1. Postgraduate Research Experience

Characteristics, degree completion times & thesis quality of Australian PhD candidates
Sid Bourke, Allyson Holbrook, Terry Lovat & Kerry Dally, Quality in Postgraduate Research Conference 2004

Introduction by DEST of the Research Training Scheme (RTS) tightened the financial guidelines for direct governmental support of research higher degree candidature, raising institutional and individual student concerns about degree time taken to completion, and the ‘quality’ of result obtained. This study involved 601 PhD candidates across all discipline areas and six Australian universities. It demonstrates the relationship between time taken to complete the degree and candidate characteristics, university attended and discipline area. Some of the more important variables for completion time were proportion of full-time enrolment, notification of a problem during candidature, holding a scholarship, age at commencement and being a native English speaker.


What factors influence timely completion? Susan Gasson & Lisa Reyes, Quality in Postgraduate Research Conference 2004

This study identifies factors that may influence timely completion of research candidature by examining the profile of a number of research candidatures completed in less than 4.5 years. Factors considered included student profile (gender, study mode), infrastructure support (scholarships or funding) and supervisory arrangements as well as discipline area. The common thread was that all students maintained the same supervisory team and, in the majority of cases, the same principal supervisor throughout their candidature.


Quality & pressure to complete: The experiences of doctoral scholarship holders
Leonie Rennie, Quality in Postgraduate Research Conference 2004

This paper reports research that analysed the reasons for a given sample seeking scholarship extensions. Quality of supervision was the major factor that either facilitated or hindered students’ completion of their degree. Other barriers related to the adequacy of work facilities and equipment, personal, family and some gender-related matters. The research indicates that many of the problems faced by students are preventable by sensible and sensitive supervision and planning. Time devoted early in the degree experience to choice of the research problem and design, and in establishing realistic time frames pays dividends in a quality research experience and outcome.

The Doctoral Education Experience: Diversity and Complexity, Ruth Neumann, Macquarie University, EIP 03/12, Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003

This study examines doctoral students’ educational experiences across four discipline groups and six universities. Consideration was given to type of doctorate (PhD or professional doctorate), mode of enrolment (full or part time), and stage of research (early, middle or late). The report concludes that the large majority of students are positive about their doctoral programs. For some however the experience is at best neutral or mildly disappointing and for a small number fairly traumatic.

Some of the key findings include:
- Financial and resource issues are strongly differentiating factors, both between full and part time students and between students in the hard and soft disciplines.
- The opportunities for students’ feedback to their institution on their experiences and satisfaction are limited and inconsistent.
- There is a need for more flexible entry and exit points within the doctorate.
- Very few students enter a doctorate with a specific career in mind (including an academic career). Professional doctorate students do not see the qualification as relevant to advancing their careers.
- Universities need to offer career development opportunities for doctoral candidates
- Hard disciplines are more likely to avoid recruiting part time students and certain categories of overseas students.
- There are stark resource differences and opportunities for students in the hard and soft disciplines
- Tensions in industry funded doctoral research include the industry partners’ expectations that students will work on non thesis related activities (hard disciplines) and topic definition (soft disciplines).
- Satisfaction with acculturation opportunities is stronger in research intensive universities. The absence of a departmental role in acculturation opportunities most noticeably affects students in soft disciplines and part time students across the disciplinary range.

Modelling Quality Experiences for Women in Research Higher Degrees, Summary Report 2003, Fran Ferrier et al.

This study examines issues for women undertaking research degrees at Monash University. In particular, it identifies some of the best practices developed at Monash and elsewhere so that women researchers could be supported through to successful completions.

The report identifies a need for increased flexibility to meet individual needs including options for part-time research, information on the availability of childcare and family support programs, realistic information on career options, and encouraging and supportive environment and additional financial support.

Postgraduate Completion Rates, Yew May Martin, Maureen Maclachlan, Tom Karmel, Occasional Paper Series, Higher Education Division, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 2001

This paper addresses government concern about long completion times and low completion rates for postgraduate research students. The study is an analysis of completion rates of postgraduate research students who commenced in 1992.

