

IRU PhD Masterclasses 2009: The Complete PhD Program

Background:

In 2006, Hugh Kearns and Maria Gardiner from Flinders University received a Carrick Citation for applying the latest psychological and educational research to enhance the quality and effectiveness of the research higher degree study experience. IRU subsequently provided a grant to Flinders University to run a series of Masterclasses (*Defeating Self-Sabotage: Getting your Thesis Finished*) for Research Higher Degree Students at the member universities during 2007. These initial Masterclasses were massively oversubscribed and an outstanding success based both on participant feedback and candidates progress in their studies. There were repeated requests from all participating universities for its success to be built upon and further enhancements to be added.

Based on this success, a further grant was provided by IRU to extend the program in 2008 by offering additional workshops (*The Seven Secrets of Highly Successful PhD Students* and *Turbocharging your Writing*) and including more students. This program is now complete and once again has been a resounding success.

The success of the program has meant that it has now gained a national and international reputation. It is now one of the flagship programs of the IRU group. Many other universities have paid to bring the program to their universities. The Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) has recently requested the *Seven Secrets of Highly Successful PhD Students* workshop to be run for students based in Melbourne, experiencing high student demand. During 2007, elements of the program were run in the UK and Ireland with very positive feedback. In December 2008, Hugh Kearns attended the Annual Meeting of the Council of Graduate School in the US to describe the program and investigate how it might be implemented in a US context.

What is covered in the Masterclasses?

The MasterClass will provide practical strategies to deal with common problems such as:

- procrastination, perfectionism, over committing
- writer's block or putting off writing
- obsessing over the quality of writing
- experimenting or reading (for years even) as a way of avoiding writing
- getting distracted and over committing rather than working on the thesis
- thinking the PhD has to be the best PhD ever
- not getting help even when stuck or obviously needing it.

The Complete PhD Program 2009

The MasterClass program will be offered again in 2009 and will significantly expand the number of students interacting with the workshop component and will add new features, principally:

- A supervisor's workshop similar to the one offered to students but dealing with the topics from a supervisor's perspective. It will look at the personal, emotional and psychological aspects of completing a PhD.
- Access for external students living close to another IRU member university.
- Involvement of DVC(R)s and/or DDOGs in opening the program to foster student sense of belonging and value to the university.

The Complete PhD Program will consequently address the critical factors that impact on PhD completions in universities:

- Ensuring commencing PhD candidates get off to a good start and embed effective work/study practices
- Supporting candidates in the mid and end stages by providing intensive and sustained coaching
- Providing strategies to support students who are towards the end of their thesis and heavily engaged in the writing process
- Supporting supervisors, particularly new supervisors who have limited experience in supervision, as they work with their students during candidature.

Timetable

Project commences (Feb 09)

Discussions with research educators at each IRU university (March-April)

Customisation/redevelopment of program materials (April)

Delivery of programs at each university (May – November)

Follow-up of programs (Aug-May 2010)