Equity Project

Improving women’s participation in research higher degrees

June 1996
Preface

The Women in Higher Degrees Project was an initiative of the Monash Postgraduate Association, supported by the Equal Opportunity Unit and the Equity Plan Consultative Committee. It was funded by a DEETYA Higher Education Equity Program Grant.

The Monash Postgraduate Association thanks Dr Kate White, the Project Officer, for her dedication to the task so much so that the Project was actually completed ahead of time in spite of the difficulties of working within our large multi campus university. Kate’s remarkable efforts to provide an opportunity for women from all campuses to contribute their viewpoints has ensured that the recommendations arising from this project are owned by the women of Monash University.
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Executive Summary

Women’s undergraduate participation rates have increased significantly in the last decade. By 1995 at Monash they comprised over 50 per cent of the following faculties: Arts, Education, Law, Medicine, Pharmacy and Science. Moreover, their participation rates in research higher degrees have improved in that time. However, their participation rates in research higher degrees were significantly lower than at undergraduate level – even in those faculties in which women have high participation rates at undergraduate level.

This project identified in the literature structural and attitudinal barriers that contribute to women’s lower participation rates in research higher degrees, established networks with women throughout the University, conducted a series of workshops across all campuses aimed at the target group – women enrolled in research higher degrees and those who might be considering postgraduate research. The project also sought views of postgraduate coordinators on how to improve women’s participation in research higher degrees.

Women at Monash University identified financial constraints, lack of role models and mentors, problems with supervision, the inflexibility of the institution and Departments within it, the negative response of Departments to women returning to study and to the experience and skills they bring, the unsupportive environment, and negative community attitudes to women doing postgraduate research all as barriers.

Postgraduate coordinators identified the lack of a critical mass of women in postgraduate research in some Departments, lack of scholarships and other financial issues, problems with supervision, lack of a research culture, not enough women academics as role models and women intermittently during their candidature as barriers to their participation.

Strategies suggested to overcome these barriers included: that the university improve its links to the community; that it recognise part-time study is the best option for some women; more encouragement, mentors and networks for women; and more resources for women doing research higher degrees.
Chapter 1

The project

1.1 Background

In April 1995, Monash Postgraduate Association (MPA) prepared a submission to the Equity Plan Consultative Committee for a project to be funded by a Higher Education Equity Program grant.

Monash University’s Equal Opportunity policy statement asserts that the University:

- supports government policy commitments to removing barriers to the full participation of disadvantaged groups in higher education, and will take positive steps through its Equity Plan to increase access and promote conditions conducive to success for disadvantaged groups in higher education. Recognising that educational disadvantage is linked to factors such as ethnic origin, social or economic circumstance, sex, disability, age or residence in a rural or isolated area, the University undertakes to take action to enable disadvantaged people to overcome these barriers.

The current Federal Government has reaffirmed its equity policy commitments. Funding for the Higher Education Equity Program has been retained. Institutions are required to report on the access, participation, success and retention of students in the designated equity groups. Women in Research Higher Degrees are one of these groups.

The project which MPA proposed was clearly within the spirit of this policy. Its purpose was to devise strategies for overcoming attitudinal and structural barriers to women’s participation in research higher degree study.

Monash University statistics indicated that women’s participation at undergraduate level had steadily increased over the past 16 years and women now comprised over 50 per cent of enrolments in several faculties. However, this trend is not reflected in research higher degrees. There was a significant decline in participation rates for women between undergraduate courses and research higher degrees across most faculties.

The MPA Committee was of the view that the various interlocking factors had already been well identified, but what required investigation was strategies to overcome them.

The methodology proposed in the submission was an emphasis on finding solutions to problems and identifying new and better ways of approaching old problems.

Specific methodology proposed in the submission included:

- a series of workshops and seminars aimed at the target group — women already enrolled in research higher degrees and those who may be considering continuing on to such degrees
• collecting data on attitudes, resources, policies and practices the target group consider would enhance their opportunity to enrol in and complete a research higher degree

• involving women from all faculties

• converting this data into policy statements to feed into appropriate decision-making bodies

• devising appropriate professional development programs for both research and academic staff to facilitate beneficial attitudinal and behavioural changes throughout the university

• regularly reporting through university publications and feedback workshops

• evaluating the project through feedback from workshops and a final workshop for participants

1.2 The task

On 1 September 1995 MPA appointed Dr. Kate White as Project Officer for its Equity Project. This was a half-time position over 10 months.

1.3 The wider context

During the first two months the project officer carried out an extensive survey of Australian and international literature on the topic. She also consulted widely with women at Monash University.

Of all the literature consulted perhaps Baringa (quoted in Paula Caplan, Lifting a Ton of Feathers: a woman’s guide to surviving in the academic world, 1993, p.173) best expressed the pattern of women’s participation rates. She noted a funnelling effect or process, or what she called the leaking pipeline, that tends to occur between women’s participation rates at undergraduate level and at postgraduate level in research higher degrees.

At Monash this is evident even in those disciplines where women predominate. For example, women’s participation rates in arts, social sciences and education in 1995 were: Arts, Humanities, Social Science - 74.6 per cent, and Education 86.4 per cent, but participation rates in research higher degrees were: Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences 57.8 per cent and Education 56.1 per cent.

The work of Sandra Acker over 20 years on gender and education (Gendered Education, 1994, p.153 and ff.) suggests that this funnelling is a constant theme in education from nursery and primary school teachers through to academics. Men tend to dominate in the management roles in educational institutions. For example, in 1990 in Britain, women constituted 80.6 per cent of nursery and primary school teachers, but only 48.6 per cent of nursery and primary head teachers; 47.8 per cent of secondary school teachers, but only 19.7 of secondary head teachers; 22 per cent of university academics and 4.6 per cent of mainstream professorships (1991-2). In Australia women make up 45.8% of university staff at Level A, but only 9.8% of staff at Level E (Limited access : Women’s Disadvantage in Higher Education Employment, Tanya Castlem, Margaret Allen, Wendy Bastalich, Patrick Wright, National Tertiary Education Union, 1995, p 35)
The message here is that fewer women make it to senior positions to provide role models for women. So the funnelling of women’s participation in research higher degrees mirrors a wider funnelling of women in senior positions throughout the education system and also in the public sector generally as well as the corporate sector.
Chapter 2

The process

2.1 The project launch

On 20 September Professor Lachlan Chipman, Convenor of the Equity Plan Consultative Committee, and Professor Stella Crossley, Chair of the Affirmative Action Coordinating Committee, launched the Monash Postgraduate Association Equity project.

At the launch Professor Chipman said there had been small increases in the rates of women’s participation in higher degrees by research, rising from 44.7 per cent in 1994 to 46.55 per cent in 1995. There had been commensurate increases in women’s participation in non-traditional areas such as engineering – 14 per cent in 1994 to 15.5 per cent in 1995. However, in some traditional areas – such as arts, humanities, social sciences and education – women’s participation in higher degree research is significantly lower than their participation in undergraduate courses.

Professor Crossley said:

the MPA Equity Project was both worthwhile and long overdue. It had been known for some time that women did not enrol in research higher degrees to the same extent as men. But, to her knowledge, no faculty had investigated the reasons for this. She said that it was interesting that it was the students who recognised the need for a project of this kind because changes on university campuses, (and she mentioned the inclusion of student representatives on Monash committees as an example), often happened because students saw a need for change and showed leadership in doing something to bring it about. Professor Crossley said that the MPA Equity Project was a welcome addition to the other affirmative action projects in progress on Monash campuses.

