Risk Management of Off-Campus Students

Purpose

To identify off-campus HDR students and to develop quality assurance measures to minimise candidature risk and to provide an enriched education experience where attendance on campus is limited.

Background

This topic has often focussed on candidature risk management for students who are at obvious geographical distance to UWS. There has been a tendency to think in terms of students located interstate, in far regional NSW or overseas and to group them together as an amorphous “off-campus” group. Discussion has targeted the strengthening of work protocols (agreeing on type and frequency of contact, submission of material and feedback) and by using electronic communication such as Skype and email. Where possible visits on campus are encouraged, in addition to the mandated once per year.

However, this only identifies a portion of students who may be distant to campus and does not address the specific needs of those groups nor the matter of research culture and the research education experience.

Proposal

- Identify the broad groups of students isolated from UWS
- Provide strategies for each of those groups that will minimise candidature risk
- Develop an enriched blended learning environment to enhance the research education experience.

Location of HDRs by postcode of semester address;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester addresses</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greater Western Sydney</td>
<td>511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-GWS - NSW</td>
<td>329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interstate</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>957</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Nearly half of UWS HDR students are outside the GWS area. However, this includes people located in the Blue Mountains and South Coast and Southern Highlands who would not be considered distant to UWS and who may commute to campus every day. The high number of international addresses may not be accurate as many on-campus overseas students are slow to update their new Australian addresses on the student record system.

It is noted that the geographical layout of UWS is an intrinsic problem that further complicates our situation in terms of student access to peers and academic leaders. We are located over far distances and suffer traffic congestion, poor public transport and inadequate parking facilities.
While geographical distance is an obvious issue, isolation has many forms that can be just as significant as a postcode. Students may have a full-time professional work load, carer responsibilities or health issues that limit their mobility and/or availability during the day. These are somewhat invisible factors and management will involve self identification by students and/or their supervisors.

Increasingly there is recognition that a significant issue for off-campus students is the difficulty of engaging with research culture. Research culture is a powerful contributor to high quality research education by a process of immersion with exemplars of excellence in research and engagement with peers. Satisfaction surveys consistently rate research culture as highly valued by students.

The article referred to below is one example of the discourse on the importance of physical space in building collegiality. [http://www.guardian.co.uk/higher-education-network/blog/2013/mar/15/interdisciplinary-academic-universities-research?CMP=twt_gu](http://www.guardian.co.uk/higher-education-network/blog/2013/mar/15/interdisciplinary-academic-universities-research?CMP=twt_gu)

At UWS we can create an alternative space by using blended learning and other on-line resources to foster a rich learning and peer support environment that is readily available to all students but of particular importance to off campus students.

**Categories of Off-Campus Students and Risk Management Recommendations**

1 **Students who are located overseas at partner universities to use specialist facilities and who will be away for an extended period.**

   There are very few candidates in this category, usually no more than one or two per total HDR cohort. It does not include Cotutelle arrangements as these already address off shore location by other established means.

   Formal approval granted by AOU RHD Committee (see attachment 1).

2 **Students who are undertaking off campus field work for six months or longer**

   Student and supervisor advised to complete a checklist (see attachment 1).

3 **Students who are geographically distant at the time of admission and students whose circumstances change during the candidature so that they become geographically distant.**

   At the point of admission or the time of change of address the student and supervisor to address issues related to geographical distance using a checklist (see attachment 1). They should re-negotiate the terms of their relationship when there is a significant change of the student’s location

4 **Students who are off-campus for reasons other than geography**

   Provide guidance to help students to self-identify as most likely to benefit from access to resources that don’t require on-campus attendance and prioritise the development of those resources. Student choices will be personal, according to their interests and needs. There is already a very extensive amount of material available.

**Research Culture.**

Promotion of continued development of on-line learning environments. Many of these exist already at UWS with School and Institute HDR sites in vUWS and social media accounts. ORS and HALL have started gathering additional resources material for a vUWS site dedicated to assisting HDR students.
and supervisors including the provision of on-line versions of attended workshops. These would be an additional resource available to all students but of particular importance to all the student groups discussed here.

