



Monash Postgraduate Association Inc

## Coursework Postgraduates and the second-class citizen syndrome

A report by the  
Monash Postgraduate Association Inc  
August 2005

## Table of Contents

SECTION A – Coursework postgraduates at Monash University.....	3
SECTION B – The current situation.....	5
1. Provision of postgraduate study and social space.....	5
2. Teaching quality.....	5
3. Composition of classes.....	6
4. Provision of lecture notes and course materials.....	6
5. Electronic submission of work.....	6
6. Hidden costs.....	6
7. ITS services.....	7
8. Accommodating cross-faculty degrees.....	8
9. Research seminar series.....	8
10. Conference travel grants.....	8
11. Contributing to the research output.....	8
12. After hours services and facilities.....	9
13. Central administrative unit.....	9
14. Access to quantitative data.....	9
SECTION C - Recommendations.....	11
1. Provision of postgraduate study and social space.....	11
2. Teaching quality.....	11
3. Composition of classes.....	11
4. Provision of lecture notes and course materials.....	11
5. Electronic submission of work.....	11
6. Hidden costs.....	11
7. ITS services.....	12
8. Accommodating cross-faculty degrees.....	12
9. Research seminar series.....	12
10. Conference travel grants.....	12
11. Contributing to the research output.....	12
12. After hours services and facilities.....	12
13. Central administrative unit.....	13
14. Access to quantitative data.....	13
SECTION D – Summary.....	13

## **SECTION A - Coursework postgraduates at Monash University**

Monash University strives to provide a quality experience for all students. Why then do so many coursework postgraduates perceive themselves to be valued only for the fees they bring in to the university? Through the MPA fora<sup>1</sup>, casework<sup>2</sup>, and anecdotal evidence<sup>3</sup>, a common thread appears: many coursework postgraduates feel unsupported and believe that they are excluded from engaging fully in the academic postgraduate community.

In 2004, there were 11,466 coursework postgraduates enrolled at Monash, representing 22% of the total student population. Research has shown that coursework postgraduates identify themselves as a completely separate group to undergraduates, with different needs and expectations.<sup>4</sup> Many come from professional backgrounds and are accustomed to working in a professional environment. However, on commencing a coursework degree at Monash, some postgraduates feel they are treated like undergraduates, or like second-class citizens in the postgraduate community.

With coursework fees rapidly rising, coursework postgraduates are an increasingly discerning group of customers. They expect a service commensurate with the amount of money being paid. They expect their courses to be delivered in a professional manner and the content to be of a high quality. They expect to be treated in a courteous manner by administrative staff and a collegial manner by academic staff. In short, coursework postgraduates understand the contractual relationship they have with the university: they have paid their fees and they expect the university to deliver the service as advertised.

There are many compelling reasons to address the concerns of coursework postgraduates, the central reason being that Monash is a provider of high quality postgraduate education and must continue to be so.

In addition:

- As funding from the Federal government to the university decreases, we must increasingly rely on self-generated income. In 2004, fee-paying coursework postgraduates brought in over \$71 million to the university<sup>5</sup>, and this is likely to increase as the coursework population increases and the university moves towards more full-fee paying courses.
- In 2004, international postgraduates made up 35% of the total coursework postgraduate enrolments.<sup>6</sup> Their experiences at Monash translate into good or

---

<sup>1</sup> The MPA conducts open fora on every Victorian campus, every semester. This data has been collected since 2000.

<sup>2</sup> The MPA provide advice and advocacy to over 300 postgraduates each year, approximately half of whom are coursework.

<sup>3</sup> In 2004 the MPA ran/participated in over 118 postgraduate-specific events where staff received informal feedback from individual postgraduates on a range of issues.

<sup>4</sup> Fullarton, S. 1997. Identifying the needs of coursework postgraduate students: The case of DUPA, MPA, RPA and SUPA, MPA Report.

<sup>5</sup> Figure provided by Monash University Financial Resources Management Division, and comprises Australian and international fee-paying coursework postgraduates (Course type 04 only).

<sup>6</sup> Schapper, C. 2004. Monash University Postgraduate Student Statistics: Trends and Comparisons from 2002 to 2004, MPA Report.

bad public relations for the university in their home countries, affecting future international postgraduate enrolment numbers. This is also true for local postgraduates whose decision to choose Monash over any other university is based partly on its reputation among past students.