2.2 Reference Group

MPA appointed a reference group to assist the Project Officer. Members were:

" Ms Timme Grinham - postgraduate representative on the PhD and Scholarships Committee
" Ms Margaret Heagney - Student Equity Officer
" Mrs Pam Herman - Manager, Research Training & Support Branch
" Ms Julie Hotchin - MPA Committee member
" Associate Professor John Hurst - Computer Science
" Ms Jodie Joyce - postgraduate representative on the Equity Plan Consultative Committee
2.3 Establishing networks

One of the aims of the project, as outlined in the MPA submission, was to establish networks throughout the university.

The networking began with the project launch. The project officer sent out 200 invitations. She noted those who offered apologies but asked to be kept in touch with the project. She also organised a contact list to be distributed at the launch.

From these two sources she compiled a contact list. Other contacts came from articles on the project which the Project Officer wrote for the following: Equity, GradPost, Magnet (MPA newsletter) MAPS newsletter. She later submitted articles to Compass (MPA's annual magazine), Dissent (Monash University Women’s Collective) and Otico (Peninsula).

In each of these articles the Project Officer invited postgraduates or intending postgraduates to contact her. About 50 women responded to this publicity and spoke with the Project Officer and/or arranged to see her. They in turn often recommended other contacts. Further contacts came from MPA and the Equal Opportunity Unit staff.

The project officer also tried to establish networks and gain publicity for the project through participation in wider forums. On 25 October she was a panel member at a conference at Melbourne University which the Postgraduate Association and Graduate Centre hosted. It was entitled “changing the culture: women in postgraduate research”. She was also a panel member at a one day miniconference at Melbourne University on national issues in Postgraduate Education at which she discussed the project in the context of wider access and equity issues in Higher Education.

In April 1996 the project officer delivered a paper on the project at a national Conference in Adelaide entitled “Quality in Postgraduate Education: Is it Happening?”. The paper generated considerable interest.

These forums provided the opportunity to discuss the project and also to make valuable contacts with participants either interested in the issue or carrying out research on a related topic.

2.4 The Workshop Program

The project officer discussed with the reference group the need for a pilot workshop before the end of 1995. The group suggested speakers. It was considered important to hold one
pilot workshop before the end of the academic year to assist in planning workshops for 1996.

The project officer contacted people identified from the contact list; she also contacted Gippsland, Caulfield, Parkville and Peninsula campuses; and followed up names from MPA, Equal Opportunity and other sources.

2.4.1 Pilot Workshop

This workshop was held on 14 November in the Gallery Theatrette, Clayton Campus.

Who was invited?

Given that formal undergraduate classes had finished for the year, the focus was mainly on postgraduates, including academics who were also postgraduates.

Publicity

The Project Officer put up posters throughout the Menzies Building and sent others to MPA Departmental representatives in all faculties. She also publicised the workshop through faxes to other campuses and direct contact. There was insufficient time to publicise the project in Magnet.

Choosing panel members

The Reference Group decided it would be good to have a mix of women academics and postgraduates. The project officer approached four women who had been recommended. Unfortunately several were unavailable at that particular time but offered to help with future workshops. The final panel consisted of:

" Dr Denise Cuthbert, senior lecturer, English
" Ms Susan Feteris – part-time lecturer, Physics
" Ms Rosemary Martyn – part-time lecturer and PhD candidate, Social Work
" Ms Elaine Chow – full-time PhD candidate, Genetics

Panel members presented an interesting range of experiences, some including the difficulties of combining research/teaching with family responsibilities.

Reporting back

The project officer divided the participants into four workshop groups of six people each, and delegated one panel member to each group. This worked well. Often participants who had not spoken in the open forum were keen to have the opportunity to speak with the panel member and other participants in the workshop. Participants identified a range of structural and attitudinal barriers. Strategies suggested for overcoming these barriers included: setting up an email network, a home page on WWW, faculties to review the role of postgraduate coordinator, a pilot mentoring scheme for women to be established by faculties, mandatory staff development – including gender issues – for supervisors, and a women’s monthly networking lunch to be established in 1996.
2.4.2 Evaluation

Each participant received an evaluation sheet before the end of the workshop. Most of the responses were positive, with comments such as:

"made me realise that many other women who seem so confident and ‘together’ also suffer from my fears"; “good to hear other people’ experiences and ideas”; “useful ideas/approaches from those in the group who had survived the system”.

Criticisms of the workshop included: that the size of the workshop groups was too small, there was repetition in the reporting back forum and discussion of strategies was too brief.

2.4.3 Lessons for future workshops

At the second reference group meeting on 29 November there was a full discussion of the workshop, including the venue and the feedback from the evaluation sheets. Most thought that the venue was good. They argued that the repetition was useful in reinforcing points made, but perhaps those reporting back could mention points already raised without discussing them in detail. There was a suggestion that it might be better in future workshops to have one workshop on barriers, followed by reporting back and another on strategies, followed by reporting back. The meeting also thought that the questions prepared for workshop participants were useful.

At this meeting members discussed in some detail directions for future workshops. The Project Officer asked for suggestions for people who could assist in analysing statistics on women’s participation rates at Monash. People suggested were: Professor Max King, Econometrics, Dr Felicity Allen, Dr Margaret James and Dr Gay Baldwin.

She also sought direction about whether to design and carry out a survey or conduct a series of interviews. The meeting thought that surveys were too labour intensive and preferred open-ended interviews. It suggested that the Project Officer should also explore the views of academics about why women’s participation in research higher degrees is significantly lower in some faculties and that the Project Officer target postgraduate coordinators, contacting them about the project and arranging interviews with some of them.
Chapter 3

Some preliminary themes

How do I decide when it is something to do with me as an individual or something to do with me as a woman?

This question from a workshop participant encapsulates the dilemma of many women who face structural and attitudinal barriers in higher education. Women often experience increasing difficulties at university as they attempt to move from undergraduate degrees into honours and then on to research higher degrees. Some of the structural barriers are easy to identify but attitudinal barriers are often more subtle and can cause women to turn their uneasiness and lack of confidence back on themselves.

The literature search covered women in education, women in higher education, and women as undergraduates and postgraduates. It also explored those disciplines which have been traditionally male dominated. Themes to emerge from the literature survey are summarised below:

i. pathways to postgraduate study.

Women have a myriad of pathways to postgraduate study. Many do not do an undergraduate degree, followed by a Masters and/or a PhD. Women often return to study while they have young children or when their children have gone off to school. Others may have to wait until an elderly parent or relative dies before they are free to focus on their own interests or needs. But where women do move straight from undergraduate to postgraduate research they perform well. Helen Arthurson’s study of women’s PhD completion rates at the University of New England over an eleven year period showed that women in the Sciences were more likely to successfully complete their theses and in a shorter time than women in other faculties. The modal age of female students at initial enrolment in a PhD was 23, whereas for Arts it was 37. This suggests a pattern of women Science graduates quickly moving from undergraduate into postgraduate study. Women PhD candidates in Science were also more successful in graduating with their PhDs than the total PhD student group, both male and female.

ii. women on the periphery of academic cultures and structures

Some of the literature suggests that women remain on the periphery of academic cultures and structures. Women are not invited to join the informal networks - even as academics let alone postgraduates - unless they have male partners who are academics. Some research suggested, especially in the sciences, that women tend to be given research projects that are not mainstream to the discipline, or in sections of the department that are under-resourced. (See Becher, Henkel and Kogan, Graduate Education in Britain, 1994, p.156 and ff)
iii. isolation/few support networks

