

ARMS 2024 CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Theme: Professional research management as an embedded practice

Title: Embedding Wellbeing Practices into the Research Student Experience

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Abstract:

A recent Monash University survey revealed a high percentage of graduate research students perceived their mental and physical health to be poorer from commencement to their current year of PhD candidature, with approximately one third of these students accessing mental health support. We now know that wellbeing and research candidature outcomes are inextricably linked, and poor wellbeing can result in drawn-out candidature timeframes, withdrawal, and poorer health outcomes for students. ^{1,2}

To strengthen local partnerships among the PhD cohort, and in particular, to transcend disciplinary silos, the MBUS Graduate Research Team (GRT) developed a renewed focus on research student wellbeing in 2024. We developed a 4-pronged approach: 1. Launching student wellbeing events; 2. Coaching research supervisors in preliminary mental health student discussions; 3. Improving the GRT's communications strategy; and 4. Enhancing the GRT's suite of event offerings to students to support a renewed sense of collegiality with their research community. By improving the research student experience, we hope to support improved outcomes both personally and academically.

After pursuing these strategies in the first semester of 2024, graduate research event attendance has increased across the board, and even doubled in some instances compared to the previous year, with many students choosing to participate in multiple events. Increased engagement with the GRT regarding candidature-related issues also initiated more confidential preliminary discussions around mental health issues. Following the enhancement of GRT event offerings, students also reported a renewed excitement for their research and reflected an enhanced sense of wellbeing and inclusion among their research community.

We aim to continue improving and evolving graduate research student wellbeing initiatives into the future. This wellbeing focus has reinforced our team's commitment to providing an optimal research student experience, ensuring we can be a more reliable source of support and information for our PhD cohort.

1. Nature 575, 257-258 (2019) doi: <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-019-03489-1>

2. Humanities and Social Science Communications 8, 305 (2021): <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-021-00983-8#Sec16>