

# Essential Info For New Students 2009

Brought to you by the Physiology Postgraduate Students' Society (PPSS)

## The society

All Physiology postgrads are automatically members of the PPSS. There is no joining fee. The society has social, academic and advocacy functions. We organise seminar days for work-in-progress talks, occasional interdisciplinary seminars from interesting guest speakers, BBQs and info sessions for the Honours' students, pub nights, dinners, and outings. We are also your voice: PPSS representatives attend most of the business meetings that run the Physiology Department, and we are consulted on matters of importance to graduates that may arise from time to time. The strength of the society rests on everyone being willing to take part in, and sometimes take leadership of these activities, so get involved!

The PPSS executive committee consists of: the President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary. In addition, certain students are appointed our representatives for various departmental meetings. Elections for these positions are held annually, except when office-bearing students are finishing up their degrees and need to step down. Any postgraduate student may nominate for these positions, regardless of seniority: **that includes you.**

## Settling in

**Get to know us.** As a new student, you should make sure you know the following people in particular, because they all have a role in making your candidature go smoothly:

*Head of Department*

Stephen Harrap: s.harrap@unimelb.edu.au

*Graduate coordinator*

Gordon Lynch: gsl@unimelb.edu.au

*Co-coordinator*

Lea Delbridge: lmd@unimelb.edu.au

*Admin Officer (Academic Services)*

Lesley Robinson: lesleyr@unimelb.edu.au

**and not least...** The PPSS Committee

**Stay in touch.** Even if you are an off-campus student, make sure that your name and email address have been added to the PPSS email list by contacting the current Secretary.

**Arrange study space.** Make sure you have been allocated a desk in one of the postgrad rooms. If not, speak to Karin Diamond, our Department Manager.

## Becoming a Postgrad

It's different from doing Honours or being an RA! The first thing a lot of new students notice is the pace difference between a one year and a three year thesis. The pressure feels off, but you can't lose sight of the goal, because deadlines come around more quickly than you expect (see "Confirmation", below). Talk to more experienced postgrads if you need some advice or just someone to complain to.

The second major thing that people notice is the difference in research autonomy, and this can require a serious mindset adjustment. You control the ultimate direction of your work, although under the guidance of supervisors, and prescribed by the available equipment and funding. It can take time to build up the courage to assert your scientific opinions, but be sure that it's your right and responsibility to do so.

After one year, all students aiming for a PhD must be 'confirmed' as graduate students of the University. This is process which is supposed to ensure that (a) the project is viable, and achievable within the timeframe, (b) you have demonstrated adequate progress towards the final product, whether in proof-of-concept or actual data collection, and (c) the necessary resources are available to you. It is not supposed to be an adversarial process, but some students have found it frustrating and daunting. Be aware of this one year goal from early on, and familiarize yourself with the MSGR requirements for the Confirmation report and interview: <http://www.gradstudies.unimelb.edu.au/current/phdhbk/candidature.html>

In particular, make sure you prepare your report in enough time to circulate it to all the people who will be on your confirmation committee in plenty of time. Current postgrads advise you to include any data you have gathered so far in your report, even if you aren't yet sure what it means, haven't completed a data set, or done any statistics. It's about demonstrating that you've made a start. Don't forget, every confirmation is unique, and the report should reflect *your* independent research. Ultimately, there's no 'right' way to do it!

## Progress Reports

A second major deadline is the Progress Report, which is due one year before your proposed thesis submission date if you are a full time student. It is similar to the Confirmation report, but often requires less detail. If you feel you are going to need an extension, progress report time is the time to start looking into the necessary forms. All of this information is available from the MSGR website:

<Http://www.gradstudies.unimelb.edu.au/>



## Damn Lies and Statistics

The Statistical Consulting Centre in the Department of Maths & Stats on campus offers a limited number of places annually in their free advice program. Postgrads can apply for up to 5 hours of one-on-one consulting with a statistician. This opportunity is best used at the beginning of your PhD (if you have a particularly difficult study to design) or more commonly, at the end of your work when you are faced with a mound of data to interpret. They will expect you to be well prepared about what you want to get out of your analysis, but they will be extremely helpful. If you know you need help, apply early because places fill up fast.

Application forms are available from their website (note you need a supervisor's signature): <Http://www.scc.ms.unimelb.edu.au/postgraduates.html>

You can also take the SCC's six day intensive Statistics for Research Workers course if you want to brush up those skills. It usually runs over two weeks in February, and can be taken as a fee-paying module, or as an additional subject under your PhD, in which case you pay nothing. Go to the SCC website for course application details; collect the additional subject form from MSGR if you want to take up the free option (Note this does mean you have to complete some minor assessment tasks during the course).