Key findings were:
- By 1999, 53% of postgraduate research doctoral students and 31% of masters students who commenced an award in 1992 had completed that course;
- Around 2% of doctoral and 14% of masters research students had completed courses generally other than the one they enrolled in;
- Almost 18% of doctoral students and 16% of masters students had not completed any award course and were still studying in 1999.
- Completion rates are generally higher for full-time students than part-time students;
- Completion rates vary across fields of study, being higher for veterinary science and science and lower for arts, social science and legal studies;
- Women are more likely to complete a masters award course than men but there are no significant gender differences in completing doctorate degrees;
- Completion rates generally decline as age increases;
- University specific factors explain a significant proportion of the variation in completion rates;
- In terms of EFTSU consumed by the 1992 cohort, 22.8% was consumed by those who did not complete an award.
- Overall completion rates of the cohort are estimated to be 65% for doctoral and 48% for masters students.
- Only 36.1% of doctoral and 18% of masters students are estimated to have completed within 4 years and 2 years of full-time equivalent study respectively.

The authors conclude that universities need to look at their selection and supervision practices and suggest that the performance-based funding of the research training scheme should assist in focussing universities’ attention to this problem.


2. Postgraduate Coursework Experience

Online Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: A Case Study, Glen Postle et al, University of Southern Queensland, EIP 03/11, Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003

This study investigates the issues arising from the introduction of online education in higher education using postgraduate education students at the University of Southern Queensland as a case study. The purposes of the study were to assess the applicability of online education for higher education institutions, to document the issues with which teachers have to come to terms in the online environment, and to determine whether there might be a ‘pedagogical framework’ that is unique for online education in higher education.

Key findings include:
- Online education disrupted staff and student expectations relating to curriculum design, curriculum implementation, and teacher and learner roles.
- Students and staff working in the online environment operated outside of traditional temporal norms.
- Levels of communicative engagement for gender and different cultural groups were similar, indicating that the relative anonymity and the asynchronous nature of online education might remove barriers to participation.
- Teachers had become managers of learning and they seemed comfortable with the notion that they had to combine this role with another one that defined them as learning partners.
- This interactive capability was viewed as a powerful pedagogical tool, but staff had not yet come to terms with the demands that were being placed on them through the 24 hour a day x 7 day a week capabilities of online education.
- Staff and students expressed concern that pedagogical imperatives might be taking second place to commercial interests.
- One of the clearest findings to emerge from the study is that there does not exist at this time a shared pedagogical framework for online education.

Improving access and equity for postgraduates from rural and isolated areas, Emmaline Bexley, Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations, November 2003

This paper contends that the needs of rural and isolated postgraduate students are largely ignored by the Commonwealth. Until these students are recognised as a legitimate equity group little can be done to address their needs.

Key findings include:
- Around half the postgraduates from rural and isolated areas study by distance mode, the remainder are internal students at a local rural university.
- Rural and isolated students are concentrated in external coursework masters programs, however this is proportionally higher than the overall postgraduate population.
- Proportion of rural and isolated students studying postgraduate courses below the masters level is much higher than in the overall population.
- 80% of total rural and isolated postgraduate students study in the eastern states.
- Government schemes are directed at either rural regions or rural undergraduates.
- Few supports exist for rural and isolated students who choose to study at metropolitan institutions.
- More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students live in rural or remote areas compared to non-Indigenous students.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who move to metropolitan universities to undertake postgraduate study can experience cultural and educational isolation.
- For some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students distance education can be a positive experience of learning in a culturally inclusive manner.

The paper outlines a number of strategies successfully employed by student associations to address the needs of rural and isolated postgraduate students.


Out of sight, out of mind? Strategies for supporting external postgraduate students, a briefing paper by the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA), June 2003

This briefing paper discusses the educational experience of external postgraduate students, describing the difficulties they may encounter due to their distance from the university and suggesting strategies for their support.

