

CRIG FORUM

RESEARCH SUPPORT

Research Ambassadors
providing peer support at
Victoria University

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www.vu.edu.au



SO MUCH I COULD COVER...

- Background
- Recruitment
- Training
- Teamwork
- Marketing
- Consultations
- Feedback & evaluation

RESEARCH AMBASSADORS @ VU



Providing peer support to both research students AND staff in a range of skill areas – e.g. research design, data analysis, data management, statistical software, IT troubleshooting, EndNote, writing, ethics applications, general transition support



BACKGROUND

- Based on the SOAR Centre concept by the Graduate Research School at Edith Cowan University
- Research Ambassadors a joint initiative in 2011 between Library, Office for Postgraduate Research (OPR), Office for Research (OfR)
- Steering committee established to oversee implementation
- Situated within the Library at several campuses, supervised by the Research Librarian



RECRUITMENT

- June 2011 – advertised to PhD and Masters by Research
- July 2011 – interviewed 10, selected 6
- August 2011 – pilot program begins; runs until December 2011

- 2012 delays in re-starting program, recruited 3 new ambassadors with 3 continuing



TRAINING

- Induction training in first 2 weeks, drawing on ECU experiences
- Identified training and development needs for each ambassador
- Encouraged to register for training workshops run by library and by OPR to increase their skills
- Ongoing professional development a key to this program



COMMUNICATION TOOLS

For communicating with the team and with clients:

- Getting IT things sorted was the greatest issue
- Sharepoint website established for team
- Office Communicator (currently only staff to staff contact) was heavily used by RA's to communicate with supervisor and other RA's



TEAM BUILDING

- Strong collaboration encouraged between team members from day one
- Shift report submitted for every shift
- Team discussion posts

The strength of the teamwork is the highlight of the program



ROSTERED SHIFTS

- Each ambassador works 2 x 4-hour shifts per week
- 2011 located at 2 campuses
- 2012 spread over 4 campuses
- Remote service coverage from 10am to 5pm 5 days per week
- Encourage drop-in and 'by appointment', use Skype for chat with students, OC with staff
- Shift reports are high priority
- When no appointments – work on professional development activities and creating resources, e.g. Guides, FAQs, team documents

HOW TO GET THE MESSAGE OUT?

- Create an online guide...
- Targeted emails, tailored messages
- Speak at induction sessions, workshops
- Morning teas

The screenshot shows the 'Research Ambassadors Support' LibGuide page. The header features the title 'RESEARCH AMBASSADORS' in large white letters on a blue background, with the email 'seekRA@vu.edu.au' below it. To the right is a globe graphic with the text 'SUPPORT ENGAGEMENT SEEK ENCOURAGEMENT KNOWLEDGE'. The breadcrumb trail reads 'Library > LibGuides > Research Ambassadors > Research Ambassador Support'. The main title is 'Research Ambassador Support', with a last updated date of May 10, 2012, and a URL. There are links for 'Print Guide', 'RSS Updates', 'Email Alerts', and 'SHARE' (with social media icons). A navigation menu includes 'Home', 'Ambassador Services', 'Ambassador Profiles', 'Book an appointment', 'Useful Links', 'Feedback', and 'Contacts'. The main content area has a 'Welcome' section with a globe and the word 'WELCOME' in large letters, followed by 'Support • Referral • Advice • Transition • Skills'. Below this is an 'About the Research Ambassador Program' section with two paragraphs of text. On the right side, there are two boxes: 'Research Ambassador hours' listing online and library hours for Footscray Park, City Flinders, St Albans, and Werribee libraries, and a 'Contacts' box with the email 'seekRA@vu.edu.au'.

CONSULTATIONS

From August to December 2011:

Students 88% - Staff 12%

3 faculties, unevenly spread:

Business & Law	57%
Arts, Education and Human Development	30%
Health, Engineering & Science	8%
Other	5%

Query breakdown:

EndNote	13.8%
Research design and methodology	11.5%
SPSS	11%
Candidature preparation	8.8%
Data and file management	8.3%
Turnitin	7.4%
Writing support	6.9%
IT troubleshooting	6.0%
Library databases	5.1%
Document formatting	4.6%
NVivo	3.7%
Other (incl. referencing, ethics, MS Office)	12.9%

2012 early analysis shows similar trends

CONSULTATION SPACES

Works best in a dedicated
Researcher space

The Footscray Park Research
Student Study Lounge is ideal

More difficult at other sites where
there is little passing 'trade'





EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK

Evaluation of the ambassador experience

- Collected information beginning, middle and end of semester from the Research Ambassadors, followed up at end of year forum:
- What they said:
 - “A vast range of skills and knowledge is gained during ... weeks as research ambassador. At the beginning this was through the induction program and later with self-studies and through the questions raised by various students”
 - “Being a RA enables me to expose myself to the other disciplines colleagues are working on, which broadens my vision and enable me to approach my own research assignment from multiple angles. I wish I could spare more time learning from other RAs, as a process toward my professional development”



EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK

Evaluation of the client experience

- Feedback forms
- Survey to be filled in by users and non-users
- Online feedback form
- Unsolicited emails

What they said

- Feedback forms 100% positive
- “Thank you very much again for your excellent support. Previously, I have sought support from several people, who have all made the task seem insurmountable. You have made light work of this task, and now I know how to do it myself. Your clear and concise explanations have helped me to understand how to work with this software program in the future”



WHAT'S NEXT?

- Keep on looking for new marketing angles
- Use of social media ?
- RA's to run workshops in areas of strength
- Pick up on Career Development aspect of ECU program

Questions?