

RSAA Policy on Supervision, Supervising Load, and Student Communication

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BACKGROUND

At the 2019 senior staff retreat it was agreed to adopt a new policy on PhD supervision that aligns with the overall ANU program to improve PhD supervision and rationalise the process of screening to ensure supervisors are adequately qualified.

The goals of this policy are:

- (i) To ensure that students receive adequate attention from their supervisors and that supervision is not compromised either by supervisors being overcommitted, by supervisors leaving partway through a PhD project, or by supervisors being insufficiently qualified.
- (ii) To allow students to develop a broad view of the research taking place at RSAA and be aware of the range of options available to them before making final decisions about their projects.

This policy described here describes concrete actions aimed at achieving these goals. It is expected to evolve with experience of the impact of these actions.

POLICY

The following rules will guide student supervision at RSAA. There will initially need to be some flexibility to grandfather existing supervisory agreements and allow a graceful transition to the new arrangements; where this is necessary the transitional arrangements need to be approved by the Associate Director for Education. The policy will be provided to all new staff who are potential supervisors as part of their orientation.

The policy has two parts, one aimed at supervisors and one at students.

1. Supervisors

- 1.1. *Each member of staff will serve as the primary supervisor for no more than four students in total.* PhD, Masters, and Honours students all count towards this total. Exceptions may be granted by the Associate Director for Education in unusual circumstances (for example a brief overlap between a student near completion and one just starting).
- 1.2. *There is no limit to the number of projects on which an advisor can serve as the non-primary supervisor.*
- 1.3. *A staff member may serve as the primary supervisor for a PhD student only if they meet all the following criteria:*
 - 1.3.1. *Either at least one year of experience serving on a PhD supervisory panel as a co-/associate supervisor at RSAA or having supervised at least one Masters or Honours thesis to completion or having acted as a primary PhD supervisor at another institution.*
 - 1.3.2. *Either has a contract at RSAA with an expiration date at least two years past the start date of the PhD project or is an emeritus member of the RSAA staff.*
 - 1.3.3. *Has published at least three first-author refereed papers or equivalent (e.g. patents or major instrument design reviews).*

1.3.4. Has published at least 1.0 HERDC-recognised publication, normalised by the number of authors, in the past 2 years.

1.3.5. Has completed the ANU supervisor training and is active on the ANU supervisor register.

1.4. *When communicating with prospective students, potential supervisors are to explain the process by which students at RSAA select supervisors.* They must make it clear that:

1.4.1. Students are admitted to a Masters or PhD program at RSAA only as part of a general application process, not by individual supervisors.

1.4.2. While individual supervisors are free to discuss possible projects with prospective students, only the admissions committee can make formal offers of admission.

1.4.3. Admitted students are required to follow the policy outlined below about choosing supervisors.

2. Students (this applies only to PhD students, not Honours or Masters students)

2.1. *Domestic students are required to commence the PhD degree during a one-week period at the start of the semester in which their enrolment begins.* The exact date will be determined annually by the HDR convenor. The HDR convenor is empowered to make exceptions in unusual circumstances. *International students are encouraged to commence their studies at the same time as domestic students if possible, with the understanding that this will sometimes not be possible due to visa or similar issues.*

2.2. *Students are required to discuss projects with at least three possible supervisors before selecting a PhD project.* These discussions may be in person, by phone, or by video conference, but not by email – the student must actually speak to the prospective supervisor.

2.3. *Students will inform the Thesis Oversight Committee of their choice of supervisor within one month of commencing their degree.* At this meeting students will be required to list the prospective supervisors with whom they have spoken and the TOC will not accept a supervisor selection without this information.

2.4. *Students will be informed of this policy as part of their induction into RSAA.*

To facilitate student project selection, RSAA will organise two 'market days, one each to be held shortly after the semester 1 and semester 2 student commencement dates. During these events, potential supervisors will present possible projects to students. Supervisors will also provide short written descriptions of their projects prior to market day, to be distributed to the students. Students are not required to work on one of the proposed projects; they remain free to define their own projects together with their supervisor(s). The goal of market day is simply to ensure that students have access to a wide variety of possible ideas prior to selecting a supervisor and project.