These include strategies to:
- reduce isolation
- improve communication
- reduce frustration
- reduce administrative difficulties
- increase access to Communications and Information Technology (CIT)
- improve access to university resources
- improve access to student support services

The paper proposes that universities make a greater effort to involve external postgraduate students in campus life through regular newsletters, incorporating an element of face-to-face contact, ensuring staff communicate with students via a range of channels and providing dedicated academic and support service liaison staff. Many of these strategies may be of equal interest and applicability to other student cohorts irrespective of mode delivery.


3. International Postgraduate Student Experience
Background Paper on Equity of Conditions for International Postgraduate Students, Emmaline Bexley, Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations, March 2004

This paper critiques five key aspects of federal government policy that CAPA believes discriminates against international postgraduate students:

- Overseas Student Program Assessment Levels are inherently racist and based on a flawed assumption as the countries nominated as high risk do not necessarily coincide with visa non-compliance.
- Visa costs for international students are the highest in the world
- Compulsory work permits for international students are out of step with other comparable nations
- CAPA argue that international students should be entitled to work after graduation in Australia for up to one year
- Public education costs should be clearly communicated to international students.


4. Resources for Postgraduates

2004 Statement of Minimum Resources for Postgraduate Study, Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations

This paper proposes minimum standards of facilities and resources for postgraduates. Although a number of institutions have policies related to resources for postgraduate research students, there appears to be no specific policies for postgraduate coursework students as the needs of this cohort are considered similar to those of undergraduate students (a view disputed by CAPA).

The paper details common needs for both coursework and research postgraduates covering induction, facilities, study environment, timetabling and ancillary services.

CAPA recommends that all universities undertake demographic analysis of their postgraduate coursework cohort in order to better understand their needs. It suggests that after hours facilities and services must be available for all part time students in this cohort.

Additional support for postgraduate research students should include agreements between the postgraduate and supervisor, study space and explicit examination procedures.


Role of campus services in supporting tertiary education

The recent government proposal that universities do not collect fees that are not directly related to course provision brought a strong response from the campus services sector. ACUMA, the professional association representing the sector, argued in its submission to the Senate Inquiry into Higher Education Funding and Regulatory Legislation that universities should continue to collect a compulsory amenities and services fee. It argued that this funding was critical to provide the services and facilities necessary to create a fully functional and effective academic community.

ACUMA estimates that if the amenities and services fee is optional, the sector would lose 75% of its revenue funding. It suggests that sudden structural change of this magnitude would have major adverse consequences for the sector. Particularly hard hit would be services with low commercial viability such as student employment, welfare, childcare and advocacy services.

5. RMIT Postgraduate Experience

Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ), 2003
Summary of RMIT results, Dr. Robyn Barnacle

The PREQ 2003 is a national survey of research degree candidates who submitted for examination during 2002 that is conducted by the Graduate Careers Council of Australia. The RMIT sample was 174 graduates representing a response rate of 51%. Key survey results are as follows:

**Graduate Employment**
- The majority of graduates were employed and have previous experience in full-time employment

**Quality of Experience**
- Overall, graduates were satisfied with their experience, at close to 70% satisfaction.
- Graduates were particularly satisfied with skills development, at over 80% satisfaction, and their understanding of the goals and expectations of doing a research degree, at around 75% satisfaction.
- Graduates recorded a mixed response regarding supervision, from 70% satisfaction with the efforts of the supervisor to understand the difficulties that candidates face, to only 45% satisfaction with the supervisor’s guidance on the literature search.
- Graduate’s satisfaction with infrastructure provision was marginal, at just over 50%. Satisfaction was particularly low in regards to levels of financial support at just over 40%.
- Only 45% of graduates were quality of the intellectual environment. The question of whether research ambiance in the department was conducive to research attracted the lowest level of satisfaction in the survey at 34%.
- Female graduates appeared to be less satisfied than male graduates, with some questions attracting a disparity of up to 32%.