- Some postgraduates are undertaking a coursework degree prior to enrolling in a research degree. If our coursework postgraduates are viewed as our potential research postgraduates, we should be strengthening the research/teaching nexus by including, encouraging and inspiring coursework postgraduates to be part of the academic postgraduate community, rather than excluding them.
- The university is concentrating on increasing participation in alumni and in particular, on increasing revenue from alumni. The best way to ensure alumni participation from postgraduates after they graduate from Monash is to ensure that they have a positive experience while they are here.
- The delivery of fee-paying courses places the university in the position of 'trader' and the postgraduate in the position of 'consumer'. The university must comply with the Trade Practices Act, particularly in relation to consumer protection, the section of the Act that prohibits various forms of unfair trade practices which are harmful to consumers.

## SECTION B – The current situation

Areas of concern raised by coursework postgraduates with the MPA can be grouped into the following categories:

### 1. Provision of postgraduate study and social space

Coursework postgraduates need a campus-central space where they can study in silence and one where they can socialise with other postgraduates. They also need access to a postgraduate-specific computer laboratory on their campus.<sup>7</sup>

While research postgraduates are usually accommodated within their departments, few faculties offer accommodation to coursework postgraduates. The majority of coursework postgraduates rely on facilities being provided at a central level by the campuses.

<b>Postgraduate-specific facilities available to coursework postgraduates (at central university/campus level)</b>				
	<b>Coursework postgraduate numbers (2004)</b>	<b>Computer labs</b>	<b>Study space</b>	<b>Social space/ lounge</b>
<b>Berwick</b>	0	no	no	no
<b>Caulfield</b>	5298	T 204 (20 computers) A1.39 (20 computers) both 24/7 access	A1.38 (4 computers) 24/7 access	A1.38 24/7 access
<b>Clayton</b>	4094	no	P/G room, main library (18 computers) library hours access	no
<b>Gippsland</b>	1578	no	yes	yes
<b>Parkville</b>	133	no	no	Scott building (1 computer*) 24/7 access
<b>Peninsula</b>	348	no	Library (9 computers)	no

\* computer provided by the MPA

The Caulfield campus postgraduate lounge and computer area in Building A, open 24/7, is an excellent example of how a relatively small space can be used effectively to address the needs of coursework postgraduates.

### 2. Teaching quality

Many coursework postgraduates have raised concerns about the quality of their courses. The MPA applauds the university's decision to introduce compulsory unit evaluation of all Monash coursework units. The quality of the education provided to coursework postgraduates also depends to a great degree on the performance of the lecturer. Currently, evaluations of the lecturer (MONQUEST) are conducted only when requested by the lecturer. Postgraduates have suggested that it would be

<sup>7</sup> CHEQ. 2003. Caulfield Services and Facilities Survey Report, Monash University.

beneficial if it were compulsory for all lecturers of postgraduate units to be evaluated by the participants as part of a comprehensive quality assurance mechanism.

### **3. Composition of classes**

The practise of parallel teaching, where postgraduates and undergraduates are in the same classroom for lectures, is unacceptable to postgraduates<sup>8</sup>, especially returning professionals. When students enrol in a postgraduate course, they expect an educational experience that is more demanding and intellectually challenging than that provided to undergraduates: they expect the opportunity to engage with other postgraduates, who are more likely to have similar work ethics and similar professional backgrounds.

### **4. Provision of lecture notes and course materials**

Provision of lecture notes varies across faculties and courses. Some faculties advertise that lecture notes and/or course materials will be provided as part of the course. Where this promise is made, faculties should ensure that the material is provided either in hardcopy or on the web, prior to the lecture. This is particularly important for international postgraduates, for whom English is a foreign language. Being able to follow notes assists these postgraduates in coping with the difficulties of studying in a foreign language, as well as helping them to cope with the poor diction, use of colloquial language and strong accents of some lecturers. The situation is exacerbated when faculties run intensive two or three week courses over summer, and the promised material is not made available to participants.