Not surprisingly, studies constantly report that women as postgraduates – and academics – lack confidence and see themselves as isolated. These same women said they had no support networks, nor generally had they attempted to establish any.

iv. more problems with supervision

Several studies report that women tend to have more problems with supervision. Often supervisors are male, but difficulties with female supervisors are also common. The fact that the majority of women postgraduates are supervised by men and have little contact with their female peers may discourage PhD completions by women, as Phillips and Pugh (How to Get a PhD) note. But other factors are possibly at work here. Booth and Satchell suggest that the professional status of a female PhD candidate’s mother will influence completion rates (the higher the mother’s social class as defined by her occupation, the more likely the daughter will complete her PhD successfully).

v. fewer resources

A survey at Griffith University, The Unintended Gender Effects of Higher Education on Postgraduate Students (1994), found that women postgraduates fared second best when it came to the slice up of the ever diminishing resources cake. The questionnaire listed 19 different resources, ranging from desks to computer training and conference funding, and men reported they were better equipped than women in every instance. However, it should be noted that women may have fewer resources because they are often in Faculties which have restricted funds.

vi. lack of a critical mass and role models

Ingrid Moses in Barriers to Women’s Participation as Postgraduate Students (1990), argued that a critical mass of higher degree students in related areas seems to be necessary to provide peer support, stimulation, “normality” of women’s concerns with study, good facilities and formalised seminar programs.

vii. different communication styles

Castleman et. al Limited Access: Women’s Disadvantage in Higher Education (1995) noted that those interviewed in higher education said that men tended to promote themselves better and to impress, independently of their actual performance. This confirmed earlier work, especially that of Hall, that the women express themselves and communicate within a university setting disadvantages them.

viii. competing demands

Unless women proceed straight from undergraduate to postgraduate studies, anecdotal evidence suggests that it is likely that they will have more, and more diverse, demands on their time and energy than men.

ix. the question of relevance

A number of questions about relevance come to mind:

How relevant are research higher degrees to women’s career aspirations and their need to juggle this myriad of competing demands?
Are women looking at research higher degrees and rejecting them as too hard, too long and not relevant to their needs?

Are women choosing instead to do graduate diplomas and masters by coursework because they are shorter, more career focussed, and better enable them to advance quickly in their careers? Moses (1990) certainly noted this trend.

A preliminary analysis of women’s participation rates in coursework higher degrees and graduate diplomas suggests that in the Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences/ Business, Economics, Administration and in Education more women are doing these postgraduate courses rather than research degrees. This is discussed in detail later in the report. Moreover, comments from workshops and postgraduate coordinators, see below, offer possible explanations for why women prefer coursework postgraduate courses. While the issue is beyond the scope of this study, it is clear that there appears to be a correlation between women’s lower participation rates in research higher degrees and their higher participation in Graduate Diplomas and Masters by coursework.
Chapter 4

Statistical analysis

In January the project officer spent two weeks analysing statistics on women’s participation rates at Monash University. She prepared tables which showed female participation rates 1979-1995 by degree faculty; female undergraduate and postgraduate participation by degree faculty 1995; percentage of females by degree faculty by campus 1995. She then circulated the tables and description of them to several people who have previously analysed women’s participation at Monash University.

From this feedback she decided not to pursue analysis of women’s participation by degree faculty by campus. The differences in the participation rates between campuses were small and could often be explained by other factors. For example, slightly higher participation rates for women in Education at Peninsula and Gippsland probably result from both campuses offering courses in primary teaching which traditionally have attracted more women than men. The reference group subsequently agreed, after discussion, that it would not be useful to pursue this analysis.

This analysis of participation rates revealed the following: women’s participation rates at Monash have increased significantly across all faculties over the sixteen year period under review. Women in some faculties have gone from low to high participation rates. However, the increase has varied considerably between faculties with the strongest increase in Business, Education, Law and Science. Women as undergraduates now comprise over 50 per cent of the following faculties - Arts, Education, Law, Medicine, Pharmacy and Science. At undergraduate level then, except in a few degree faculties, women are participating at the same level or better than male students.

Moreover, women’s PhD enrolments have increased consistently since 1988 and women now predominate in some Faculties. For example, in the Faculty of Medicine in 1996 women PhD students outnumbered men overall in 13 of the 19 Departments. (See Appendix 2). Moreover, on a percentage of enrolment basis, fewer female than male examinees at Monash present theses that require further examination.

As Ian Dobson (People and Place, vol.4 No.2, 1996, p.65-6) has recently pointed out, emphasis on women’s disadvantage in their access to higher education should now focus on “those gender equity issues which still need to be pursued”. He cites several issues which need to be studied. They include: why women apply in under-representative numbers for postgraduate awards, equity aspects of fee-paying courses, transition rates from undergraduate to postgraduate work and ways to increase the incidence of research in highly feminised areas such as nursing and visual/performing arts.

This present study – of women’s lower participation rates at research higher degree level – is one such area Dobson identified as needing to be pursued. Women’s participation rates in research higher degrees are still significantly lower – even in those faculties in which women
traditionally have had high participation rates at an undergraduate level although this study does acknowledge that the situation has improved in the last ten years. For example, in Arts in 1995 their participation rate at undergraduate level was 71.9 per cent and at higher degree research level was 56.4. Thus the ratio of female higher degree research students to female undergraduates in Arts was .8. In Education the lower participation rates at postgraduate level were even more pronounced - from 86 per cent at undergraduate level to 58.6 per cent for higher degree research students, a ratio of just under .7. Women’s higher degree research participation rates were also significantly lower in Business & Economics - 47.5 per cent for undergraduates and 35.9 for higher degree research students, a ratio of .75 and Science where the ratio is .74. One of the reasons for women’s lower participation rates in research higher degrees in the Faculty of Science is that many of these women do postgraduate research in the Faculty of Medicine rather than in Science.

The significantly lower participation rates of women in research higher degrees raises some important concerns. If a university has lower participation rates for women across almost all degree faculties it means that there is a restricted pool of women who will complete PhDs. Lack of relevant doctoral and postdoctoral qualifications and experience is one factor in women’s low participation rates in academia.

Meanwhile, women’s participation rates in other than research higher degrees indicate that women who go on to postgraduate study often prefer to do masters by coursework or graduate diplomas. The ratio of women in other than research higher degrees to women in undergraduate degrees in 1995 was as follows: Arts .9, Business and Economics .8, Computing and Information Technology 1.1, Education .8, engineering .7, Law .4, Medicine .8, Pharmacy 1.5 and Science 1.2. Except for Engineering and Law, the ratios were higher for course work postgraduate degrees than for research higher degrees.

These ratios raise the question of how relevant are research higher degrees to women’s career aspirations. Clearly women often prefer to do coursework masters and graduate diplomas.

This in turn raises concerns about equity, as Dobson has emphasised. It is difficult for students enrolled in masters by coursework to gain scholarships. Doing coursework may also cut off their entry to a research higher degree and decrease their chances for scholarship eligibility. While many women may prefer to do a Masters by coursework, they are financially disadvantaged by doing so, especially if it is an upfront fee-paying course. On the other hand, a 1994 study suggests that doing a PhD has a low fiscal pay-off: it is a poor social investment given its high cost and long study period. (Campus Review Weekly, 18-24 August 1994).

The reasons for women’s preference for Graduate Diplomas and Masters by coursework is beyond the scope of this study but it is the logical next step in research into equity and higher education.
Chapter 5

The workshops

5.1 Planning for 1996

The Project Officer consulted the MPA Executive Officer to plan the program for workshops in March, April and May 1996 and made arrangements to visit Gippsland campus in January to plan a workshop there.

