

## Building local leadership in research education

### Scenario 2: Building a research culture for students and research staff

The Faculty is trying to enhance its research and research culture and to build a community that involves research students and research staff. It has sponsored presentations by key researchers at Faculty conferences and organized a substantial seminar series. However, many students and researchers only come to presentations that are related to their immediate research area. They don't come to broader research presentations from Faculty staff or students.

When this issue was investigated, some researchers reported that they are focused on ERA results so were only interested in research closely related to their discipline. This attitude filtered down to the students. Others, particularly those with cross-disciplinary experience, were more open to different approaches and encouraged their students to broaden their understanding of research in the field and engage with the broader research culture.

1. Are conferences and seminars the best ways of fostering interaction between students and researchers? What are some alternatives?
2. Apart from discussions with the supervisor, what activities might allow students to gain a broader and deeper understanding of how research actually happens?
3. Who decides what sorts of activities might be appropriate for the student cohort? How do they get buy-in from others?

### Additional information

Below are some issues that have been raised by others in response to this scenario. You may wish to consider them for yourself or raise them with colleagues to explore what might be realistic in your situation.

*What outcomes from interaction between students and researchers are worthwhile?*

Suggestions:

- Students meet other researchers and know enough about their interests to draw on them when they need to.
- Students see different ways of thinking about and doing research in relation to real research problems
- Students develop the confidence to ask questions and probe what other researchers do
- Students see that becoming a researcher involves more than doing a specific project

Further resources available from [www.first.edu.au](http://www.first.edu.au)

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### *What are alternative forums for interaction?*

#### Suggestions:

- Student-led and organized internal conferences where other researchers are invited to do key notes and act as paper discussants
- Reading groups/journal clubs at which students and researchers discuss papers of interest around agreed themes
- Writing groups of both students and researchers (eg. membership requires sharing drafts of a current paper aimed at publication)
- Social events, including off-campus activities, which involve both groups. Once a week 'morning teas'.
- Organise working spaces so that students and researchers necessarily interact (eg. don't have student workrooms on another floor or in another building)
- Avoid 'random' seminar programs solely driven by availability of presenters. Consider themes and topics that are integrative as well as seminars presenting current research.
- Form 'research buddies': team up newer students with more experienced students or post-docs to show them and tell them things that 'all researchers need to know'
- Research shadowing: students spend time in the lab or research team meetings with researchers other than their supervisor. Could be internal or external groups.
- Student-run community meetings in which researchers are invited to address topics chosen by students to help them in their research
- Have intensive research days that have a wide variety of activities that look attractive (eg. mix of student seminars, presentations by researchers, panels to discuss tricky issues or topics, workshops on particular theories or methods, etc.). Consider funding for travel that could be accessed by distant students.

### *Getting buy-in from others*

#### Suggestions:

Getting buy-in from other researchers may require a different strategy to buy-in from students

- Make sure that students understand the importance of events and activities in terms of their own plans
- Sell the idea to influential supervisors to ensure their students are especially encouraged to attend. Ensure influential supervisors are asked to contribute regularly.
- Establish a student-organised working group (students from different

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- stages of enrolment) with access to a staff adviser to plan activities
- Invite researchers to activities in which they don't have to do a lot of preparation (unlike a seminar), eg. responding to questions posed by students, explaining how they decided to tackle a particular research question, etc.
  - Link meetings to the normal activities of research groups—either as part of the same program or as part of events that all will be attending for other reasons
  - Take into account the normal working patterns of those to be invited to find good times and locations
  - If people do not attend, find out why. If they do attend, find out what they are getting out of it.

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