

Postgraduate Essentials: Strategies for a successful start to your research degree

FAQ & Starter Kit

The University of Western Sydney provides an online orientation program to assist commencing research candidates to adjust to higher degree research candidature at UWS, and to understand the requirements of Confirmation of Candidature. This Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document introduces the program and explains how to participate.

What is Postgraduate Essentials?

Postgraduate Essentials is an online course that provides an integrated orientation program for all new higher degree research candidates.

It consists of eight self-paced modules that familiarise candidates with higher degree research policy and protocol at UWS, and develop academic skills and management tools important for the first six months of candidature and beyond.

The online environment provides opportunities to interact with postgraduate peers across the University, receive updates on workshops and events for research candidates, and seek specialist advice from the Office of Research Services, UWS Library and Student Learning Unit.

Please note that completing *Postgraduate Essentials* is a requirement of Confirmation of Candidature. Requirements for completing the program are explained on page 2 and listed in Table 1 (p. 3).

Your progress through the modules will be tracked using the vUWS E-Learning system. Make sure you check your candidate email account regularly for updates on your progress and other announcements.

How do I begin the program?

To access the *Postgraduate Essentials* site, login to vUWS at <http://elearning.uws.edu.au> using your MyUWS Account username (your Student ID number) and password. Then follow the link: [HDR Postgraduate Essentials \(Ongoing 2011\)](#) located in the Course List of your My vUWS page.

Upon first accessing the site you will be able to open the **Overview**, to learn more about the program, **Modules 1: Starting your research degree**.

Before beginning **Module 1** we recommend you consult:

- **Announcements** (under Course Tools) for important information on how to configure your computer, use vUWS and contact the E-Learning Service Desk for support, and
- **The Overview** module for further details on program content and requirements, profiles of the moderation team and important guidelines for online communication using the site discussion forums.

We strongly recommend you complete *Postgraduate Essentials* using a broadband internet connection. If you do not have access to broadband at home or work, UWS provides all students with high speed internet through the computer labs on every campus. The following website lists campus locations and contact numbers for all UWS computer labs:

http://www.uws.edu.au/campuses_structure/cas/services_facilities/it/general_purpose_computer_laboratories

How do I complete the program?

To register as having completed *Postgraduate Essentials*, you need to work through all seven modules and complete a set of small online tasks. There are two kinds of online task: Discussions and Assessments. These are explained below and listed in full in Table 1 Course Map of Postgraduate Essentials

Discussions

Each module includes one online forum task and a corresponding Topic link in the vUWS Discussions Tool. Commencing candidates often find it valuable to read peer perspectives on the shared transition issues covered in each of the seven modules. To support this outcome we therefore ask you to post a useful response to at least **three** of the seven discussion forum tasks as follows:

- ‘Introduce yourself’ task (please attach a photo - optional) in **Overview** or in **Module 1**
- One discussion forum task from **Module 2, 3 or 4**
- One discussion forum task from **Module 5, 6, or 7**

Assessments

Each of the first six modules concludes with a **Module Checklist**. These short ‘quizzes’ ask you to confirm whether or not you have understood and engaged with key topics, resources and activities from that module. When you submit a completed Module Checklist (100% Yes), the next module appears on the site Home Page. If you have a problem in accessing any module please write directly to the Postgraduate Essentials Coordinator, Dr Dai Fei Yang (d.yang@uws.edu.au).

Assessment at the end of Module 7 is an exception. This is a short **Research Ethics Quiz** that becomes available on the course Home Page after you submit the program **Evaluation** survey at the end of Module 7.

Please write a short email to notify the Co-ordinator of your completion after you have completed the Research Ethics Quiz. A Statement of Completion (SoC) is usually mailed out to candidates on Friday every week. If you have not received a SoC after two weeks of completion please let the Coordinator know, just in case the mail is lost in the system.