The Project Officer prepared a brochure to distribute at postgraduate enrolments on the Clayton campus. She was also on the MPA desk at the enrolment centre for several sessions to distribute the brochure and discuss the project with enrolling postgraduates.

During January the Project Officer also devised strategies for organising a series of workshops across all campuses. Throughout late January/February she had discussions with individuals and groups and travelled to Gippsland, as well as Peninsula and Parkville campuses. The Project Officer took the view that workshops were more likely to succeed if the MPA collaborated with existing groups in developing the program for and promoting the workshops. Collaborating with the other groups would give them some ownership of the workshop and help to raise the profile of that organisation as well as that of MPA. It would also give the collaborating parties the opportunity to be involved in developing policy recommendations which would flow from the project.

On 21 February the project Reference Group met for the third time. Issues discussed included organising workshops and interviewing postgraduate coordinators. The Group suggested several contacts at Caulfield campus and also questioned whether the Project Officer would organise a workshop at Parkville campus.

On 28 February the Project Officer went to Peninsula to meet with an interdisciplinary research group. She discussed the project with them and asked if they were interested in collaborating in a workshop for the project. The Group set up a sub-committee to liaise with MPA. That sub-committee then took the initiative in organising the workshop.

On 8 March the Project Officer met with Ms. Margaret Duncan, Equal Opportunity coordinator, Parkville Campus and Professor Colin Chapman, Dean of Pharmacy, to discuss the project and whether or not it might be useful to hold a workshop on that campus.

Professor Chapman expressed interest in the MPA Project, but said Pharmacy didn’t perceive any difficulties for women in postgraduate research. Pharmacy currently has 65 per cent female enrolment at undergraduate level. In research higher degrees women’s participation rates in 1995 were 52.5 and in higher degree course work 91.6. Women’s participation levels in Pharmacy have steadily increased since the mid 1980s when Pharmacy dropped physics as a prerequisite subject. Moreover, women see Pharmacy as a
flexible career, which will enable them to combine part or fulltime work with family and other responsibilities.

However, Pharmacy initially had difficulties recruiting women into postgraduate research. Professor Chapman detected that they lacked confidence to apply for the positions advertised. He therefore wrote to the top 30 final year students inviting them to do postgraduate research. The response had been positive.

Professor Chapman, Ms Duncan and the Project Officer agreed that there was little need to conduct a workshop on the Parkville campus. Pharmacy is one of the success stories of women’s participation in higher education. Nevertheless, Professor Chapman said he would invite the Project Officer to speak at a research orientation program (for third years) or to the fourth year trainees at one of their full day seminars.

The result of three months planning and networking was the following workshops:

5.2.1 Workshop at Clayton 20 March

This workshop was organised in collaboration with Monash Student Association Women’s Affairs Collective. MPA produced a brochure on the workshop for the Collective to distribute during Orientation Week.

The target participants were women in third year of their undergraduate degree and the workshop aimed to attract Arts and Social Science students. The purpose was to explore perceptions of postgraduate research in relation to their overall career planning.

The panel comprised Katie Spearritt, a PhD student, National Key Centre in Industrial Relations, Monash University and Convenor, the Young Feminist Group, Women’s Electoral Lobby, and Megan Gilbert, a third year Arts-Law student representing MSA Women’s Collective. About 16 attended the workshop. The discussion was well focussed and raised several important issues.

Katie said that her research on affirmative action in the corporate sector indicated that women were moving in, but not getting on. She found that women are leaving corporations and setting up their own businesses. She said one of the biggest barriers was the corporate culture which revolved around male “clubiness”.

Issues raised in group discussion included: lack of information about doing honours and postgraduate research; no encouragement from lecturers about doing honours even though several had had good results; Departments needing to encourage women to get into honours; and the need for more flexible timetables for honours year.

5.2.2 Workshop at Gippsland Campus, 25 March

This was organised in collaboration with Gippsland Association of Postgraduate Students (GAPS), the Equal Opportunity, Officer Mrs Christine Body, and the Chaplain, the Rev. Judy Redman.

The target participants were women postgraduates, women in honours year and women in third year of their undergraduate degrees.
Rev. Judy Redman facilitated the workshop. The speakers were Dr Wendy Wright, Lecturer in Applied Science, Dr Marion Collis, lecturer in Sociology, Dr Maureen Fastenau, lecturer in Management and Kath Williams, representing GAPS. About 15 people, either staff or postgraduates, attended the workshop. The speakers were excellent and generated lively discussion.

Professor Chipman, in opening the workshop, said that women’s participation rates decreased at honours year and that the reasons are unknown.

Strategies suggested to improve women’s participation rates in research higher degrees included: Departments encouraging able students, both male and female, to consider honours; the University providing ways for women to reconnect to the University; more scholarships and flexible child care; more mentors and role models for women doing research higher degrees; and more support for women doing postgraduate study by distance education (public perception of distance education is a problem.)

5.2.3 Workshop at Clayton 28 March

This was held in collaboration with Monash University Women in Engineering Project and its Project Officer, Andrea Dickinson.

The target participants were women in third year of their science/engineering undergraduate degree. The purpose was to explore their perceptions of postgraduate research in relation to their overall career planning.

The panel comprised Dr Maria Forsyth, Senior Lecturer, Materials Engineering and Loretta McLaughlin, a PhD student in Chemical Engineering. About a dozen people attended the workshop. The speakers were excellent. Unfortunately, no students from the Science Faculty attended the workshop and therefore another workshop was planned to target that group.

Participants identified reasons why women do not do postgraduate research: good starting salaries available of around $32,000; the kudos involved in being a woman engineer; students not seeing any value in the postgraduate degree; the lack of role models – lecturers are often older, conservative males who find it difficult to communicate with women; and students who were experiencing “burn out” and wishing to get out of university after four tough years of undergraduate study.

5.2.4 Workshop at Peninsula 13 May

This workshop was held at Peninsula campus in collaboration with the Peninsula Multidisciplinary Research Interest Group, with assistance from the student union. There were 25 participants. The speakers were Denise Ceddia, Lecturer in Computing, Tracey McDonald, Acting Head of the School in Nursing and Julie Todaro, fourth year student and women’s affairs officer, student union. Issues raised included: was the narrow focus and commitment required for a PhD worthwhile? was it more important to have balance in one’s life? getting a PhD is important to academic career advancement; lack of knowledge about postgraduate research “I haven’t been told anything about it, even though I have good results” (this was a student already doing honours); the need for better child care on all campuses, not just Clayton; and the need for better support networks.
Strategies suggested to improve participation in research higher degrees included: start research early (before you have family responsibilities); the need for a multidisciplinary response to research at Peninsula campus; the need for disciplines such as nursing, which is predominantly female, to build a research culture; more role models for women on campus; an information day for women about honours and postgraduate research in second and fourth years; and ensuring that students can get access to equipment to do postgraduate research.

5.2.5 Workshop at Clayton 21 May

This was a workshop and lunch for science honours students. Speakers were Dr. Jan West, Postdoctoral Fellow, Physiology and Aileen Ho, PhD student in Psychology. Issues raised were the motivation and determination needed to do a PhD; whether a PhD is too specialised in terms of career planning; and lack of female role models in some science departments. Another concern was that doing a PhD takes too long. Several students said that they wished to take a year off after their honours year, especially those doing double degrees. However, if they achieve a first class honours and get an APA or MGS scholarship it is not possible to defer. Students said that they need to apply for postgraduate scholarships at the busiest time of their honours year. Others said they would like a list in each Department of what recent PhD graduates have done and what careers they have pursued. Some students had few ideas of where an academic career would lead.

