



A Potential Diagnostic Tool to Identify HDR Students Requiring Writing Support

Key Words

Writing self-efficacy, higher degree research

Abstract

A high level of academic writing proficiency is a necessary, but often challenging skill that all higher degree research (HDR) students must reach to satisfactorily complete their doctoral studies. To achieve this proficiency, students will often receive guidance from their supervisory team, but many students will also receive extra support from university learning advisors. The main sources of extra writing support currently available at Macquarie University are one-to-one writing consultations, writing groups, and face-to-face research writing courses. Each of these supplementary forms of writing support cater for only a small fraction of enrolled HDR students. Furthermore, it is unknown whether the students that receive this extra support are those that have the greatest need. In an attempt to inform this research area, HDR students have been asked to complete the writing self-efficacy scale that has been developed by Schmidt & Alexander (2012). This scale measures writing self-efficacy and is grounded in Bandura's theory of perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1982). Self-efficacy beliefs influence the types of activities attempted, the amount of effort invested, the level of perseverance, the amount of stress experienced and the quality of eventual performance. Specifically, writing self-efficacy has been identified as a predictor of writing performance in numerous studies (for review see Pajares, 2003). The scale has been administered to HDR students at the start of their candidature and to HDR students attending research writing courses in view of clarifying: i) whether the scale is sensitive enough to produce a range of responses that will allow the identification of students who have a low-, mid-, and high-writing efficacy, and ii) what are the predominant writing self-efficacy levels of the students that attend our research writing courses. It is hoped that this scale will have the sensitivity to be used in the future as a quick diagnostic tool to identify students early in their candidature who most need support.

References

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