Previous participants spent an average of just under one hour on each module or about 7 hours to complete the whole program (i.e. Overview plus Modules 1-7). This includes time spent reading and responding to discussion forum postings. **It is very important for you to complete this program as early as possible within the timeframe of your Confirmation of Candidature.**

Table 1: Course Map of Postgraduate Essentials

Module	Content	Discussions		'Assessments'
		Topic	Moderator/Adviser	
Overview (Required)	Introduction to program aims, content, communication tools, technical support and completion requirements.	Introductions (Postgrad Lounge)	Dr Dai Fei Yang Coordinator – <i>Postgraduate Essentials</i> Student Learning Unit	N/A
1. Starting your research degree (Optional but recommended)	Key stages and distinct challenges involved in higher degree research	<u>Skills and attributes</u>	Dr Dai Fei Yang Coordinator – <i>Postgraduate Essentials</i> Student Learning Unit	N/A
2. Managing the project	Time and task management issues, tools and resources	<u>Managing the relationship</u>	Mary Krone Manager, Research Student Team Office of Research Services	N/A
3. Working with your supervisor (Optional but recommended)	Roles and responsibilities of candidates and their supervisors	<u>Useful databases</u>	Susan Robbins Research Services Librarian UWS Library	Complete Module 4 Checklist to (100% Yes) to open link to Module 5 on course Home Page
4. Searching the literature	Strategies and electronic tools for conducting an effective literature search through the UWS Library	<u>Writing issues</u>	Dr Claire Aitchison Snr Lecturer – Postgraduate Literacies Student Learning Unit	Complete Module 5 Checklist to (100% Yes) to open link to Module 6 on course Home Page
5. Writing a literature review	Strategies for writing a critical literature review for the Confirmation of Candidature Document	<u>Confirmation issues</u>	Dr Marie Fellbaum-Korpi Lecturer Student Learning Unit	Complete Module 6 Checklist to (100% Yes) to open link to Module 7 and program Evaluation on Home Page
6. Preparing for confirmation	Requirements of the Confirmation of Candidature Document and strategies for presenting to your Confirmation Panel	<u>Intellectual property</u>	Dr Fiona Cameron Associate Director: Innovation UWS Innovation & Consulting	N/A
7.1 Intellectual property	Intellectual property definition and guidelines	<u>Ethics hypothetical</u>	Dr Jane Hobson Manager, Research Quality, Policy & Planning Office of Research Services, with Raj Paramanathan Research Ethics Coordinator Office of Research Services	Complete Evaluation survey to open link to Research Ethics Quiz on Home Page. Make sure you complete the Ethics Quiz. On completion of all the above tasks, send an email to the Coordinator. A Statement of Completion will be sent to you via email within two weeks (usually on the following Friday).
7.2 Meeting ethical standards	Practical advice on the responsible conduct of research and preparing applications for research ethics clearance at UWS.			

Who can I contact for support in using vUWS?

The *Postgraduate Essentials* orientation program is delivered through vUWS or 'Virtual UWS', the University's online learning system. The following services and staff are available to support you with different aspects of your online experience.

Program Coordinator

For enquiries about Discussion and Assessment requirements, your progress towards completing *Postgraduate Essentials* or problems in accessing any modules, please contact Dr Dai Fei Yang at d.yang@uws.edu.au. You can also post a public enquiry in the 'Program Queries' forum on *Postgraduate Essentials*.

E-Learning Service Desk

If you are having difficulty using vUWS or configuring your computer and browser to function with vUWS, please contact the E-Learning Service Desk for assistance:

Ph: (02) 9852 5252

Email: vuws@uws.edu.au

E-Learning Student Support site

You can also consult online guides to using vUWS. The E-Learning Student Support site provides information on how to navigate in vUWS, post a discussion message, print pages, and configure your computer as well as lots of other relevant information to assist you as you use vUWS. This site is accessed through a link on your My vUWS page, just like *Postgraduate Essentials*.

ITD Helpdesk

Contact the ITD Helpdesk for support with accounts and passwords, computer labs or UWS office computers (hardware, software and network performance).

Ph: (02) 9852 5111

Email: helpdesk@uws.edu.au

Expectations from Program Coordinator (PC) and Module Moderators

The PGE Coordinator (PC) will read forum postings periodically, probably every fortnight. If there is an urgent request/issue, students need to write to the PC directly otherwise a two week period of responding time is expected.

The forum is set up for the purpose of collaboration and co-construction of knowledge among the students. The PC will not respond to individual question immediately. Instead, students will help one another in solving a particular problem or enquiry. If the PC observes that there is a need to step in, he/she will provide guidance or refer the question to appropriate personnel who will be able to help.

This is also applied to Module Moderators who are responsible for individual topic of discussions.