5.2.6 Workshop at Caulfield 22 May

This was presented as a one hour workshop in a three hour seminar program for honours and postgraduate students in Accounting. The speaker was Anne Bardbel, senior lecturer in Business Management at Caulfield. The focus was on using this project as a case study in equity issues in higher education. There was resistance from male students. However, eventually some joined in the discussion. Issues raised were the value of postgraduate research. Most thought that a postgraduate research degree would not assist their career. On the contrary, by becoming so specialised it may impede career advancement. Some of the women participants said that they had had enough of study and wanted to either get jobs or travel. One female student said she already had a substantial HECS debt and did not want this hanging over her while she was on a meagre scholarship and doing postgraduate research, although she would like to do a PhD.
Chapter 6

Views of Postgraduate Coordinators

6.1 Interviewing Postgraduate Coordinators

The Project Officer submitted an application to the Human Ethics Committee at Monash University for clearance to conduct open ended interviews with selected postgraduate coordinators mainly on the Clayton Campus. It stated that the group chosen would be a sample of a randomised group of postgraduate coordinators across all departments. The selection would try to include a balance of arts/education/science coordinators, male and female and total no more than 20.

Once the Committee granted approval in March the project coordinator and MPA Executive Officer, Margaret Sloan, contacted each of the 20 coordinators to explain the project and ask if they would like to participate. She found that everyone was happy to be interviewed. The Project Officer then contacted the postgraduate coordinators to make appointments and send them the necessary preliminary documentation.

The interviews were open-ended with several general questions to focus the discussion (see Appendix 1).

6.2 The Issues

The response of postgraduate coordinators varied considerably and often depended on the faculty. However, there was sometimes wide variation in response between departments in the same faculty. The discussion of issues has been organised under the following headings: the number of women in postgraduate research, scholarships and other financial issues, supervision, research culture, age, women academics as role models, after the PhD, intermitting and other issues.

6.2.1. Number of women in postgraduate research

Often the number of women in postgraduate research mirrored their participation rates in undergraduate courses, although it was sometimes lower. Some postgraduate coordinators linked this discussion to the number of women academics in the Department.

What follows is a discussion of their responses. Some comments have been edited to preserve anonymity:
• “a third of postgraduate research students are women and 50 per cent of course work postgraduates are women”

• “in 1995 in Honours we had 15 women and one male”

• “we have five students in honours – three women and two men”

• “we have not seen a gender difference”

• “we have a Graduate Diploma and a Masters course. The Grad Dip forms the first year of the MA. The second year of the Masters can be wholly coursework or combined course work thesis or all thesis. We have 24 women and 5 men enrolled in the Grad. Dip. In the second year, which is the Masters, we have 17 males and 28 women and we have 18 males and 24 women doing another Masters by coursework in intensive mode”

• “currently we have 21 in honours, eleven of them women. The number of women research postgraduates is considerably lower – approximately 25 per cent”

• “I have had as many women doing higher degree research as men. Two women had babies while they were doing PhDs”

• “there are 20 women in total in the Department (postgraduates, academics and other staff) involved in research. We have eight women and five men doing PhDs”

• “we have 51 postgraduate students in the Department and 15 are female”

• “most of our female postgraduates are from overseas. We have only one part-time female staff member. We have offered her full-time work but she doesn’t want it. She has two school age children”

• “about 80 to 90 per cent of our undergraduates and 70 per cent of our higher degree research students are women”

• “in honours we have 40 females and 60 males. We have eight women and ten men doing Masters and six out of 18 PhD candidates are women. We have two women as tenured lecturers out of a staff of 20”

6.2.2. Scholarships and other financial issues

Women who participated in various workshops, see below, identified financial issues as paramount in any discussion of women and higher degree research. Postgraduate coordinators were fully aware that without financial assistance most women and men could not pursue postgraduate research. Some departments offered their postgraduates work as tutors or demonstrators to enable them to fund their postgraduate studies or to add to their postgraduate stipend of approximately $16,000. What emerges from the following comments, though, is the discrepancy in funds between departments, even in the same faculty. Departments with money are more likely to attract and keep good research students.

• “we have a lot of postgraduates working as tutors”

• “we have postgraduates working as demonstrators”
• “all our research students have scholarships - 95 per cent are Monash Graduate Scholarships (MGS), with some Australian Postgraduate Awards (APAs) and one or two Departmental scholarships”

• “most postgraduates have APAs or Departmental scholarships”

• “we support our postgraduates with scholarships from departmental funds. We get money from industry. This gives money for untied scholarships. This Department is more entrepreneurial in getting funding than any other in the Faculty”

• “it is difficult for people to come back to a PhD because the scholarships are ranked. The way in which the scholarships are structured, if you don’t have people taking them up they lose them. It is driven by funding. If you are a bit “iffy” the scholarship gets lost. The focus in the Department is on getting PhDs because you get funding attached”

• “there are plenty of jobs for accountants so that is why they don’t go on. Less are doing honours now because of the improved job market”

• “our Graduate Diploma and Masters are fee paying. The women are more forthcoming in complaining about the fees when we make the offers. Some declined offers because of fees. Others went to another institution which doesn’t charge fees for the same course”

• “our students at the end of their courses get offered salaries of between $40,000 and $80,000, so it is often hard to attract them into postgraduate research. Most of our postgraduates are from a science background”

• “our students have no problems getting scholarships. As well, all postgraduates are invited to teach in the Department.”

• “money is a big factor. The first thing they ask is where they can get a scholarship. We get outside funding to support scholarships. Some of the money comes from industry. The Department tends to subsidise students with Monash Graduate Scholarships. The Department supplements them by $4,000 to $5,000. At least 95 per cent of postgraduates are financially supported. Overseas students are often supported with fees. Some of our postgraduates get tax free stipends of up to $25,000 per year”

• “some postgraduates study part-time and then they can get unemployment benefits”

• “we have to establish a research culture within our industry to establish research money in our Department”

• “there is pressure in industry to employ female graduates so most of the women go out and get jobs at the end of their degree”

• “there is a furphy that if you have a PhD you are unemployable. Those with PhDs would not be in the graduate entry program, they would go in higher up”

• “often our women postgraduates are the only breadwinners in the family. Some of their husbands are unemployed. The women work part-time and study part-time. They need a part-time scholarship as well”
• “there is a big issue of women getting HECS exemptions if they work part-time. Without HECS exemptions they simply cannot afford to do postgraduate research because they may be the sole breadwinner”

6.2.3 Supervision

Few postgraduate coordinators experienced any particular difficulties supervising women in postgraduate research. However, a few offered comments:

• “in honours year, women are more anxious about the kind of relationship they will have with their supervisor”

• “women are more motivated as postgraduates. The men have more problems”

• “women perform better at postgraduate level. The males are overconfident and the females underconfident. Women don’t drop out at postgraduate level. But the males burnout, have breakdowns or go and take jobs”

6.2.4 Research culture

Most postgraduate coordinators were keen to discuss the research culture in their Department. Generally, they believed it was important to foster a good research culture for postgraduates. However, several found that sections of the Department did not actively include or support postgraduates.