### **5. Electronic submission of work**

Many departments do not permit coursework postgraduates to submit work electronically. This creates particular difficulties for distance education postgraduates, and for those located at off-campus locations such as the Law Chambers in Melbourne. It also affects postgraduates working full-time and studying part-time, who may only come on campus once per week, after normal business hours.

Given that electronic communication is now widely used, and indeed much of the university's information sent out to students is only in electronic form, it is long overdue to allow students to submit work electronically.

Not only would this be faster, cheaper and more environmentally friendly, but digital communication has been legally recognised as equivalent to hardcopy since 2000.<sup>9</sup>

### **6. Hidden costs**

#### **6.1 Printing and photocopying**

Coursework postgraduates pay substantial fees for degrees, and where courses advertise the provision of course material, assignment notes and lecture notes, postgraduates expect that the cost of the provision of such material should be included in their fees. However where this material is provided on the web, postgraduates must bear the additional cost of printing it out. The cost can average around \$10 per week – an amount not always anticipated by international postgraduates in particular. In addition, postgraduates must pay their own photocopying costs to obtain material that

---

<sup>8</sup> Some Graduate Diplomas, which are quite explicitly undergraduate sequences, would be an exception to this.

<sup>9</sup> Electronic Transactions Act 2000 (Victoria)

they consider central to their course. Research postgraduates have access to free printing and photocopying in their departments.

## 6.2 Computers

Many postgraduate courses assume that all participants own a computer. This places pressure on coursework postgraduates to purchase a computer, and creates financial difficulties for many postgraduates, particularly international postgraduates who have not anticipated this additional cost. This is especially true for coursework postgraduates working on campuses that do not provide postgraduate-specific computer laboratories. Research postgraduates have access to computers within their departments or through the MRGS.

## 6.3 Academic transcripts

Postgraduates are entitled to receive only one free academic transcript over the duration of their course. For research postgraduates, this is generally requested at the end of their degree, after the thesis has been examined and passed, and the degree awarded. However, many coursework postgraduates must provide their employers with evidence of having passed each unit, in order to receive study leave to continue to do subsequent units within the course. Copies of unit results downloaded from the web are not accepted. The academic transcript is currently the only available form of official record. This means that after the first unit, coursework postgraduates must pay \$10 to receive an official record of their results every time they complete a unit. Coursework postgraduates believe that having already paid for the unit, the university has an obligation to provide an official record of their results for that unit without further charge.

## 7. ITS services

Coursework postgraduates increasingly rely on electronic communications to support their work and on the internet as a major source of information. They believe they should receive the same access to ITS services as that provided to research postgraduates, including dial-up modem access to allow external internet access from home, increased network drive space, increased internet quota and increased email quota.

The ITS services default provisions currently provided to students are set out in the table below<sup>10</sup>.

ITS service	Undergraduates	Coursework postgraduates	Research postgraduates
Email quota	10Mb	10Mb	100Mb
Internet quota	Per unit	Per unit	Per unit
Network drive space	25Mb	25Mb	100Mb
Dial-up modem	Monash access only	Monash access only	Monash and external access

The email and internet quotas are provided to students automatically from central ITS. Research postgraduates can receive dial-up modem for external access, and increased internet quota by applying through their faculties.

<sup>10</sup> Table information provided by Infrastructure Services, ITS, Monash University

## **8. Accommodating cross-faculty degrees**

Many coursework postgraduate degrees offer the opportunity to take units from faculties other than the faculty through which the student is enrolled. Postgraduates have complained that there is an inconsistency in the accreditation of points from units across faculties, for example, a unit taken in Faculty A, worth 16 points in that faculty, may be credited by Faculty B as worth only 8 points, despite the fact that it equates in all other respects.

## **9. Research seminar series**

The MRGS runs the Expert seminar series exclusively for research postgraduates, covering academic-related topics including time management, presentation skills, intellectual property, supervision, statistics, Endnote and Powerpoint. Coursework postgraduates, new to Monash, and unaware of the funding and administrative division between coursework and research, express confusion and disappointment at being excluded from these seminars. They argue that many of these topics are relevant to their general studies and minor theses. More importantly, the MPA believes that giving coursework postgraduates the opportunity to become involved in the research community provides the inspiration and encouragement to influence their decision to undertake a research degree at the completion of their coursework degree.

