PROJECT ISSUES

Student Perspective

The project I was working on was suggested by my supervisor and was extremely complex. It’s cutting-edge research. So I had zero or probably two percent knowledge in the area when I started– I’d read a little bit, but not very much. So it was a matter of trying to up-skill myself to actually understand the language because it’s very thick, like, one sentence, when I first read it, I didn’t have a clue. So I spent months and months up-skilling myself to actually understand the research. All the reading I was doing ... I was so confused, oh my god, so although the model was there I just couldn’t link it to the project I was planning to do... and I think when I look back at my work I produced at the time it was clear I wasn’t getting it. But I did get there with the literature at least– I was quite proud of myself. But I did say to my supervisor from the beginning, this strikes me as a PhD project rather than an honours and I’ve said that numerous times. And I guess that was one of my concerns, that it was way beyond my capabilities and it just wasn’t doable within the time frame. In hindsight I think that it’s a bit of an ask for this particular project to have been an honours project. It really needed someone who understands research a little bit better, who had more research training and experience.
PROJECT ISSUES

Coordinator Perspective

Sometimes new supervisors have unrealistic expectations as to what can be achieved in an undergraduate or honours dissertation project. I think when they start that don’t really understand/remember the limited research skills and experience students have and the limited space of time that a student has to get the research done: how important it is to actually narrow the topic down early, focus the lit review, do the fieldwork, do the analysis, complete the thesis all in that little space of time. So I think, yes, definitely that some new supervisors don’t understand the critical timing of it all.

Supervisors come and talk to me if a project they’re supervising falls apart for any reason. Sometimes the students may be - I don’t want to say lazy - but maybe just not having the right initiative to achieve the goals or to get things happening and if they’re not then seeking help things just drag on. If at the same time the supervisor isn’t quite on top of things and realising what is happening, work on the research project may stall. My focus in talking to supervisors in these situation is “OK ... what’s the back-up plan?”. I try to keep dibs on what is happening with the projects to make sure that they’re progressing on schedule. If I can see there might be a problem ahead of time, I can nip it in the bud or talk to the supervisor about back up plans.

I’ve had supervisors come and talk to me about the project and the student not being able to complete the work or not achieving it on time. I’ve also had that with respect to students in their data collection as well. Sometimes it may sort of reflect a bit of lack of communication and interaction between the supervisor and the student because maybe the supervisor should have been on the ball a bit more to pick up that the students hadn’t really achieved their goals and have got themselves to a point where they’re going to be needing extensions and may not be collecting in the end enough data to meet their needs. So, it sort of places a limitation on the quality of the research and the data that’s been collected as well.