FOR POSTGRADUATE & HONOURS STUDENTS

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## FOREWORD

*Welcome to Postgraduate & Honours study at Murdoch University. Firstly, congratulations on being accepted into the program. The next year(s) will be an incredible time for you as you research, ponder, write and edit. There is no doubt that you will experience a wide range of emotions during your candidature – excitement and disbelief, the joy when something comes together and despair when it doesn't, the sheer pleasure of being able to spend time researching something in which you are really interested. One of the main supports you will have during this time should be your supervisor. MUPSA has developed this booklet to help provide you with information regarding this important relationship. Its aim is to help you to develop a positive, productive, and rewarding relationship with your supervisor.*

*On behalf of the MUPSA Executive, I wish you every success and happiness throughout your coming studies.*

**Nick McCarthy**

**President**

**MUPSA**

**Murdoch University Postgraduate Students Association**

## **THE FIRST MEETING**

The supervision of postgraduates forms part of the University's core business. Therefore, it is important to establish contact and ease open the lines of communication early on in the relationship with your supervisor. Put time aside to arrange a meeting, convenient to both parties before you begin your postgraduate studies. Bearing in mind that all relationships require work; a willingness to communicate, negotiate and sometimes compromise will go a long way towards maintaining good relations.

## **GOAL SETTING**

A structured approach to postgraduate work is fundamental to the success of the overall experience. Clear and forthright discussion regarding expectations during the first meeting may help in avoiding problems further down the track. During the first meeting it's a good idea to set some goals and to discuss these with your supervisor. For example:

- Level of supervision
- A suitable schedule of regular meetings
- How you will communicate (via email or phone)
- Timelines for submission of work and monitoring of progress
- Mutual boundaries and a clarification of expectations for both parties

## **ACADEMIC SUPPORT**

The Teaching and Learning Centre has a dedicated staff member for honours and postgraduate students. They provide a number of seminars aimed at assisting students with the specific writing, researching, formatting and presentation skills required. Contact Julia Hobson at the teaching and learning Centre on 93606942 for further details.

The GREAT program, run by the Graduate Centre, also provides a wide range of seminars especially designed for postgraduate (non honours) research students. Contact Suzanne Knuiman (Graduate Centre Training Officer) on 9360 2740 for further details.

## YOUR EXPECTATIONS

The relationship between you and your supervisor should be a supportive, open and flexible arrangement and one in which your supervisor makes him/herself available at mutually agreeable times. Good supervision should involve regular meetings between the student and supervisor.

Your supervisor should also be able to provide guidance where reading material is concerned.

It is reasonable to expect that your supervisor would share his/her expertise, thus providing guidance throughout your postgraduate studies. Additionally, your supervisor should be available to advise you on the suitability of your chosen topic. It is reasonable to also expect that your supervisor will:

- Make time to meet with you and respond to your communications
- Offer support and encouragement throughout your postgraduate studies
- Listen and respond to your queries and/or concerns within a reasonable time
- Deal with your communications confidentially and with respect at all times
- Respect and protect your intellectual property
- Provide constructive feedback and criticism

As your progress and performance will be affected by feedback, it is important that you receive constructive feedback on all aspects of your performance. You should discuss this issue with your supervisor during the initial meeting. This will ensure that both you and your supervisor will have a shared set of guidelines in relation to 'timely' feedback. The most important roles that your supervisor will play are those of critique and supporter.

**This is how the Times Higher Education Supplement (22nd January 1988) reported a student's view of the qualities of an excellent supervisor.**

An excellent supervisor will:

- Be available when needed
- Keep to regular meeting times
- Give the student full attention during meetings
- Have the commitment to read the student's work well in advance
- Be friendly, open and supportive
- Be constructively critical
- Have a good knowledge of the research area
- Structure the working situation so that is relatively easy to exchange ideas
- Have the interest to put more information in the student's path
- Have the involvement to help postgraduate's get a good job.

### **SUPERVISOR'S EXPECTATIONS**

As a postgraduate student, you will be expected to approach your studies in a professional, autonomous and mature manner. You will be expected to be punctual when attending arranged meetings and you will be expected to hand work in on time. Your supervisor will also expect you to take a pro-active approach in all aspects of the student/supervisor relationship. Therefore, it is your responsibility to contact your supervisor should you encounter any study-related difficulties. Some of the attributes expected of you will be:

- Ability to work independently
- Enthusiasm
- Good time management skills
- Remain focussed on goals
- Meet with your supervisor on a regular basis
- Make regular progress reports
- Contact your supervisor if you experience difficulties
- Good communication skills

## TROUBLESHOOTING

Occasionally, the student/supervisor relationship may run into stormy waters. So it is important that issues are dealt with as they emerge rather than letting them drag you under. In the first instance, you should discuss and try to resolve the issue by consulting with your supervisor. It is crucial that you alert your supervisor to any study difficulties you are experiencing.