**Comparison results**
- Scale means were slightly less favourable for 2003 compared to the 2002 result on overall experience, examination, supervision and infrastructure, and slightly improved for skill development, goals and expectations and the intellectual climate.
- The mean percentage agreement for RMIT is consistently lower than the national average, with the disparity ranging from 2% (goals and expectations) to 15% infrastructure.


2003 Graduate Destination Survey

The percentage of RMIT postgraduate coursework students in full-time work in the year after completion has over the past two years fallen below the national average. Of the 2002 graduates, 84.8% were in full-time work compared to 85.5% nationally.

RMIT’s postgraduate coursework graduates are far more likely than their national counterparts to continue in full-time study. This is primarily due to those completing Graduate Certificates and Postgraduate Diplomas continuing with full-time study.

RMIT generally produces a higher proportion of self-employed graduates than are employed nationally. In the latest survey, 7.5% of RMIT postgraduate coursework students were self-employed four months after completion.


Research Student Exit Survey, 2002/2003, Professor Robin Usher, Research and Graduate Studies Committee, RMIT University
This survey indicates that although graduates were in broad terms satisfied with their experience at RMIT, there was a significant minority whose experience was poor or unsatisfactory.

Many graduates indicated that their research degree was a rich and rewarding experience, developing a sense of personal effectiveness in addition to research skills. On the other hand, generic skill development did not figure strongly, particularly in relation to enhanced job prospects and career development.

Negative factors were related to poor supervision, inadequate facilities, lack of funding for conference attendance, cumbersome processes and a less than optimum research environment.

Recommendations arising from the survey include a need to improve the research environment, facilities and support provided to students (including more conference attendance). Staff should be better trained in the relational aspects of supervision and more time should be allocated to properly supervise students. Staff should also become more aware of the importance of generic skills development in research programs.

http://mams.rmit.edu.au/3hktixpot7s.pdf

2002 Course Experience Questionnaire
(reference also in Student Life Volume 3)

An analysis of the results of the 2002 Course Experience Questionnaire suggests that age and citizenship influence the experiences of postgraduate coursework students.

Postgraduate students expressed greater confidence in unfamiliar problems and understood what was expected of them. Age seemed to make a difference to the student’s ability to plan their own work and work as a team member. There was also a stronger perception that teaching staff worked hard to make their subjects interesting.

In terms of citizenship, more domestic students indicated that they knew what was expected of them compared to international students. Domestic students also better understood the standard of work that was expected of them, and believed that they were given enough time to understand the things they had to learn.

By contrast, more international students believed that their program helped them to develop their ability to work as a team member. More international students thought that staff seemed more interested in testing their memory rather than comprehension, and believed that memory was the main factor in successfully completing their program. International students also responded more positively to the idea that teaching staff motivated them to do their best work.

R. Barnacle (August 2002), Exploring Issues Associated with the Postgraduate Research Environment at RMIT, RMIT University
(reference also in Student Life Volume 2)

This study aimed to investigate how research students and academic staff at RMIT experience the postgraduate research environment how the postgraduate research environment can be improved.

The study used qualitative methods consisting primarily of focus groups with a sample of research students from each Faculty at RMIT, and interviews with academics involved in the management of research degree programs within RMIT and across the ATN.

The findings demonstrated that considerable dissatisfaction exists amongst research students at RMIT with the quality of the research environment. The study found that the critical factor in determining the quality of the research student experience is the presence of a scholarly community, and that the key to improving the research environment is the level of enthusiasm and commitment of academic staff, and also to a lesser extent, students, toward research.
Students’ comments indicated that a gulf exists for many between their expectations regarding a good research environment and their experience at RMIT. Research student aspirations regarding the research environment were summarised as follows:

- To be embraced as part of a vibrant, engaging and supportive culture of research (i.e.; passion for discovery, scholarship and ideas).
- Desire for respect: to be treated as a researcher (rather than just (sic) a student).
- To receive the necessary technical, library and financial support that will enable the successful realization of a research program.
- A physical environment that promotes the emergence of both spontaneous and formal opportunities for intellectual and social exchange between and amongst academics and students.