• “we create a research culture in this Department where women can do well”

• “most of the best honour students are female”

• “we have a session in last semester of third year about going into honours. As well, most masters and honours students all give two talks. Others participate in the weekly Departmental seminar program. We have a three day orientation program for postgraduate research students at the beginning of the year. We hold social functions for postgraduates which the Department funds”

• “most of the Departments are full of old men who have trouble accepting women as equals - it is still “an old man’s club”

• “there hasn’t been a research culture in our Department until recently. But now we target second year students and talk to them about honours year”

• “at honours we try to foster a research culture. Women are very lacking in confidence but actually do better”

• “we need a new breed of academics who think in terms of a research culture”

• “we instituted postgraduate seminars. Women tend to be more nervous about publishing. But not all staff are interested in fostering a research culture”
6.2.5 Age

Age as a factor for women in postgraduate research was an important issue raised in both workshops and informal discussions throughout the project. Women are more likely than men to have a break in their career due to family responsibilities. Some find it difficult to go back to study and/or to gain acceptance from their peers and members of the Department. It is clear from the comments of some postgraduate coordinators that women who are young and single are more likely to succeed.

• “we get older women in their forties coming back to do postgraduate degrees”
• “the female postgraduates are all young and single and are more dedicated than the men”
• “the women who go on to Masters are either past young children mode or are younger”
• “those already working outside come back as older students in their mid-20s to mid-30s, and it is from that group that we have those doing PhDs. They are better organised and work efficiently”
• “the Australians who come straight from honours are young. Older women are from overseas or are already academics”
• “academics who have moved from the Institutes to the University structure find the requirements are changing. Some feel they should do a PhD. But there are conflicts with teaching/administration. Age is also a factor. What will you get at the end of the day even if you do a PhD?”
• “women postgraduates in their twenties are quite ambitious. We have one or two married women. These are overseas students. Usually their husbands are here and they decide they will do postgraduate study”
• “our students are older, because it is a professional course. A number of coursework students have had children and had to delay study”

6.2.6 Women academics as role models

It is clear from the literature and from discussions with undergraduate and postgraduate women that having women as role models is important to improving women’s participation rates in higher research degrees.

Postgraduate coordinators expressed contradictory views on the importance of women academics as role models. Some thought there was a correlation between increasing numbers of senior academic women and attracting more women into Departments as undergraduates and postgraduates, while others thought there was little correlation.

• “in this Department we have fewer academics as role models which adversely affects women at higher degree research level”
• “only one of the 12 academics in the Department is female, she is a good role model”
• “one out of the six staff members is female. In 1995 in Honours we had 15 women and one male”

• “we have four female lecturers and one assistant lecturer”

• “we have ten fulltime academic staff and none are women. The reason for this is partly historical. When we were recruiting in the late 1970s, the people applying were men and we haven’t had a huge turnover”

• “I find that the motherly encouraging approach is helpful to women students (women postgraduate coordinator)”

• “there is a problem with role models being tokens in our department. There are not many women in our discipline who are game to take on the system”

• “there are no role models for girls in X. Careers teachers at schools are not encouraging them”

• “if we had more female lecturers it may be better; it may be helpful and women may be able to relate better. But I think it doesn’t matter. (Only two out of 20 academics in the Department are women)”

• “a woman teaches research at the undergraduate level which may help”

• “students haven’t seen many role models of women academics with Doctorates in this Department which is a problem”

6.2.7 After the PhD

Several postgraduate coordinators did not believe that there were any significant differences between the performance of men and women at postgraduate research level. They argued that the real difference emerged once women finished their Doctorates. However, one postgraduate coordinator had a different experience with postgraduates.

• “the problem isn’t attracting females into the graduate program. Our experience is that participation rates at higher degree research level are 1:1 male/female. Women get PhDs, but they don’t do Post Doctoral fellowships”

• “the problem is what women do after they get a PhD. Women find it difficult to have other facets to their lives, including children, and be so dedicated to research. One student did a PhD and then did an undergraduate degree in a professional course”

• “if women are single they don’t want to go overseas to do a Post-Doctoral Fellowship. For those getting married, they are expected to follow their men, not the other way around”

• “the problem here is when women finish their PhDs; it is then that they drop out. Some are less ambitious in deference to their partners. A lot can’t go overseas”

• “more women than men in this Department go overseas to do post doctoral work”
6.2.8 Intermitting

Several postgraduate coordinators put forward the view that women could not afford to intermit if they wished to remain at the cutting edge of research. This would reinforce traditional views that women either have a career or a family, but not both. However, some Departments appeared to be more relaxed about women intermitting.

- “In the Masters and PhD, the degree to which the field moves makes it difficult to intermit or to do it part time which might be more suitable for some women. What you might have been doing 18 months ago may no longer be relevant, especially if you are working in a group or team”

- “It is impossible for women in my research area to take time out for having families. The research is at the cutting edge and you could not step out of the team for even up to three months. What some women and men decide to do is get a job in industry where the pace is not so hectic. If research in this area does not stay at the cutting edge you simply will not get funded”

- “It can be difficult for women to become Fellows of Colleges so that they can work as a medical specialist. If women have children that is where the barriers come. It is a big commitment. The Committees of the Colleges are still very male dominated”

- “For a man, his career is well defined. For a woman, is there a structure to let her have children? I haven’t seen any document that allows women (or men) to go part-time and have maternal leave. How do you provide a secure career path and be a parent? In some Asian countries it is the norm for women in our discipline to be academics. So you find a lot of the female staff are pregnant or have small children”

- “We also have instances where women get pregnant and take longer to complete. They are on our books for a long time. There is a fair bit of flexibility”

- “We are flexible in giving students a lot of time to finish their Masters. Some intermit. Others have been on our books for some time”

6.2.9 Other issues

There were a range of other views about women in postgraduate research which postgraduate coordinators discussed, some relating to international students.

- “I think the ethnic background can be a factor in women’s participation rates”

- “Most women are studying part-time, some are working, balancing kids and don’t go on to Masters”

- “We have a number of students doing honours part-time. We usually don’t promote it, there is flexibility”

- “Women postgraduates tend to be a bit shyer – that is a cultural issue. They tend not to confront a superior”
• “women international students are often married; they tend to leave their families behind with the extended family, and live in group houses with other students from their country”

• “our numbers have fallen. We are thinking of customising courses for niche groups”

• “we need to persuade girls that they can do computing; they turn off computers around their teenage years”

• “one woman finished her Masters degree and got a job in Sydney. She left her young child with her mother in Melbourne”

• “more women choose to do coursework. Women tend to come through Masters course work and then do a PhD which is a slightly different approach to the men. Women prefer coursework because it is closed and predictable; whereas research is devouring and it is hard to set limits. Many women with other responsibilities prefer coursework. Confidence is also an issue”

• “sometimes women have trouble getting recognition at home of the importance of their study. There is often less of an acceptance at home”

• “it is a general sociological observation that once women get married they find it harder to commit to research”

6.3 Strategies

The project officer invited postgraduate coordinators to suggest strategies that might help to improve women’s participation in research higher degrees. Some said they did not have any strategies to suggest. Others offered the following responses:

• “mentoring is being trialed in this Department for all students”

• “we need a critical mass of women before we will attract more into this Department”

• “we can talk about research methodologies, but we can’t talk about how to juggle your family”

• “the Institute of Chartered Accountants put out a booklet on how to cope with your spouse in the professional year. We need something similar for postgraduates”

• “we are looking at ways to get more students to do Masters level rather than just Grad. Dips. Strategies include flexible delivery, intensive five days with ancillary assessment, distance mode via World Wide Web, and tailoring courses to meet employer’s needs”

• “we need more scholarships to get more women – we only get one”

• “it would be good if there was a mechanism to ease the cultural problems of Asian postgraduates to help them adjust”
• “scholarships are needed specifically for women to rejoin the workforce. That is, if they have their PhD and then drop out to have children. They need scholarships to do refresher courses to allow them to get back to the competitive edge”

• “we need to go to talk to schools and send successful graduates who look normal, especially to private schools”

• “our Department is thinking of adopting a marketing strategy - direct marketing to students already on campus. Also market to the community in general - schools, careers officers, newspapers, open days etc.”