## Departmental Talks

All postgrads are required to give a 15-20 minute talk to the Department in any calendar year. This fulfils the MSGR requirement to present your work to a scientific audience, but there's nothing stopping you from talking at conferences as well! In 2008, postgrads will be presenting talks on alternate fortnights with the Departmental Seminar. Tell the current PPSS president if any days don't suit you and your supervisor/s. Before completion, students give a longer "final talk" to the Department; usually 45 - 50 minutes plus questions. These are scheduled as part of the regular Postgrad Seminar Series. Contact the PPSS President to schedule any final talks. The Seminar Series program is available via the Physiology Intranet:

<http://www.physiology.unimelb.edu.au/>



3

## Attending Conferences

Try and attend relevant conferences during your candidature if you can : every contact you make is a potential collaborator or postdoc job! Travel Funds from the Department support postgrads attending conferences. Students who have the written permission of their supervisor to attend a conference are entitled to \$500 per annum for attendance or \$800 per annum when presenting, and some of these funds accrue from year to year. To apply, complete an HR18 form (available in the mailroom), and submit with a letter from your supervisor. Access the Risk Management Office website for details of insurance whilst travelling on research business:

<http://www.unimelb.edu.au/insurance/students/>

## Show me the money!

Funding can be hard to come by. If you are not funded yet, try applying for these;

Australian Postgraduate Award (APA)  
<http://cms.services.unimelb.edu.au/scholarships/pgrad/local/available/apa>

Melbourne Research Scholarship (MRS)  
<http://cms.services.unimelb.edu.au/scholarships/pgrad/local/available/mrs>

NHMRC Dora Lush Biomedical Postgraduate Scholarship  
<http://www.research.unimelb.edu.au/grants/apply/nhmrc/index.html>

National heart Foundation Postgrad Awards

<http://www.heartfoundation.com.au>

Or you could: Use the Scholarships Office database 'JASON' <http://www.jason.edu.au/>

Subscribe to Gradflash for email updates <http://gsserv.registrar.unimelb.edu.au/gradflash/>

Join the professional society most relevant to your research and see if they have student bursaries.

For the ladies, there are also funds from the Australian Federation of University Women (AFUW), but you must join your local branch to apply. (These are more likely to be one-off grants than stipends)

<http://www.afuw.org.au/>

Opportunities for International Students can be found here:

<http://cms.services.unimelb.edu.au/scholarships/pgrad/international>

## Publish or Perish

A great way to ensure that the final examiners like what they read is to have your research published as you go. Published work is hard to fault because it has already been deemed of a high standard, and at worst, even unsuccessful submissions benefit from the constructive comments of peer reviewers. However, especially if you have lots of pretty colour plates, it can be costly. If you manage to have your work accepted for peer-reviewed journals, you can apply for a grant to cover up to 50% of the cost of publication through the Melbourne Research Office:

[Http://www.research.unimelb.edu.au/grants/apply/unimelb/publication/](http://www.research.unimelb.edu.au/grants/apply/unimelb/publication/)



## A Final Word...

Program the Uni Security number into your mobile: if you're ever stuck in the building after hours without your swipe card, they can buzz you out! (not talking from experience or anything...) **x46666**.

## Negotiating Bureaucracy

Knowing who to ask what question is part of the key to successful University life! If you are confused, ask the redoubtable Lesley Robinson, the Physiology guru of Postgrad Administration (be brave; she doesn't bite!). NHMRC and NHF Scholarship applications and progress reports go through the Melbourne Research Office, but all funding matters are the responsibility of the Scholarships Office; this includes bank account details, payment dates, and so on. Note, if you happen to need maternity leave during one of these scholarships you will need to contact both agencies and complete specific forms. The Scholarships Office also deal with all APA and MRS administration, and are often the application agent for other external funds. MSGR administer the PhD for the whole University, so any query about your candidature (confirmation, additional subjects, leave of absence, etc.) should be directed to them. Physiology is part of the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences, so Faculty enquires should be directed to them. Note - none of these offices communicate with each other very well, so if you move house make sure you tell them all! In the Department, Sarah Clegg is the person to go to for keys and swipe cards, and Lesley is the person to ask for any questions relating to your postgrad candidature. Approach Gordon and Lea, the postgrad convenors, are for advice on career development, supervision problems, and general moral support. Alternately, you can always approach our department manager, Karin, for assistance or a chat. For IT hassles, log onto the Department homepage and follow the link to request assistance: <http://www.physiology.unimelb.edu.au/>