Informal learning environments and peer support. Students can access enormous amounts of on-line material, blogs, groups and make connections with peers by this method. Peer support particularly is well serviced by on-line resources. Students may be able to attend “Shut-up and Write” in other cities. The on-line HDR environment is supportive and very useful in providing support that might not otherwise be available. UWS can assist students in identifying the most useful blogs, tweeters and articles to help them join the on-line community.

Events such as School/Institute conferences should (and usually are) advertised well in advance so that students who have to make complicated arrangements have sufficient planning time to ensure that they can attend.

**Attachment 1**

Check lists for students geographically distant to UWS.

**Attachment 2**

Advice given to students when they start to help set up protocols with their supervisory panel. For information.
Students who are located overseas at partner universities to use specialist facilities and who will be away for an extended period.

The candidature requires use of world class facilities that are not available in Australia. The grant project will provide access to those resources, to the benefit of UWS. The arrangement has been made possible by existing collaboration between researchers at both universities.

Student; Topic; School/Institute; Supervisory Panel;

- Is the candidature part of a funded grant? If yes, who are other collaborators?
- Funding Body:
- Where will the student be located?
- What is the advantage to the candidature of this location?
- What role will the partner institution supervisor take?
- Does the arrangement facilitate access to resources not available at UWS?
- Is the student enrolled? If not, when will they enrol? If yes, how long have they been enrolled?
- What progress had been made, details, and timeline for the remainder of candidature.
- How often will the student communicate with the principal supervisor/panel?
- By what means? (Skype/email etc)?
- Will the student have access to adequate on-line resources?
- What are the arrangements for providing feedback on the student’s progress?
- Are there other means of communication within the School that would benefit the candidature such as email or social media groups?
- Does the student have a reasonable plan for completion and particularly of progress planned during the period offshore? Please give details of work that is expected to be completed during this period
- Will the student attend research events at UWS?
- Will the student attend research events at the partner location? Provide details if yes.
- If the student is yet to enrol what arrangements will be made for establishing the candidature?
- Will the student have access to library facilities?
- Are there plans for UWS supervisory staff to visit the student?
- Will the student be using School/Institute funds for travel?
- Can the School/Institute guarantee facilities when they are on campus at UWS?
- Describe other advantages that this arrangement will provide to the candidature?
- Have any issues of concern been raised in Annual Progress Reports to date?
- If so, how were they resolved?
- Has the student completed their Confirmation of Candidature? If not how will this be organised?
- What action will be taken if progress is not satisfactory?
- Wherever possible the supervisor should find an external supervisor at another institution, whether within Australia or overseas.
- There should be an explicit timeline of progress by milestones and include the expected time and outcome of completion for each stage. To be Trimmed.
- Regular meetings through SKYPE and a weekly progress update.
- If there is a request for an overseas trip to be extended there must be a statement of explanation/support from the external supervisor and the student must initiate a new eTan to ensure continuity of insurance coverage.
- Sick leave should be recorded and Trimmed

A copy of an agreement covering relevant point should be approved by the School/Institute HDR Director and placed on the students TRIM file and distributed to all concerned parties (panel, student, overseas contacts involved in managing the candidature).

Students must remember to keep contact details up to date with the Office of Academic Registrar and ensure that they fulfill all reporting and enrolment requirements.

The agreement should be placed on the student’s TRIM file and distributed to all concerned parties (panel, student, overseas contacts involved in managing the candidature).

**Students who are undertaking off campus field work for six months or longer**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>School/Research Institute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The student will be undertaking off campus field work from ... to ...</td>
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Describe the nature of the field work and relevance to project.

Candidature arrangements;

- The student will communicate with the UWS principal supervisor, at least ..... using the telephone, email, Skype or possibly video conferencing.
- The student will have access to library facilities and on-line facilities offshore at.....
• What are the arrangements for providing guidance on the student’s progress?

• Are there other means of communication within the School that would benefit the candidature such as email or social media groups?

• If the location does not have good on-line facilities (remote area with limited or no internet access), what steps will be taken to overcome this obstacle?

• Explain how arrangements adhere to risk assessment guidelines

Occupational Health and Safety Guidelines and Procedures

• Will there be changes in how progress is monitored and feedback protocols? Please give details

• Has the student adhered to UWS travel policies?

• Has the student applied for School/Institute funds for the field work?