• “we need more video and teleconferencing facilities for distance education postgraduate research students”

• “to increase higher degree participation rates for women you need to target undergraduates at each year, but especially third year and make sure they pick options that will get them into honours”

• “to get more women into research higher degrees requires flexibility/responsiveness/enthusiasm of supervisors”

• “most of our good students, especially females, go out and get jobs. Perhaps widespread availability of scholarships may help them to stay”

6.4 Conclusion

Postgraduate coordinators are presumably chosen for that role because they have a special interest in postgraduate research students. While many were enthusiastic and supportive of their postgraduates, this project is concerned at the extent to which postgraduate coordinators do not question existing discrimination against women in higher education. How can a postgraduate coordinator state that there are only two women staff in a large Department, but this has no effect on the poor participation rates of women in that Department?

Others were aware of the “old boy’s club” in their Department but were unwilling to challenge the status quo, even though this was keeping women postgraduates and academics away from the Department.

One of the most worrying responses of postgraduate coordinators was to the issue of intermitting. This project simply does not accept that a woman needs to remain childless to keep at the cutting edge of research. It is a question of how that research is organised and how research teams conduct themselves.

Other issues of concern included the response to women doing honours part-time. Postgraduate coordinators made it clear that they did not advertise the fact that honours could be offered part-time. How many women do not proceed to honours because they have never been informed that this is an option? And how many women with young children might do honours part-time if they knew it was available? Clearly this policy is discriminatory and unfair to some women.
A related issue is part-time scholarships. The university is clear that part-time scholarships are available for women with other responsibilities and information about this is widely disseminated. For example, Monash University Publications 1996 Postgraduate Research Scholarship Application Grants and Postgraduate Courses 1996 both make it clear that part-time scholarships are available for "persons who for compelling social reasons (e.g. major family commitments) are unable to pursue full-time postgraduate study". But most postgraduate coordinators did not know of these scholarships. One or two claimed that the eligibility criteria for women were stricter than the University suggested. Again, there appears to be a breakdown in the flow of communication within the University which disadvantages women. If postgraduate coordinators do not know about part-time scholarships, their students are unlikely to apply for them.

While these interviews with postgraduate coordinators revealed a healthy diversity in approaches to a wide range of issues, it is of some concern that funding arrangements can be so varied and that there is no agreement, for example, on the need for a research culture in each department. Diversity is to encouraged, but if it leads to inequality, and especially to inequity for women in higher degree research, it is to be questioned.
Chapter 7

Views of Women at Monash

7.1 The barriers

The feedback from workshops often reinforced the significance of those issues identified in the literature search. But it also suggested additional barriers as well as emphasising differences between faculties.

7.1.1 Finance

One of the major barriers to women participating in research higher degrees is money. Without a scholarship to provide an independent income, most women cannot contemplate a research higher degree. Women often described periods of being without any source of income and wondering whether it was worth continuing. Two said that they had been blatantly discriminated against when they applied unsuccessfully for scholarships at university, with the comment “you have got a husband”. (It should be noted that Monash University selection policies stipulate that awards are to be made strictly according to academic merit)

In engineering and possibly in other faculties, there was little financial incentive to do postgraduate research degrees. Several women engineers said they had had enough of study, being poor and being at university by the end of their fourth year. Moreover, some had already been offered jobs after doing vacation work at the end of their third year. Engineering graduates expected to start on a salary of about $31,000. They said the attitude in industry tended to be “you can do a PhD but we won’t pay you any more”.

A further difficulty for those women who are enrolled part-time and do receive a scholarship is that the scholarship is taxed, whereas those enrolled full-time with scholarships are not. At Monash some of those with part-time scholarships receive a higher stipend to compensate for being taxed. However, given that many women would prefer to study part-time, taxing scholarships for part-timers is an equity issue.

Most younger students have already accumulated a considerable Higher Education Contributory Scheme (HECS) debt. The prospect of borrowing money to do postgraduate research or of living on a $16,000 stipend for three years to do a PhD while still having the HECS debt to eventually repay was not an attractive proposition for many.

Child care: this is a matter of allocating resources and is another financial barrier to some women doing postgraduate study. Women said that it was impossible to focus on postgraduate research unless they had access to flexible, affordable and reliable child care.
7.1.2 Lack of role models and mentors

Women postgraduates tended to describe their experiences in terms of whether or not they had men and women in academia who had encouraged them. Several said they would not have considered doing honours, let alone postgraduate research, unless a lecturer or tutor had encouraged them. One Dean found that postgraduate female participation rates in his Faculty increased significantly after he wrote to the top final year students inviting them to do research higher degrees. He commented that women seemed to lack confidence until they realised they had achieved good undergraduate results. Conversely, several women in third year of their undergraduate degrees who were interested in honours were mystified about the process of how students got selected. They asked at workshops about where they could gain information on the process of being accepted into the honours year. Other participants, who were both postgraduates and academics, argued that male academics often withheld information from women - such as information about how to get scholarships for research higher degrees or how to get on to various Departmental committees.

Not all workshop participants were comfortable with notions of mentoring. Some younger women said they rejected it as a male concept and thought that female to female mentoring would operate quite differently.

Clearly, the honours year is the key to understanding women’s participation rates in research higher degrees. There is often a fall-off rate between third and honours year for women and an even more significant fall-off between honours and postgraduate research. Universities need to focus their attention on this transitional year from undergraduate to postgraduate study if they are to improve women’s participation in research higher degrees.

7.1.3 Supervision

Many women described frustration’s with supervision. While some women had had excellent supervisors, others believed they were unsupported. Even where women had good supervision from female supervisors the problem was often that the female supervisor was untenured and was not available for the whole of the student’s candidature.

7.1.4 The inflexibility of the institution or departments within it

Several women complained about the bias against women doing part-time undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Women doing part-time research degrees find it almost impossible to get any funding. Those with small children or other family responsibilities cannot study full-time. Often they perceive that the university wished they would go away and stop bothering them. Some Departments discourage or even refuse to accept women, and presumably men also, into the honours year on a part-time basis. This then becomes a major barrier to these women moving into research higher degrees.

These comments reinforced those of postgraduate coordinators who mostly did not wish to broadcast that students could do the honours year part-time.
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7.1.5 Response of Monash to women returning to study

Women complained that Departments were not interested in all the juggling of time they often have to do in order to study either full or part-time. This juggling may be even more complex if, as postgraduates, they need to do field work or travel interstate to do research or attend conferences.

7.1.6 Unsupportive environment

Women discussed a range of subtle ways in which they experienced discrimination. Women academics described the behaviour of male academics towards them at meetings: men would often start to fidget and shuffle papers when a woman academic tried to contribute to discussion and then resume discussion as if she had not spoken. Postgraduates also experience similar dismissive behaviour from their supervisors or other academics in their Department.

At home, women said their husbands or partners often engaged in subtle sabotage - either making them feel guilty for studying or being unwilling to share more of the household chores.

7.1.7 Community attitudes

There are different community attitudes to males and females doing postgraduate study. A man who is doing a research Masters or PhD is generally regarded as "doing it for his family" and praised. But a woman postgraduate who has a family is regarded as selfish.

