

# **BRAINSTORMING STEPS TO ENHANCE THE STUDENT-SUPERVISOR RELATIONSHIP**

**Joint Workshop for research students and supervisors**

**by**

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# WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

The aim of research is to create new knowledge for society's benefit—whether it's a minor research project at undergraduate level or a major PhD thesis. This is best done when supervisors and students—with strong institutional support—work together in a relationship based on confidence, trust and mutual respect. This workshop brings together students and supervisors who have attended the previous day's ***Strategic approach to research*** and ***Strategic approach to research supervision*** workshops, to brainstorm on the steps we can take to enhance the student-supervisor relationship. The aim is to identify some of the obstacles to developing a productive student-supervisor relationship and to facilitate the *cross-fertilisation of ideas* about what we can do to address the problems.

# WHAT IS RESEARCH?

“... includes work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce, industry, and to the public and voluntary sectors; scholarship; the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances, artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights; and the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes, including design and construction...”

Research can be done from undergraduate through to doctoral level

# CHANGES IN DEFINING AND EVALUATING RESEARCH

“For all new grant applications ... the US National Science Foundation asks a principal investigator to list his or her ‘products’ rather than ‘publications’ ... This means that ... a scientist’s worth is not dependent solely on publications. Data sets, software and other non-traditional research products will count too....

There are more diverse research products now than ever before.... [but] one must evaluate whether each product has made an impact on its field ...”

Heather Piwaowar, *Nature*

What are the implications for research and research-training in Timor Leste?

# WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE PRACTICE

Both workshops have stressed the need for supervisors and students to work together to achieve good outcomes

Outcomes include:

- the creation of a new generation of creative and critical academics, pushing the boundaries of knowledge
- the creation of a new generation of citizens able to make a creative contribution to community and industry
- supervisors equipped and inspired to guide and mentor the new generation

Institutions, academics and students need to jointly accept responsibility for achieving these outcomes

# STUDENTS AND SUPERVISORS HAVE TO WORK TOGETHER

## *Demystify your thesis* 1<sup>st</sup> session ‘Getting the most out of your supervisor’

- Emphasizes that the thesis is ultimately the student’s product and responsibility
- But in completing a thesis, the role of the supervisor can be critical
- So ***managing*** the student-supervisor relationship is also critical
- Both supervisor and student have to accept responsibility for managing the relationship, which means understanding the other’s expectations, and balancing the rights and responsibilities of both student and supervisor
- Both must be committed to developing a relationship based on ***confidence, trust*** and ***mutual respect***

# AN OPPORTUNITY TO BRAINSTORM

What constitutes 'research' and 'research products' is shifting towards delivering benefits to industry and the community & advancing society's development

Universities are expected now to develop the researcher as well as deliver research outputs

Given the shift, what changes are needed in research training?

What are our expectations of research students and supervisors?

As a starting point, let's consider the results from yesterday's Activity:

- what supervisors expect from students
- what students expect from supervisors

# THE STARTING ACTIVITY

The three most important things students expect from supervisors and supervisors expect from students:

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_



# WHAT SUPERVISORS EXPECT OF STUDENTS

- Student will identify a clear Research Question
- Will construct a suitable data collection instrument
- Is able to collect accurate data
- Will be proactive
- Is able to express clearly their ideas in writing
- Can systematically use an appropriate writing style
- Student understands how to review the literature
- Will have specific research goals—**what** am I researching?
- Can reference appropriately
- Can use appropriate sampling methods
- Is able to communicate effectively
- Can write in an academic style

# WHAT STUDENTS EXPECT OF SUPERVISORS

- Supervisor will choose a suitable topic for the student
- Will suggest relevant references
- Will instruct student on designing the research
- Will provide research methods
- Will give constructive criticism
- Will provide guidance
- Will be approachable
- Will guide student in thesis structure
- Will motivate the student (**MANY REFERRED TO THIS**)
- Will provide a systematic method of writing
- Will accompany the student on the research journey
- Will facilitate student obtaining resources
- Will correct the student's grammar & vocabulary

# WHAT STUDENTS EXPECT cont.

- Will give the student ideas
- Will make suggestions on the research
- Will show the student how to write an understandable thesis
- Will show the student how to make the reader understand the objectives of the research
- Will assess the student's writing
- Will correct the student's work

# POSSIBLE VU-UNTL COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

In the *Finding Pathways in Education* conference, I nominated four potential joint projects for UNTL and VU:

1. Adapting *Demystify your thesis* to the needs of coursework masters and undergraduate research students
2. Adapting the *Supervisor Toolkit* to the needs of coursework masters and undergraduate research supervisors
3. Adapting the Graduate Certificate in Education *Supervising research students* to the needs of UNTL academics wanting to supervise
4. Adapting the *Researcher Development Framework* to the needs of coursework masters and undergraduate research students

This is an opportunity for VU and UNTL staff to work together to build relevant and sustainable research pathways for their students

# YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS?

Four proposed collaborative projects aim to:

- Empower and equip students to undertake research
- Enhance staff knowledge and practical strategies for supervising research students
- Lay the foundations for UNTL to develop the framework and infrastructure for building its postgraduate research culture and capacity

**Next steps? Involve staff and students in joint VU-UNTL working parties to audit UNTL needs, identify how VU programs might be adapted, and develop and trial new initiatives**