• Internationals students must seek advice of the international Office about the validity of their visa on return to Australia

• In addition, students must complete a variation of program form for formal approval of the field work

• Wherever possible the supervisor should find an external supervisor at another institution, whether within Australia or overseas.

• There should be an explicit timeline of progress by milestones and include the expected time and outcome of completion for each stage. To be Trimmed.

• Regular meetings through SKYPE and a weekly progress update.

• If there is a request for an overseas trip to be extended there must be a statement of explanation/support from the external supervisor and the student must initiate a new eTan to ensure continuity of insurance coverage.

• Sick leave should be recorded and Trimmed

The agreement should be placed on the student’s TRIM file and distributed to all concerned parties (panel, student, overseas contacts involved in managing the candidature).

Students who are geographically distant at the time of admission and Students whose circumstances change during the candidature and they become geographically distant.

To be addressed when it becomes known that the student will be distant to UWS, at admission or later during the candidature.

Student and supervisor will address this is writing and file it on TRIM

• The student will communicate with the UWS principal supervisor, at least fortnightly (or ...?), using the telephone, email, Skype or possibly video conferencing.
• The student will meet all panel members at least twice a year.

• The student will attend ..... on campus at UWS and visit UWS additionally as required.

• Will the student come to UWS to establish the candidature, attend induction/orientation, start Postgraduate Essentials, meet UWS staff, and confer with the university librarian?

• The student will have access to library facilities and on-line facilities offshore at.....

• What are the arrangements for providing feedback on the student’s progress?

• Are there other means of communication within the School that would benefit the candidature such as email or social media groups?

• Which research events will the student attend at UWS?

• Can the School/Institute guarantee the student facilities when they are on campus at UWS?

• The student must attend their Confirmation of Candidature in person. How will this be organised?

• Can an alternative arrangement be made for skills workshops if required? Can the student attend UWS to come to participate in skills workshops?

The agreement should be placed on the student’s TRIM file and distributed to all concerned parties (panel, student, overseas contacts involved in managing the candidature).
Setting Up The Relationship
This section poses ideas to consider as you and your supervisory panel get to know each other in the early days of enrolment. The dot points suggest items you may wish to consider as you establish a working relationship with your supervisors. Establishing protocols sets clear boundaries, roles and expectations.

Ideas for Setting-up Initial Meetings
- What will be the frequency and duration?
- Will I have access to supervisor(s) outside scheduled meeting times?
- Who has responsibility to initiate meetings, if they are not regular?
- What is the protocol when one cannot make the meeting?
- Who takes meeting notes and circulates them?
- What will be the protocol for submission and return of work?

The Panel
- What role will be taken by each supervisor?
- What will be the workload percentages?
- Will the whole panel meet, how often?

Time Frame
- Have we mapped projected progress against time?
- How long will each stage take?
- How will we monitor time/progress?

What is a Thesis?
- What does “thesis” mean?
- Will there be a non-text component?
- Are there specific course guidelines, such as with some Professional Doctorates?
- What is a suitable structure?
- What is the difference between a thesis that passes and one that is exceptional?
- Titles of good examples in a particular field?
- What is meant by originality?
- When should writing start?
- What is expected in a literature review?
- Have we sorted out Intellectual Property (IP) issues?
- Can we start thinking about potential examiners?

Advice and Support
- Confirmation of Candidature: how much input from the supervisor, how will this proceed?
- Expectations of feedback (style, how much, how often in what form, how soon?)
- Strategies to use when comments/corrections are not understood
- Should the student seek feedback from anyone else?
- Support with content, e.g., resources, contacts, how much can be expected given the supervisor’s knowledge of the area?
- What other kinds of knowledge are needed? (e.g., research process, writing skills)
- Any personal circumstances that ought to be considered? (e.g., new baby, ill health)
- Attitudes to supervisor/student relationship (mentor/mentee, teacher/student, colleagues)

Resources
- Do you have access to resources?
- Do you know about support schemes within the University: candidature support and conference scholarships etc.?
- Are there any suitable conferences this year?

University Requirements
- Do you know what milestone reporting is required in the first year and do you have a plan of approach?
- Do you know of research activities in the School/Research Centre/Institute?
- Will you be presenting at a seminar (apart from the Confirmation of Candidature)?