The study found that mode of enrolment and discipline were no guarantee as to the quality of the research student experience, but that students enrolled full time had higher expectations regarding the research environment than those enrolled part time.

Comments from academic staff indicated that they shared many of the concerns and aspirations of research students. It was also evident that impediments to academic staff undertaking research and engaging in a scholarly community needed to be addressed in tandem with issues associated with the postgraduate research environment.

The report offered recommendations for improving the research learning environment through:

- Improving the quality of the research cultures or communities experienced by research students at RMIT through review of practice in departments;
- Adopting a comprehensive approach to the treatment of research within departments, being clear, for example, of the nature of the research student experience that is being offered;
- Developing formal opportunities for research students to attend seminars and present work in the presence of other students and academics;
- Review the library to ascertain whether it is being sufficiently resourced to meet the special needs of research students;
- ensure that laboratories are sufficiently serviced by experienced staff and that if a students’ research is funded by an external body that it does not cause undue stress on the student or undermine the content and outcomes of their research;
- Conduct a review within departments or programs into the impact that impediments on staff undertaking research have on the research environment experienced by students.

http://mams.rmit.edu.au/tw4n0wh3tjzg.pdf

Investigating Part-Time Research Students in Professional Work, R. Barnacle, 2002

This pilot study looked at part-time research students employed in professional work, to ascertain how such students acquire and develop general capabilities in the workplace and in what ways they contribute research knowledge and skills to the workplace.

The study was conducted in the context of Federal Government concern that research degree graduates, are often inadequately prepared for employment and the needs of the knowledge economy and national innovation systems.

These claims assume that all research degree students are young, enrolled full-time and lack workplace experience. They also fail to distinguish between different categories of research students: those who are already professional workers; and those undertaking their research degrees part-time.

The study revealed that the vast majority of part-time research students are professionals working full-time and their research activities are productively related to their workplace practice. It found that professionals utilise research and general skills gained through their research experience and attribute special significance to the value of analytical skills such as critical thinking within the workplace.
On-going Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (OPRES) 2002, Dr. R. Barnacle, RMIT University

This biennial survey investigates current research degree candidate satisfaction with their experience at RMIT.

Key findings include:
- Supervision was highly rated, particularly student access to their supervisor. Students were less satisfied with the quality of interaction with their supervisor.
- Research environment received the lowest rating. This varies according to faculty.
- Resources and support, particularly financial support, recorded low satisfaction.
- Research skills acquisition attracted a moderate level of satisfaction, as did questions relating to policies and procedures.
- Females recorded a lower overall mean response than men.
- Off-campus students recorded a lower overall mean response to all scales (except supervision).
- Only half of all respondents were offered an induction program.

Recommendations arising from the findings focus on the need to improve the quality of the research culture and to counter isolation amongst research candidates. Ensuring all candidates are properly inducted would go some way to address these problems.

RMIT International Career Index Email Survey (2001)
(reference also in Student Life Volume 2)

The 2001 survey of RMIT alumni produced the following information related to postgraduate study:
- 84% of graduates reported they would consider postgraduate study at RMIT claiming they enjoyed previous studies here.
- 39.1% of respondents gave their main reason for discontinuing postgraduate study as not having enough time
- 21.7% cited financial difficulties as reason for withdrawing from postgraduate study
- 55% cited not having enough time as a reason for not undertaking postgraduate study at all
- 82% believed they did not need it to further their current career
- 97% claimed they did not have the qualifications to undertake postgraduate study
- 34.9% of respondents were keen to receive information about developing their business in Victoria.

(reference also in Student Life Volume 2)

RMIT initiated a program of on-going quantitative market research to assess public opinion, beliefs and perceptions regarding key performance issues.