7.1.8 Response of Monash to life experience of postgraduates

Many women come to postgraduate experience after completing an undergraduate degree as a mature age student or after a break of many years between their undergraduate and postgraduate study. They often believe they have valuable life experience and also broad learning to share with their supervisors and other postgraduates, but complain they are treated as being "wet behind the ears". This tends to produce a sense of isolation and displacement for them as postgraduates.

7.1.9 Cumulative effect

It is often not one particular attitudinal or structural barrier that becomes the straw that breaks the camel's back but the cumulative effect of both structural and attitudinal barriers that lead women to weigh up whether or not they should attempt postgraduate research or, if enrolled, to continue with their candidature.

7.2 Strategies to overcome the barriers

Universities need to understand the diverse pathways that lead women to research higher degrees. Women suggested some ways of overcoming these barriers might include:
the university improving its links to the community: women who have left the workforce to have and care for young children often felt alienated from the university community. Universities need to provide ways for women to reconnect to universities, possibly through community adult education.

part-time study: recognition by the university that part-time study is the best option for some women at both undergraduate and postgraduate level and Departments advertising that, under special circumstances, it is possible to do the honours year part-time.

more encouragement, mentors and networks: women at an undergraduate level need more information about honours year and postgraduate study and more encouragement to consider postgraduate study. This encouragement might include: Heads of Department writing to third and final year women who have received good grades asking them to consider postgraduate research degrees; setting up pilot step-by-step mentoring programs in those departments where women are underrepresented at undergraduate level; and encouraging women to become involved in the research culture of the Department, especially at honours level.

more resources for women doing research higher degrees: more women would do higher research degrees if they could do them part-time and receive some scholarship and if the university provided affordable/subsidised child care.

Conclusion

Monash women who participated in project workshops identified various structural and attitudinal barriers that may influence women’s participation rates in research higher degrees. These are often subtle and can leave women experiencing isolation and poor self confidence. The project has proposed a range of strategies, in the form of recommendations (see below) to overcome them. Apart from any positive outcomes at this level, the project has established networks between women in different faculties and across the various campuses and given women the opportunity to discuss their perceptions or experience of research higher degrees.
Chapter 8

Evaluation and Recommendations

The final evaluation workshop was held on 5 June at the Gallery Theatrette, Clayton Campus. The participants had taken part in earlier workshops and were familiar with the project. Professor Stella Crossley, chair of the Affirmative Action Coordinating Committee, in welcoming participants said it was important for women to be encouraged to do postgraduate degrees as this improved their opportunity to get jobs. She added that while structural barriers to women participating in research higher degrees were well known, the attitudinal ones needed to be teased out.

Dr Denise Cuthbert, Senior Lecturer in English, facilitated the workshop. She asserted that women’s participation in research higher degrees was not at acceptable levels. She said the challenge for the university was to work towards equality while recognising differences, and that where structural barriers to women’s participation can be identified they should be removed.

She added that feminist scholars working in a number of fields have shown us that knowledge is not neutral; rather it is highly subjective. Women go from being consumers of knowledge at undergraduate level to producers of knowledge as postgraduates. It is important, she asserted, that women can fully express themselves as producers of knowledge.

The Project Officer, Kate White, gave a summary of the projects and the themes that had emerged from the literature search, from analysis of the statistics, the series of workshops and interviews with postgraduate coordinators.

The workshop then divided into discussion groups, each received a separate topic on which to formulate recommendations. These covered: models for higher degree research, a sympathetic research culture, attitudes to women’s work, recognition of different pathways to postgraduate research for women, and ways women can finance their research higher degrees.

From that group discussion and open discussion in the plenary session, as well as from deliberation on the report at the final reference group meeting on 26 June, the following recommendations were formulated.
Recommendations

1. That barriers to women’s participation in research higher degrees be acknowledged as largely a structural problem within the University.

2. That the Equity Plan Consultative Committee refer this report to the PhD and Scholarships Committee and to all Faculty Graduate Studies Committees.

3. That a report on implementation of these recommendations be prepared under the guidance of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor with responsibility for Equity.

4. That the Equal Opportunity Unit:
   4.1 prepare an annual report for the Equity Plan Consultative Committee and the PhD and Scholarships Committee which compares women’s participation rates in undergraduate, diploma, coursework and research higher degrees.
   4.2 reconsider the value of Post-Doctoral Fellowships for women who have had career interruptions in the light of the experience of these in other Universities.

5. That the Education Committee of Academic Board review implementation of University policies to allow and encourage part-time study for honours students.

6. That the Professional Development Centre, to be named the Centre for Higher Education from 1997, expand formal training for supervisors to include gender awareness issues.

7. That the PhD and Scholarships Committee
   7.1 encourage supervisors to undertake formal training which includes interpersonal skills and recognises the diverse background of enrolling postgraduates
   7.2 investigate the feasibility of a scholarship, particularly for those with family responsibilities or disabilities, to allow students to fulfil residency requirements for postgraduate research degrees.
   7.3 investigate the feasibility of opening up a pathway from the Masters by coursework into research higher degrees.

8. That the Faculties consider the following:
   8.1 establishing cross-disciplinary mentor schemes for postgraduate students along the lines of the model in computing at the University of Melbourne and that established for female staff at Peninsula campus.
   8.2 reviewing the regulations for coursework degrees to allow for broken periods of research and/or intermediate qualifications.
   8.3 exploring the feasibility of establishing professional doctorates which recognise work and other experience.
8.4 improving information sharing about awards and conditions through their handbooks, including possible pathways from undergraduate degrees to higher research degrees.

8.5 reassess on an equity basis the work and life experiences required for entry into higher degree research.

8.6 endorse the strategies, outlined in section 4.3 of the Monash University Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy and Equity Plan 1996-98, to improve the representation of students from equity groups in fee-paying courses.

8.7 That faculties bring the following recommendations to the attention of departments:

8.7.1 Departments should ensure that information about honours programs, postgraduate study and postgraduate scholarships [including part-time scholarships] is disseminated by coordinators and supervisors to all students and that eligible candidates should be encouraged to apply.

8.7.2 Section 1 of the University’s Education Policy, ’Teaching Learning and Support Plan’ which states in part: “all staff new to the supervision of postgraduate students will be required to participate in this part of the program [which will deal with the supervision of research students]”.

8.7.3 Departments should ensure that supervisors are aware of the existence of part-time scholarships.

8.7.4 That departments ensure that there is equitable access to technological resources (including access to email and World Wide Webb) for postgraduate students.

8.7.5 Departments should ensure that women academics taking parental leave and postgraduates who intermit are kept informed of departmental news and issues.

8.7.6. That departments ensure each postgraduate research student has a primary supervisor and an associate supervisor appointed at the commencement of candidature.

8.7.7. That departments sponsor functions to facilitate networking for postgraduate students.
Appendix 1

Questions for Postgraduate Coordinators

1. Analysis of 1995 statistics for Monash University indicates a significant decline in women’s participation from undergraduate courses to research higher degrees in almost every faculty.

Would you like to comment on this?

2. As a postgraduate coordinator, what has been your experience of women’s participation in research higher degrees?

3. This project is examining ways of improving women’s participation in research higher degrees.

Would you like to contribute any ideas/suggestions?
# Appendix 2

PhD students by gender (as at 30.8.96)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department/Centre/Institute</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>PhD Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>Anaesthesia</td>
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<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anatomy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biochemistry &amp; Molecular Biology</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Medicine &amp; General Practice</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epidemiology &amp; Preventive Medicine</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forensic Medicine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institute of Reproduction &amp; Development</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Medicine - Alfred</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paediatrics</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pathology &amp; Immunology</td>
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<td>28</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>212</strong></td>
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