

FACTSHEET: SUPERVISING PART-TIME HDR STUDENTS

Many postgraduate students at Avondale are enrolled on a part-time basis. This Factsheet provides postgraduate supervisors with ideas to support their supervision of part-time postgraduate students. Interestingly, an Australian study by Neumann and Rodwell (2009) found that part-time PhD students completed their degrees faster than full-time PhD students, in equivalent-time but they were less satisfied with their learning experiences, especially in relation to infrastructure support offered by the institution.

The following ideas are provided as suggestions for how to supervise part-time postgraduate students in ways that facilitate satisfying and successful student learning experiences.

Individuality	Acknowledge that each part-time student will have individualised needs, as Watts (2008) notes: "Part-time students, however, cannot be seen as a unitary group as their learner motivation, personal circumstances and support needs are highly individual" (p. 369). Despite their specialised requirements, part-time students have been called "invisible" (Neumann & Rodwell, 2009).
Involvement in Avondale's research community	To involve part-time students in the research community at Avondale, contact staff at the Centre for Advancement of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) via castl@avondale.edu.au to ensure the student is a) enrolled in The Researcher's Little Helper Moodle site; and b) is informed of regular on-campus workshops and online tutorials available to support postgraduate students.
Support for academic skill development	Ensure part-time students are aware of the services provided by the Avondale Library's Reference Librarian (distance.librarian@avondale.edu.au) such as: thesis formatting, referencing, locating academic resources and referencing. Online information can be found at the following websites: http://www.avondale.edu.au/library/Services/On-Campus-Students/ and http://www.avondale.edu.au/library/Services/Distance-Students/ . Part time students studying by distance may send requests through to the Reference Librarian at: distance.librarian@avondale.edu.au .
Meeting up and being flexible	Organise a time for the Principal Supervisor, Associate Supervisor and HDR student to meet up regularly at a time that is convenient for all concerned. The type of meeting will need to be negotiated, depending on the location and availability of each supervisor and the student. Due to the part-time nature of the student's enrolment pattern, these meetings may need to be held after normal working hours. Note the advice from Richard James and Gabrielle Baldwin from The University of Melbourne about organising meetings with part-time students (James & Baldwin, 1999): <p style="padding-left: 40px;">"Certain students will thrive in the structure provided by regular meetings. Others prefer to meet only when the need arises. This is a risky practice, but it may work well for independent students who are willing to initiate meetings. Email is a fine way to stay in touch, especially for part-time students." (p. 25)</p> <p>Other universities are more specific in their recommendation for when to meet up: <p style="padding-left: 40px;">"A schedule of regular contact (every two weeks for full-time students and at least monthly for part-time students) is established and maintained with the student." From http://www.monash.edu/migr/faqs-and-resources/content/chapter-five/5-2 Monash University</p> <p>Because part-time students will no doubt be juggling many responsibilities, they will appreciate your understanding about their complex lives. At times your role as a</p></p>

	supervisor "may, at times, seem more a form of emotion work than of pedagogical support" (Watts, 2008, p. 372).
Changing enrolment mode	Because a part-time student will be enrolled for a longer time than a full-time student, their enrolment may change throughout the duration of their candidature. If the student you supervise decides to change from a part-time to a full-time enrolment mode (or vice versa), please direct the student to modify their enrolment by contacting staff at the Research Services Office or the Academic Office.
Workload	Be specific about how many hours per week, per month, etc. is required by engaging in postgraduate study - from the student's point of view and the supervisor's point of view. Part time students at Avondale are advised to check their unit outline to determine how many hours per week is required for their mode of study. For example, Monash University recommends: "Part-time students devote at least 2 days each week to their study program, where at least one of these days is between Monday and Friday inclusive, and during normal business hours on each of those days." From http://www.monash.edu/migr/faqs-and-resources/content/chapter-five/5-2
Physical support	Discuss the needs of the student in terms of physical support such as a desk, a filing cabinet, a pigeon hole, etc. This will depend on the availability of resources within the Faculty: "Part-timers and students who aren't working at the laboratory bench especially need to be encouraged to spend time around the department. The provision of a pigeon-hole is a minimum service. Space permitting, postgraduates can be provided with office or study-carrel space"(James & Baldwin, 1999, p. 29).
Expectations	Early in the student's candidature, openly discuss and set the expectations that will guide your interactions. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheduled meetings will not be cancelled, unless in an emergency. • Documents for consideration will be shared via email at least two working days before each meeting.
Role perceptions	Early in the student's candidature, consider using "The Role Perception Scale: The Supervisory Relationship" to establish expectations between supervisors and between the supervisors and the student. This instrument is available at: http://www.uws.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/705230/Role_Perception_Scale_UWS.pdf For example, the issue of who instigates contact is an important issue; a shared understanding of expectations around the regularity of communication needs to be established (Watts, 2008).
Revise milestone dates and time allowed to complete the degree	Because the student is enrolled on a part-time basis, their achievement of key milestones and the time allowed to complete the degree will be more extended than full time students. Set regular times (e.g., at the end of each enrolled semester) to revise the intended dates these milestones will be achieved. Assisting students to structure their tasks and set timelines "may help keep student anxiety at bay" (Watts, 2008, p. 371) Also see the Avondale policy: PhD Milestones [AR.05]. Available at: http://www.avondale.edu.au/information::Policies/display/?s=MzEy
Staff workload	Please refer to the "Academic Staff Workload Policy (Higher Education) [HR.25]" at http://www2.avondale.edu.au/web/policiesondemand/219/ for information about allocating staff workload for the supervision of HDR students, which recommends: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervision of an Honours student is equivalent to 8 students per semester. • Supervision of a PhD /Research Masters as principal supervisor is equivalent to 16 students per semester. The above loads would need to be calculated proportionally to the student's part-time study load.
Progress reports	Progress reports for HDR students are completed twice per year. For the Progress report templates used at Avondale, see the <i>Researcher's Little Helper</i> site: http://moodle.avondale.edu.au/course/view.php?id=2308

References

- James, R., & Baldwin, G. (1999). *Eleven practices of effective postgraduate supervisors* Melbourne: Centre for the Study of Higher Education and The School of Graduate Studies, The University of Melbourne.
- Neumann, R., & Rodwell, J. (2009). The 'Invisible' part-time research students: A case study of satisfaction and completion. *Studies in Higher Education, 34*(1), 55-65.
- Watts, J. H. (2008). Challenges of supervising part-time PhD students: towards student-centred practice. *Teaching in Higher Education, 13*(3), 369-373.