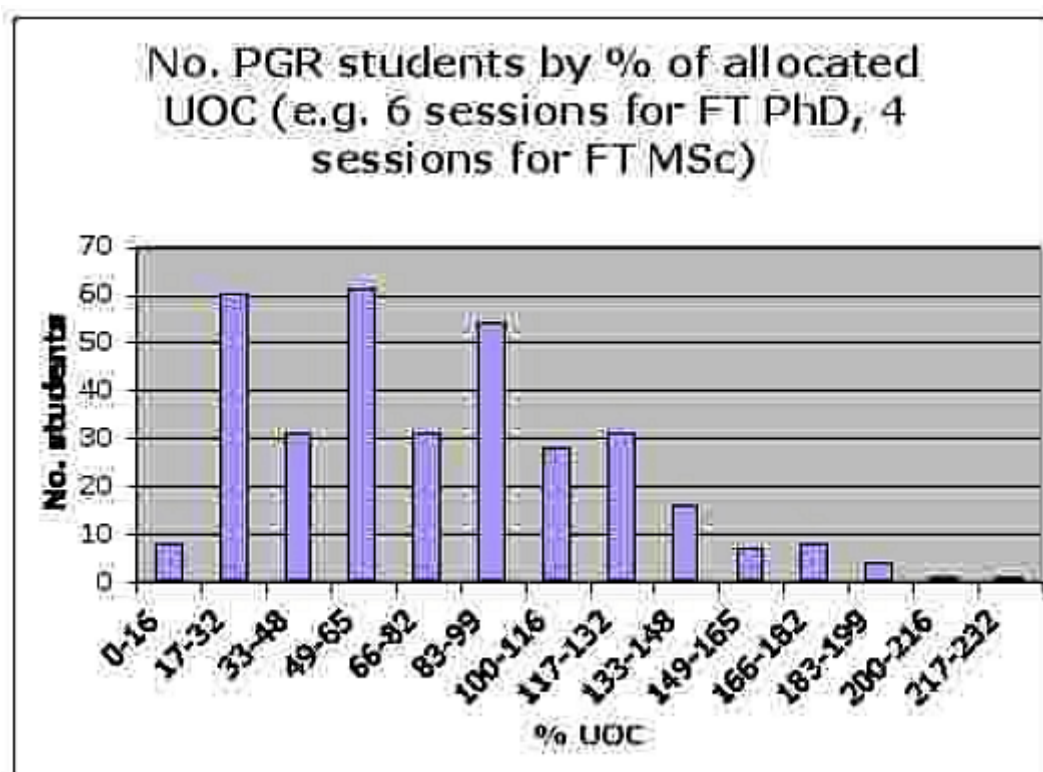


5th August, 2005

Dear Colleague

I am writing to you concerning the duration of candidatures of postgraduate students in the Faculty of Medicine. Overdue postgraduate research (PGR) students present a significant problem for our Faculty for a number of reasons. RTS income and APA places allocated to UNSW critically depend on the number of students completing in a timely fashion and failure of our students to complete will reduce APA places and restrict our ability to acquire new postgraduate students. The accompanying figure (overdue PGRstud) shows the distribution of our current PGR students by percentage of allocated Units of Credit (UOC).



The financial support for postgraduate students may come from a variety of sources. For those students who are supported by Australian Postgraduate Awards or the University equivalent (University Postgraduate Awards – UPA), the optimal length of candidature is 6 fulltime sessions or equivalent, because Federal funding for PGR students undertaking PhDs is at 3.05 years per student, but extension for a further 6 months is acceptable for scholarship holders (i.e. no more than 7 full time sessions before submission). For students supported by non-government or private money the candidature should not extend beyond the equivalent of 8 full time sessions (192 UOC) before submission for PhD students and 4 sessions (96 UOC) for MSc students, because candidatures beyond this length adversely affect the University's allotment of APA places by the Federal Government. Currently our Faculty has over 35 students at this length of candidature, plus approximately 20 students currently dis-enrolled while writing up.

I recently met with the Postgraduate Co-ordinators from the various Schools within the Faculty and agreement was reached regarding optimal candidature length for

postgraduate students, but it will not be possible to reach these goals without the assistance of supervisors and co-supervisors.

Postgraduate studies should be seen as one part of an ongoing training in research extending from undergraduate studies, through Honours to postdoctoral work. As such a PhD should be viewed as a defined period where the candidate is trained to review the literature, design and carry out experiments, and analyse and interpret findings. These goals can be just as easily achieved with 2 or 3 first author papers published in international refereed journals as with 5 or 6. The temptation to do "just a few more experiments to make sure" should be resisted if this means the candidate will be delayed in completing their thesis. Making sure for one student may mean another student misses out on a scholarship and the opportunity to pursue a research career.

I would also ask for your assistance in ensuring your postgraduate research students achieve significant milestones in their candidature at the appropriate time-points. For example, it is anticipated that students who have completed the equivalent of three full-time sessions will have completed a literature review, given a research seminar to their School or peers, have finished approximately 50% of their research work and have prepared drafts of 1 or 2 chapters of research findings. I ask for your co-operation with the PG co-ordinator of your school to ensure that students who have not completed these goals are flagged, have defined goals with deadlines set and are monitored at no more than 6 month intervals to ensure that goals are achieved.

Your contribution to the training of postgraduate research students with the Faculty of Medicine is greatly appreciated. I would ask for your assistance in ensuring that our postgraduate research students complete in a timely fashion, thereby ensuring funding of future scholarship places.

Yours sincerely,
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