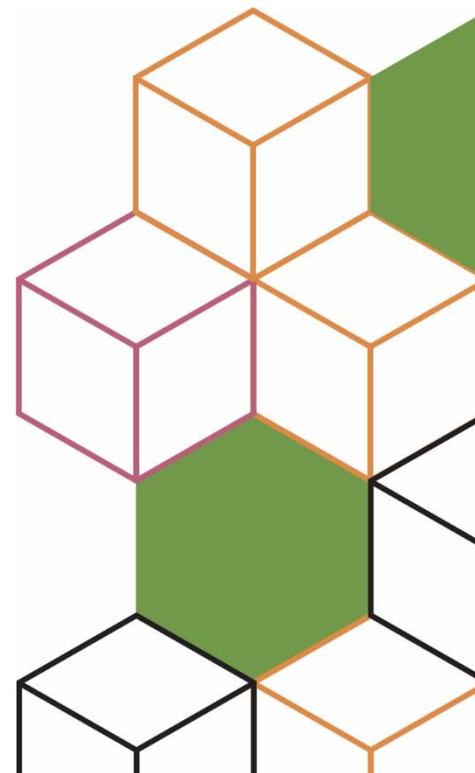


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Graduate Student Association

Submission on Proposed Amendments to the Management of Research Data and Records Policy

*Prepared by GSA Education (Research) Officer,
Monica Sestito*



About GSA

The Graduate Student Association (GSA) is the independent representative organisation for all graduate coursework and research students at the University of Melbourne. We are led by 8 GSA Board members, 10 Representative Council members and 20 Faculty Council Members, who are all elected University of Melbourne graduate students. On behalf of over 31,000 constituents, we represent graduate students to the University and wider community, provide student engagement events, activities, and information to the graduate student community, and support 150 affiliated graduate student groups.

GSA's vision is for inclusive, empowered graduate student communities that achieve meaningful and holistic university experiences. Our objectives are to support representation through our policy, advocacy and campaign activities, academic excellence, transition to work, support engaged and healthy community activities, and address organisational sustainability.

Context

The University has proposed a major amendment to the Management of Research Data and Records Policy. As it currently stands, the policy distinguishes between researchers, defined as “any *staff* member or honorary *staff* member involved in research or in connection with the University of Melbourne,” and research students, defined as any undergraduate, graduate, and/or exchange student who participates in research in connection to the University of Melbourne.¹ In fact, the entire policy is organised around the different roles and responsibilities of researchers, heads of departments, and research students in relation to data management. Section 4 of the policy explicitly states that research students share responsibilities with their supervisor for data management. It also establishes a clear line of guidance from a research student's supervisor on to their head of department.

Under the proposed policy change, the category of research student disappears. In its place, the category of researcher is expanded to encompass staff, visiting researchers, graduate researchers and coursework students who conduct research in relation to the University of Melbourne.² This means that graduate researchers – and indeed all coursework students – will be treated as staff members with regard to the management of research records.

As a part of the compulsory coursework component of doctoral programs, graduate researchers are required to complete the Managing Data @ Melbourne module available on the Learning Management System (LMS) and show evidence of completion in order to pass their confirmation.³ This program operates under the premise that graduate researchers are researchers in training and, therefore, are not required to have ready-made, comprehensive skills in data management. This is also reflected in the Graduate Research Supervisory

¹ See: <https://policy.unimelb.edu.au/MPF1242#section-3.4>

² See the draft policy on this Policy Hub:

<https://about.unimelb.edu.au/strategy/governance/regulatory-framework/policies/policy-consultation-hub>

³ For more information on this module, see:

https://library.unimelb.edu.au/Digital-Scholarship/training_and_outreach/data

Agreement, which all research candidates must sign with their main supervisor upon commencement. The Agreement enshrines the responsibility of supervisors to “mentor candidates through the research process, [including] new or unfamiliar tasks,” and to “introduce candidates to, and provide advice on, all relevant University policies.”⁴ Understanding and implementing good data management skills is one such area with which most candidates may require support and guidance.

Position

Though technically students in virtue of their enrolment in Masters by research or doctoral programs, graduate researchers approximate University staff members in many ways. Some are awarded Research Training Program stipends, which ostensibly provide a living wage so candidates can support themselves throughout their studies. Many contribute to research projects conducted by paid University staff and to the overall research output of the University, in their capacity as graduate researchers. All are obliged to sign the Graduate Research Supervisory Agreement, which explicitly defines the expected weekly working hours for a candidate (40 hours for full-time candidates; and 20 hours for part-time).⁵ All are also subject to strict performance requirements and progress monitoring. To make ends meet, many graduate researchers compete for scarce casual tutoring positions in the University, which brings them even closer to the paid academic workforce.

Despite approximating the responsibilities of paid staff members, graduate researchers do not approximate their rights. This is particularly evident regarding the leave entitlements of graduate researchers, from which carer’s leave, bereavement leave, and short-term sick leave are excluded.⁶

If graduate researchers do not have the rights of staff members, then they should not be made to assume their responsibilities – at least, not without adequate material compensation. For this reason, the Management of Research Data and Records Policy should not be amended in a way that places graduate researchers on equal footing with staff members regarding their responsibilities for data management. The issue here is not a question of ensuring that graduate researchers have adequate access to resources in order to fulfill data management responsibilities; it is instead a matter of principle. If the University does not commit to respecting and clearly defining the rights and responsibilities of graduate researchers as distinct from paid staff members, it risks being seen to instrumentalise graduate researchers’ intellectual output and labour while burdening them with the risks assumed by paid staff.

⁴ The Agreement is downloadable via this website:

<https://gradresearch.unimelb.edu.au/roles-and-responsibilities/working-with-my-supervisors>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ In response to GSA advocacy, the University administration is working on a scheme to allow short-term sick and carer’s leave for graduate researchers, though the timeframe for rolling this out is unclear.

Recommendations

1. The Management of Research Data and Records Policy should **maintain a distinction between researchers, defined as staff or honorary staff, and research students**, and clearly demarcate the different levels of responsibilities for each category.
2. The Management of Research Data and Records Policy should **enshrine in its procedural principles the resources and services available to all research students**, including graduate researchers and coursework students undertaking a minor thesis, to meet their data management responsibilities, jointly held with their supervisors.