



CROSS CULTURAL SUPERVISION

In 2012, 34,643 international students completed a Masters by Coursework degree in an Australian university, with a further 1,528 completing an Honours degree (DIISRTE Higher Education Award Course Completions 2012). This represented more than half (53.7%) of all Masters by Coursework and 13.1% Honours completions (DIISRTE Higher Education Award Course Completions 2012).

Difficulties international students enrolled in dissertation programs may experience include:

- Difficulty with written and spoken English: approximately a quarter of international students report difficulties in this area, potentially leading to misunderstandings in supervision and difficulties in writing a dissertation (Winchester-Seeto et al, 2013;Yeoh & Doan, 2013)
- Difficulty with adopting western academic writing conventions (Wang & Li, 2012)
- Difficulties in adjusting to a new culture (Brown, 2007) with unfamiliar requirements and processes (Winchester-Seeto et al, 2013)
- Being separated from family and support networks(Winchester-Seeto et al, 2013)
- Differences in learning approaches (dependent versus independent) between the home and host country (Yeoh & Doan, 2013) that can include reluctance to critically engage both in written work and in supervision (Brown, 2007; Wang & Li, 2012)
- Cultural differences in acceptable practices within hierarchical relationships (Winchester-Seeto et al, 2013), including difficulties in asking for help when needed (Brown, 2007)
- Unfamiliarity with plagiarism policies (Yeoh & Doan, 2013)

These difficulties can impact on the supervisory relationship, requiring

- Sensitivity to cultural differences, the student's needs and adjustment (Yeoh & Doan, 2013)
- Development of effective communication(Wang & Li, 2012; Yeoh & Doan, 2013) and intercultural competence (Durkin, 2008)
- Negotiation of western academic norms with student's cultural norms and values to develop a 'middle way' (Durkin, 2008)





- The need to discuss expectations and set boundaries on supervisor time and task involvement (Brown, 2007)

Questions raised in the literature include:

- Is it the individual supervisor or the institution who has responsibility for meeting the additional needs of international students? (Brown, 2007)
- Should additional workload hours be allocated to supervisors of international students? (Brown, 2007)
- To what extent should the supervisor engage in pastoral care? (Brown, 2007)

References

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INDIGENOUS SUPERVISION

The number of Indigenous student completing Honours (2003 38 completions; 2012 62 completions) and Masters by Coursework (2003 104 completions; 2012 188 completions) degrees across Australia has almost doubled in the past decade (DIISRTE Higher Education Award Course Completions 2012). However, this represent only 1% of Honours and 0.3% of Masters by Coursework degrees completed, substantially less than the 2.2% parity figure recommended in the [Report of the Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People](#) (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew & Kelly, 2012).

The limited research to date on supervision of Indigenous dissertations students has mainly focused on doctoral students. This research indicates that factors contributing to difficulties Indigenous students enrolled in dissertation programs may experience include:

- Cultural insensitivity by students and staff (Schofield, O'Brien & Gilroy, 2013)
- Cultural responsibility and fear of cultural alienation (Henry, 2007; Trudgett, 2011)
- Lack of understanding by supervisors of processes and protocols involved in conducting research within Indigenous communities (Trudgett, 2014)
- A preference for Indigenous epistemological approaches over western research methodologies imposed by supervisors (Foley, 2003)
- Community and family responsibilities (Trudgett, 2014)
- Limited number of Indigenous supervisors available

A strong supervisory relationship between supervisor(s) and the Indigenous student is central to successful completion of the dissertation (Trudgett, 2014). Henry (2007) posits the key principle underlying this as “respect for, and valuing and inclusion of, Aboriginal knowledge and ways of knowing within Aboriginal candidates’ learning” (p. 155). Culturally appropriate supervision needs to occur in a context of cultural safety that acknowledges the student’s cultural positioning (Trudgett, 2014). With the majority of supervision of Indigenous students provided by non-Indigenous