The MPA works closely with MRGS, LLS, Careers and Employment and the libraries to coordinate seminars to meet the needs of both coursework and research postgraduates. The courses offered to coursework postgraduates, available through the MPA and units other than MRGS, cover topics that complement the Expert seminars, rather than duplicate them. Where there is a request from postgraduates for a specific course that cannot be provided by any other unit, the MPA itself will organise the seminar, with the aim that this will be taken up by the appropriate unit once a need has been demonstrated. This strategy has been very successful<sup>11</sup>. However the MPA does not have the capacity, nor would it be sensible, to repeat Expert seminars for interested coursework postgraduates. The result is that coursework postgraduates miss out on support seminars that would be of great benefit to them.

## **10. Conference travel grants**

There is no central funding available to coursework postgraduates to cover the costs of attending and presenting work at relevant academic conferences. The central travel grant scheme administered by the MRGS is available to research postgraduates only. Some coursework postgraduates, particularly those undertaking a minor thesis, have the potential to write academic papers and part of that process is presenting papers at conferences. These postgraduates should be encouraged by being given an equal opportunity to apply for conference travel grants.

## **11. Contributing to the research output**

Some coursework postgraduates who undertake a research unit within their degree produce quality work that is of a publishable standard. However during this period of their candidature, coursework postgraduates do not receive even the basic facilities

---

<sup>11</sup> One example is the generic academic support seminar series run by the MPA, an idea later taken up by MRGS to become the Expert seminar series.

provided to research postgraduates: computer access, printing and photocopying. Further, with the exclusion of coursework postgraduates from research support such as seminars and conference travel grants, there is no incentive or encouragement for them to contribute to the research pool in any form. While the potential number of research papers from coursework postgraduates may be small in comparison to that of the academic staff and research postgraduate population, we should not discourage anyone from contributing to the university's overall research output.

## **12. After hours services and facilities**

Over 77% of the coursework postgraduate population at Monash University are part-time or external.<sup>12</sup> Most of this cohort is on campus only after 5pm weekdays and during weekends and find it difficult to access many of the services and facilities that cater primarily to the undergraduate population operating times of 9 - 5, Mon - Fri. These services can include cafes, information services and student administration services.

While the numbers of postgraduates requiring these out-of-hours services would most likely be low, it is important to remember that these are essential services, and not businesses governed purely by profits. For postgraduates attending evening classes, and off-campus postgraduates visiting libraries and centres on weekends, this is a rare opportunity to be drawn in to the university community.

As one postgraduate commented to MPA staff, "When we get out of classes, it would be nice if there was somewhere we could go to have a coffee and continue our discussions. As it is, everything is closed so we just go home."

Coursework postgraduates also want library access hours extended as most of their available study time is in the evenings (after their lectures) and on weekends.<sup>13</sup>

Seminar series and other forms of academic support provided by faculties for coursework postgraduates are sometimes run during business hours, effectively disenfranchising large numbers of the very cohort for whom they are being provided.

## **13. Central administrative unit**

Coursework degrees are administered by the individual faculties. Apart from the work conducted by the MPA, the only university-wide (cross-campus and cross-faculty) consideration of coursework postgraduates is at PVC or DVC level. A central administrative unit at university level to oversee coursework postgraduates, (equivalent to MRGS for research postgraduates), would help to ensure that Monash offers a high quality educational experience to all coursework postgraduates, consistent across all faculties.

## **14. Access to quantitative data**

There is very little in the way of quantitative data on the experiences of coursework postgraduates at Monash, apart from the MEQ (from which the postgraduate data has not been drawn), the Caulfield campus survey report, and a study conducted jointly by the MPA and three other Victorian universities in 1997. The Caulfield campus survey report, conducted in 2003 by DVC Alan Lindsay at the request of the MPA, validated

---

<sup>12</sup> Schapper, C. 2004. Monash University Postgraduate Student Statistics: Trends and Comparisons from 2002 to 2004, MPA Report

<sup>13</sup> CHEQ.2003. Caulfield Services and Facilities Survey Report, Monash University

the MPA's claims regarding coursework postgraduates' concerns on Caulfield campus. With the backing of quantitative data, many of the recommendations of the MPA were actioned. The MPA believes that the lack of university-wide quantitative data is one of the most serious impediments to improving the coursework postgraduate experience at Monash.