The main issues arising from discussions with RMIT full-fee paying postgraduate research students were:

Motivated by Employment
- The main reason most students chose to do postgraduate research was to improve employment prospects. Students wanted to further their careers as “researchers” or to become better qualified in a particular area. Most students believed obtaining a postgraduate qualification was the only way to move forward.

Satisfaction with Projects
Students enjoyed doing practical projects and solving real problems that existed right now. Most seemed happy with the projects they were involved with at RMIT. They described RMIT’s projects as practical, flexible and relevant to industry.

*Selecting a University*
- The reputation of the supervisor was a significant factor in choice of university at postgraduate level.
- In most cases students went wherever they were offered a position and were happy with their supervisor.
- Some students did very little “shopping around” of other universities.
- Many students had completed their undergraduate degree and/or honours at RMIT and had been satisfied with their supervisors, subsequently deciding to stay at RMIT.
- Many students found that RMIT was the only university who specialised in their particular area or allowed them to pursue a specific topic or area of interest.
- Funding and the availability of scholarships was a significant factor in choice of university.

*International Students*
- One of the major differences between local and international students was the right to scholarships.
- There were no significant differences between the concerns of international students and other students in general.

Concerns included:

*Lack of Space and Poor Facilities*
- RMIT students thought they were disadvantaged by the lack of space and poor facilities at RMIT.
- Lack of office space
- Books, periodicals and journals in the library were not current and students frequently had to go to other universities’ libraries.
- Limited access to the internet from home.
- The network was often down or crashed frequently and students were cut off from the internet and email.
- Email addresses were students’ ID numbers instead of their names.
- Students felt these problems caused delays in their research and completion times.

*Lack of Funding*
- Students were dissatisfied with the situation regarding travel grants and funding for conferences. RMIT rarely provided funding for conferences, whereas students perceived that at other universities travel grants were easily obtained.
- Departments were very inflexible and slow in relation to obtaining funds for materials, equipment, etc that were vital to their research.

*No Collaboration*
- Lack of opportunities to work together teams with other research students.
- The atmosphere at RMIT is very secretive and protective.

*Lack of Support*
- Lack of technical staff to assist students in labs.
- Lack of contact / process for dealing with students’ problems.

*RMIT: A Research University?*
- Students questioned RMIT’s credibility as a research university and believed there was much progress required to fulfil RMIT’s research performance objectives.
- Students perceived RMIT as a business-orientated university mainly interested in making profit.
- Better facilities, more technical staff and more experienced supervisors with good reputations were required to achieve performance objectives in research.

*Improved Facilities and Student Support*
- RMIT’s lack of facilities and support services for students was perceived as a barrier to attracting high caliber students and need to be addressed.
- Supervisors indicated that facilities were poor in most departments. Supervisors also believed the scattering of the buildings and departments prevented students from interacting and developing a collegiate atmosphere.

**The Internet**
- Internet usage was significantly higher than the previous wave, suggesting the internet is becoming an increasingly popular tool to find information about courses.
- 46% of VCE students had used the internet to look up course information; again this is much higher than the previous wave.
- Only 3% of VCE students surveyed did not have access to the internet.

6. Lifelong Learning


This bibliography illustrates the wide range of education and training issues that have drawn upon the rhetorical power of lifelong learning. It demonstrates that, because the concept draws on traditional notions of the importance of education and training for personal and social development, it has found acceptance both within the education and training profession and in the wider community. However, it also indicates that the ready adoption of the term by policy makers has rendered the term a ‘catch-all’. The different ways it is used in policy statements and commissioned research is not sufficiently interrogated in the academic literature for the concept to develop the strength necessary to usefully engage with current education and training issues and debates.


**Lifelong Learning in Australia**, Louise Watson, Lifelong Learning Network, University of Canberra, EIP 03/13, Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003

This paper examines the lifelong learning policy agenda in Australia and concludes that it emphasises self-funded and self-motivated participation in both formal and informal learning.