Archiving student postings

Student postings are archived every 3-4 months. All archived postings are stored and accessible in the '**Archived Discussions**' folders on the bottom of the discussion page.

What have past participants said about Postgraduate Essentials?

Overall value of program

- *Just wanting to feedback that I have found the modules easy to navigate (following some great instruction from [the program coordinator]). Whilst I had reservations at first about the amount of time the modules might take and whether I was going to find it useful I have been pleasantly surprised. It is helpful to know others are in the same situation and great to read about how other people are navigating their way through starting a PhD.*
- *The information provided was useful - particularly about the different stages that UWS requires students to go through (like Confirmation... etc). My supervisor is new to UWS so doesn't know much about these things.*
- *As an oversea student and new to different educational system, it helps me to understand about university expectation and regulation and how to deal with it.*
- *This program is useful, as it gives direction and advice on how to start a PhD, and what is expected by the end of the first year. I think the video clips with supervisors and PhD students giving their advice was the most useful aspect. It showed the different views and experiences of the beginning of candidature.*
- *Everything covered in the course was useful and is a great source of information for anything I might want to know about my candidature process, so you have my congratulations.*
- *It makes us get the idea of how to do PhD research, the resources, and the useful ways, and the functions of some website. All in all this program is useful in doing the research, and it is also flexible in time. It was well paced and references to good resources, very useful/ helpful, very clear.*
- *Although it is difficult to allocate the time to the modules (because of all the competing demands on time) they are always worthwhile. This has clarified some aspects of lit review styles for me and it is great to see that other postgrads are having similar experiences, and challenges. Thanks for providing this course.*
- *I would like to thank the organisers/providers of this on-line chat room for this bright idea that will help in exchanging knowledge and experience among PhD candidates.*
- *...it is great to have this site so we can all meet other students from the wider UWS.*
- *Overall, this is very useful program to PhD candidate, especially information about confirmation of candidature (oral presentation). No one exactly tell you what to do about oral presentation besides you have to be excellent, but through this program, I feel that I understand what to do.*
- *...it has really helped me out in a number of areas critical to my studies.*
- *I know how to start research work and get a good result.*
- *It's an excellent "how-to".*

What have previous participants said about Postgraduate Essentials?

Best aspects of program

- *The very practical way material was presented and linked. It was easy to read and follow and very well thought out. In a past life I taught adult learners for a living and so could see the logic and structure. Well done!*
- *Interactive environment where specific questions are addressed quickly and it gives a sense of belonging to a research student who works mostly in isolation.*
- *The most useful aspect of this program is be able to post your concern and read others' suggestions and ideas. I have learnt so much just by reading what other candidates had to say on different issues. Very useful.*
- *Reading the online posts of other candidates and knowing most of them had the same concerns as I have.*
- *Some of the information about how one might be feeling at particular times was useful too (having fraud complex is normal!).*
- *Having a central repository of information that could be referred to at any time. The information provided especially checklists and tips. Hearing how other postgrads were managing the early stages of candidacy.*
- *The guidance that it gave me in regard to the resources and support available to research students within UWS.*
- *Suggestions to drive different stages of research, very clear and helpful.*
- *Managing supervisor, research resources, ethics were very useful topics for me and posting was interesting and learning experience to find how others are doing and sharing experiences on the topic.*
- *Working at my pace from home, from campus and off campus. - knowing what is expected from me to earn my PhD and giving me an overview about events and challenges I will meet in the future. -videos posted in the program were very convincing and also very helpful, especially, comments from other postgraduate students who lived the experience. -Tips on using e-resources were also very useful. - Thank you*
- *Knowing what to do step by step and at the same time knowing what to expect. If we follow the guidelines and have a permanent contact with the panel there is not way how to go wrong during the candidature time*
- *Helped to gain understanding of what is expected of research student and offered systematic approach to working towards goals.*
- *The two literature review modules, and particularly the first one. That it was presented in an interesting manner, using videos, clearly laid out, etc, etc.*
- *[The modules on] Literature, writing and confirmation - information was useful for the research proposal and thesis writing*
- *The sections in each module telling us what to expect from each stage in the candidature and how to prepare for it. Modules on CoC and Literature review.*
- *All parts are useful and I think the sixth part is most useful for me.*