## **SECTION C - Recommendations**

### **1. Provision of postgraduate study and social space**

- 1.1 Provide a central postgraduate-specific study space on every campus.
- 1.2 Provide a central postgraduate-specific computer laboratory on every campus.
- 1.3 Provide a central postgraduate-specific social space on every campus.
- 1.4 Alternatively, allow coursework postgraduates access to existing central postgraduate space and facilities provided for research postgraduates.
- 1.5 Ensure funding is made available to provide administrative staff support to postgraduate-specific lounge and study areas on all campuses.

### **2. Teaching quality**

- 2.1 Introduce compulsory student evaluation of all lecturers of postgraduate units, through MONQUEST.
- 2.2 Ensure that teaching staff are not only academically qualified, but professional people capable of effectively conveying information and interacting with other professionals.
- 2.3 Ensure that teaching staff understand and appreciate the differences between the needs and expectations of the undergraduate and postgraduate populations.

### **3. Composition of classes**

Require all units of postgraduate courses to be offered specifically at postgraduate level.

### **4. Provision of lecture notes and course materials**

- 4.1 Ensure that where units advertise the provision of lecture notes and/or course materials, that all materials are provided.
- 4.2 Ensure that where units advertise the provision of course materials and/or lecture notes, that the material is available prior to lectures.

### **5. Electronic submission of work**

Allow coursework postgraduates to submit work in either hardcopy or electronic form.

### **6. Hidden costs**

- 6.1 Provide a printing and photocopying allowance to all coursework postgraduates, per unit, as part of the course fees.

- 6.2 Modify marketing material to accurately convey the hidden costs and requirements for undertaking postgraduate coursework at Monash.
- 6.3 Provide one free official record of results for each unit undertaken by coursework postgraduates.
  
- 7. ITS services**
  - 7.1 Provide coursework postgraduates with an increased email quota and network hard drive space, equivalent to that provided to research postgraduates.
  - 7.2 Faculties to allocate an internet quota per unit, to all coursework postgraduates.
  - 7.3 Faculties to provide coursework postgraduates with dial-up modem external access.
  
- 8. Accommodating cross-faculty degrees**

Ensure consistent accreditation of points for units across different faculties.
  
- 9. Research seminar series**
  - 9.1 Develop a central university-run seminar series that caters to the specific needs of coursework postgraduates.
  - 9.2 Allow coursework postgraduates access to the Expert seminar series.
  
- 10. Conference travel grants**

Allow coursework postgraduates to compete for centrally provided conference travel funds.
  
- 11. Contributing to the research output**

Provide support to coursework postgraduates undertaking research units, in line with support provided to research postgraduates.
  
- 12. After hours services and facilities**
  - 12.1 Extend library access hours on weeknights and weekends.
  - 12.2 Alternatively, provide postgraduates with 24/7 swipe card access to annexed sections of libraries (such as the annex at Clayton).
  - 12.3 Extend hours of core administrative and information services to 7pm at least one night per week during semester.
  - 12.4 Ensure at least one catering outlet is open until at least 9pm (to cover the evening meal time) every week night and between 10 -5pm on weekends.

12.5 Ensure seminar series and other forms of academic support provided by faculties for coursework postgraduates are flexible in terms of delivery times, to cater for coursework postgraduates who are only able to come on to campus after business hours.

**13. Central administrative unit**

Create a university-wide administrative body, responsible for coursework postgraduates.

**14. Access to quantitative data**

14.1 Extract and make available postgraduate data from the most recent MEQ.

14.2 Conduct surveys to identify the needs of coursework postgraduates, across all Monash campuses.

**SECTION D – SUMMARY**

The MPA is committed to working with the university to improve the Monash experience for all postgraduates. It is important that coursework postgraduates feel valued, feel included in the academic community and leave Monash having had a positive experience. Taking up the above recommendations would be a start to ensuring that coursework postgraduates are provided with the level of academic support they expect from a university with the excellent standing and international reputation enjoyed by Monash University.