Some of the key findings include:
- The lifelong learning policy agenda is built on assumptions about the importance of skills in the new economy.
- Australia has high levels of adult participation in both informal and formal education and training. Participation is highest among wage and salary earners, and an increasing amount of work-related external training is financed by individuals rather than employers.
- Although overall levels of participation in education and training in Australia are high, there is a widening gap between the participation rates of people with high skills and people with low skills. Workers in low skilled jobs receive fewer opportunities and less employer support for participation in training than workers in high skilled jobs.
- A key issue in lifelong learning is the predictability, consistency and transparency of credit transfer and recognition of prior learning procedures.


**Skills at Work: Lifelong Learning and Changes in the Labour Market**, Christopher Ryan and Louise Watson, EIP 03/14, Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003

This paper looks at the ways in which the ‘new economy’ has changed the nature of work and has implications for workers’ education and training. The new economy is described as strong growth in the services sector, increased levels of productivity growth and globalised markets.
Overall, the measured effect of employer-based characteristics on employee training appears to reflect a pragmatic approach to training by businesses – they train when it is necessary (not where they consider their workforce adequately trained) and choose those who need it (workers who are affected by workplace change, work in low skill sectors of the economy or have high PC use). Employers’ views of what training is ‘necessary’ might be challenged and be subject to change, but they appear to be important determinants of who undertakes training courses in Australia.


7. International Research into the Postgraduate Experience

Using emotional and social factors to predict student success, Pritchard, M, Wilson, G, Journal of College Student Development; Jan/Feb 2003; vol 44, no
(reference also in Student Life Volume 3)

In the US context, research undertaken by the Committee on the College Student Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry (GAP) contends that graduate students are vulnerable in different circumstances to the traditional undergraduate student (which is seen as the ‘norm’ of university students). Of key importance is the recognition of the specific needs of the graduate cohort, which includes access to healthcare, social networks, career placement and transition from graduate school. The take away message is the importance for university staff that work directly with students to be made aware of the broad issues graduate students encounter and ways in which their specific needs can be addressed and worked through.

Aslanian, C (2001), Adult Students Today, Aslanian Group
Kasworm, C (2003), Setting the Stage: Adults in Higher Education, in New Directions for Student Services, No. 102
(reference also in Student Life Volume 3)

Studies undertaken by U.S. researchers Aslanian (2001) and Kasworm (2003) have shown that adults enter higher education for reasons that include:

- Career (identified as one key factor);
- Family transitions (including personal life transitions or catalysts reflecting external environmental forces);
- Leisure needs (due to individual changing worlds and response to seeking and creating new opportunities; this group could be denoted as proactive planners and are more likely to have articulated expectations of what higher learning is all about);
- Combination of factors (in part this is due to those responding to life transitions and proactively planning for better outcomes through studies);
- Artistic interest.

According to Aslanian (2001), the majority of adult students in America are female, from a Caucasian background and average 40 years of age. The majority of adult students are married, employed in full time professional positions and are usually well-educated. Most adult students are ‘active’ in their communities and undertake a significant amount of voluntary work. The majority of adult students are motivated to begin or return to college because of career transitions and therefore enrol in vocational programs. Most study on a part-time basis due to work and family commitments and seek logistical and administrative ease as they move on and off campus.

Kasworm (2003) also identifies the following factors as influential in the mature age student’s access and participation to tertiary education:

- Selection and type of institution: Mature age students would typically enrol in an institution that is readily accessible, relevant to current life needs, cost-effective, flexible in course scheduling and supportive of adult lifestyle commitments. However, some mature age students would choose institutions that are prestigious or offer-specialised programs (perhaps not mature age friendly).
- **Enrolment and work**: Mature age students tend to be predominantly enrolled in part-time basis. This means that they are time focused on adult life demands, with a more limited time commitment and priority to campus involvement beyond the classroom.

- **Family commitments**: Mature age students value family supportive environments because a good number of them have dependants and responsibilities of children.