



SUPERVISOR WORKLOADS AND SYSTEMIC ISSUES

Workload allocations for supervision vary across universities and level of dissertation. Melrose (2002) examined supervisory workload allocation across a range of Australasian universities. Many universities did not have policy guidelines at the university level and those that did tended to specify upper limits for the number of students supervised. Workload allocation for Masters and PhD student supervision was typically made at the school/department level with a set number of hours per week per dissertation. Lee (2012) noted that the large number of students requiring supervision at Masters level may result in reduced hours of supervision in comparison to PhD students, and the importance of advising students of the limited hours that were available for planning purposes. Workload allocation for honours dissertations varies across Australian universities and disciplines. At undergraduate level, the numbers of students requiring supervision has seen the introduction of group projects (Lee, 2012). Some universities do not allocate workload for honours students, viewing honours students as contributing to the school's research output: the "plug and socket" model" (Kiley, Boud, Manathunga, & Cantwell, 2011, p. 629) :

...the Honours program and its students plug into the School's research and conveniently incorporate teaching students research skills with providing the academics/supervisors with research assistance.

This is despite the perception of many supervisors that the constrained time frame for honours combined with the need for intensive training and lower likelihood of resultant publications made honours supervision more difficult than doctoral supervision (Kiley et al., 2011). While policies may exist in relation to the maximum number of doctoral students that can be supervised, no consideration appears to have been given to the cumulative supervision load across doctoral, masters, honours and undergraduate degrees.

The use of honours students as unpaid research assistants is not a new phenomenon. More than 40 years ago Witton (1973) noted the ethically dubious practice of using dissertation students as "cheap labour for academics own research projects" (p. 70). Stefani, Tariq, Heyling and Butcher (1997) noted the need to ensure that learning about the research process was not lost in these circumstances:



