

Enhancing Learning for Research Higher Degree Students

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Abstract : Universities' push toward the production of high quality research is not limited to academic staff and experienced researchers. In this environment of research rich agendas, Higher Degree Research (HDR) students are increasingly expected to engage in the publishing of good quality papers in high impact journals. IFN001: Advanced Information Research Skills (AIRS) is a credit bearing mandatory coursework requirement for Queensland University of Technology (QUT) doctorates. Since its inception in 1989, this unique blended learning program has provided the foundations for new researchers to produce original and innovative research. AIRS was redeveloped in 2012, and has now been evaluated with reference to the university's strategic research priorities. Our research is the first comprehensive evaluation of the program from the learner perspective. We measured whether the program develops essential transferrable skills and graduate capabilities to ensure best practice in the areas of publishing and data management. In particular, we explored whether AIRS prepares students to be agile researchers with the skills to adapt to different research contexts both within and outside academia. The target group for our study consisted of HDR students and supervisors at QUT. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used for data collection. Gathering data was by survey and focus groups with qualitative responses analyzed using NVivo. The results of the survey show that 82% of students surveyed believe that AIRS assisted their research process and helped them learn skills they need as a researcher. The 18% of respondents who expressed reservation about the benefits of AIRS were also examined to determine the key areas of concern. These included trends related to the timing of the program early in the candidature and a belief among some students that their previous research experience was sufficient for postgraduate study. New insights have been gained into how to better support HDR learners in partnership with supervisors and how to enhance learning experiences of specific cohorts, including international students and mature learners.

Keywords : data management, enhancing learning experience, publishing, research higher degree students, doctoral students

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