If your attempts to resolve the difficulties with your supervisor are not successful, we suggest you take the following steps:

- Contact the Representative for Post Graduate Studies in your division:

Arts .....	Georgina Wright .....	93602319
Science and Engineering .....	Sue Osborne.....	93602334
Health Sciences (Vet/Biomedical) .....	Dr Stan Fenwick .....	93607418
Health Sciences (Health/Psychology) .....	Dr Suzanne Dziurawiec.....	93602388

*Honours students should contact the Honours Programme Chair for their school. The Divisional Executive officer should be able to provide contact details for this person or at very least, point you in the right direction:*

Arts .....	Ms Kuan Lim.....	93602890
Science and Engineering .....	Mrs Pat Allen.....	93602367
Health Sciences .....	Miss Amelia Whitelaw.....	93602566

- The Guild of Students has a Postgraduate Representative and a Research Officer who may be able to confidentially assist you with advice and information. They are located in the MUPSA office and can be contacted on 93606353 or via email [postgrad@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:postgrad@murdoch.edu.au).
- MUPSA provides a range of services to assist postgraduate students. They maintain an updated website of all the services provided at <http://guild.murdoch.edu.au/mupsa>.
- Approach the head of your school
- If the issue cannot be resolved at the divisional level and you are a postgraduate Research Student, the Manager of the Graduate Centre is available for an open and confidential discussion. Your supervisor will not be contacted without your permission.

Manager of Graduate Centre.....	Ms Anne Randell.....	9360 2179
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- The University Research and Development Board has formalised dispute resolution procedures for Postgraduate Research Students. Details can be located at

the following website address:

<http://www.research.murdoch.edu.au/rds/dispres.asp>

If after exhausting all of these options, the matter still remains unresolved we suggest you approach the Executive Dean of your division.

## **NOT AN ACADEMIC PROBLEM?**

At times you may experience personal or family difficulties which affect your ability to perform and make good progress. Although your supervisor is not a trained counsellor, he/she may be able to refer you to the appropriate support staff member. There are a number of people on campus who may be able to assist you with difficulties of this nature:

Health & Counselling .....	9360 2293
Guild Education & Welfare Officer .....	9360 6583
Student Liaison Officers (International) .....	9360 6770

### **Off Campus**

Samaritans .....	9381 5555
Samaritans Youth Line .....	9388 2500
Lifeline (24 hr crisis phone line) .....	13 11 14
Family helpline .....	9223 1100
Parenting helpline .....	9272 1466

## **ABOUT MUPSA**

MUPSA is a council of the Murdoch Guild of Students. They employ a part time research officer, who along with the executive, provides support and assistance for all postgraduate students.

Services provided include social events, confidential advice, advocacy, representation and information provision. You can also subscribe to postgrad news by emailing the research officer ([postgrad@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:postgrad@murdoch.edu.au)) or check out our website [www.guild.murdoch.edu.au/mupsa](http://www.guild.murdoch.edu.au/mupsa) <<http://www.guild.murdoch.edu.au/mupsa>> for the latest updates.

## CONTACT NUMBERS

**Postgraduate Representative and Research Officer . . . . .9360 6353**

### **Divisional Representatives for Post Graduate Studies**

Arts (Georgina Wright) . . . . .93602319

Science and Engineering (Sue Osborne) . . . . .93602334

Health Sciences - Vet/Biomedical (Dr Stan Fenwick) . . . . .93607418

Health Sciences - Health/Psychology(Dr Suzanne Dziurawiec) . . .93602388

### **Divisional Executive Officers**

Arts (Ms Kuan Lim) . . . . .93602890

Science and Engineering (Mrs Pat Allen) . . . . .93602367

Health Sciences (Miss Amelia Whitelaw) . . . . .93602566

### **Other helpful folk on Campus**

Guild Education & Welfare Officer . . . . .9360 6583

Health & Counselling . . . . .9360 2293

Manager of Graduate Centre . . . . .9360 2179

Student Liaison Officers (International) . . . . .9360 6770

Teaching and Learning Centre (Julia Hobson) . . . . .9360 6942

Contact details correct –December 2005

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