



**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN**  
IYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA • UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD

# **2011 UCT Doctoral Survey**

**May 2012**

**Institutional Planning Department**

## Executive Summary

- 248 respondents or 19% of the 1282 registered doctoral students completed the survey
- Approximately 2 of 5 respondents said they came to UCT for the opportunity to work with a specific supervisor or project
- Nearly a third said they came to UCT because of UCT's academic reputation
- 86% of respondents noted satisfaction with the quality of services available
  - However, Humanities students were least satisfied with services, highlighting especially IT and space related issues.
- 83% of the respondents said they were satisfied with the quality of interaction with UCT
- Only two-thirds of respondents said they were satisfied with the quality of supervision received
- Just over two-thirds of respondents said they were satisfied with the quality of their doctoral research experience.
- Three-quarters of respondents said they have been free to explore new ideas, select methods, interpret their own findings and generally retain their own independent thought during their research experience

## Introduction

In October and November 2011, the IPD conducted a Doctoral Survey hosted on Vula, aimed at collecting information from the 1282 registered Doctoral Candidates based on their experiences and perceptions of studying at UCT. Specific areas of interest in the questionnaire dealt with supervision, professional development and scholarly interaction. The 248 respondents (approximately 20% of UCT's Doctoral population) also provided qualitative commentary on various themes including facilities, services and funding. The report makes reference not only to the UCT experience but also to the specific challenges faced by Doctoral students with regard to the interface between academic demands, their social relationships and mental and emotional well-being.

### 2011 Doctoral Survey Representivity

Faculty	All	Respond	%
Commerce	143	16	11%
Engineering and the Built Environment	165	25	15%
Humanities	260	43	17%
Law	64	11	17%
Health Sciences	301	54	18%
Science	349	99	28%
Grand Total	1282	248	19%

The survey returned an overall 19% response rate. Response rates by Faculty were uneven with 28% of Science Doctoral students responding compared to 11% of Commerce Doctoral candidates.

### 2011 Doctoral Enrolments vs Respondents by Faculty

Demographic Group	All	% of All	Respond	% of Respond
Black	134	10%	16	6%
Coloured	126	10%	17	7%
Indian	56	4%	5	2%
White	486	38%	109	44%
Non Applicable/Unknown	26	2%	5	2%
International	454	35%	96	39%
Grand Total	1282	100%	248	100%

The survey also shows a slight over-representation of White and International Students and a slight under-representation of Black and Coloured Doctoral candidates.

### What were your primary reasons for selecting UCT?

What was your primary reason for selecting UCT? (One choice only)	COM	EBE	HUM	LAW	MED	SCI	Total
A study choice that was not available at other Universities			1	1	7	12	21
Academic reputation	10	7	10	1	16	27	71
Availability of research funding	1	3	7	2	3	8	24
Employment options			1				1
Familiarity with UCT	2	1	2	2	1	1	9
Future employability of UCT postgraduates				1	1	1	3
Influence of others (family, friends)				1	1	2	4
Opportunity to work with specific supervisor or project	3	10	17	1	21	41	93
UCTs geographic location in Cape Town		2	4	1	3	6	16
Other		2	1	1	1		5
No response						1	1
Grand Total	16	25	43	11	54	99	248

The opportunity to work with a specific supervisor or within a specific project (9193 out of 248, 37%) and UCT's academic reputation (29%) featured very prominently as the primary reasons given by Doctoral respondents for selecting UCT. A by-faculty analysis shows that for respondents from the faculties of EBE, Humanities, Medicine and Science all followed this response pattern. Commerce on the other hand had 10 (of 16) respondents indicating the Academic Reputation as the primary reason while Law's 11 respondents were split amongst 9 of the ten options provided.

### Facilities and Services

Overall I am satisfied with the quality of facilities available	COM	EBE	HUM	LAW	MED	SCI	Total
Strongly Agree	7	7	13	3	30	38	98
Agree	7	14	22	4	22	46	115
Uncertain							
Disagree	1	4	8	4	2	15	34
Strongly Disagree							
No response	1						1
Grand Total	16	25	43	11	54	99	248

Approximately 86% of the respondents (213 of 248) indicated that they Agree (46%)/ Strongly Agree (40%) with the statement querying their levels of satisfaction with the quality of facilities available at UCT. This ranged from 64% (7 of 11) of Law doctoral respondents to 96% (52 of 54) of Health Sciences respondents.

Please rate the following facilities and services during your doctoral studies	COM	EBE	HUM	LAW	MED	SCI	Total
Faculty administration	4.25	3.43	3.65	3.55	4.31	3.75	3.85
IAPO (International Academic Programmes Office)	3.77	3.44	3.63	3.75	4.13	3.94	3.84
UCT Libraries	4.63	4.32	4.33	4.36	4.40	4.35	4.37
Laboratories and Field Equipment	3.50	3.53	3.00	3.67	4.37	3.89	3.88
Computer Access	4.50	4.17	3.53	3.60	4.42	4.04	4.07
Internet Connectivity	4.69	4.28	3.74	4.00	4.13	3.82	3.98
Research Software	3.50	3.55	3.59	4.00	3.88	3.63	3.68
Access to technical support (other than supervisor)	3.47	3.24	3.32	3.64	3.92	3.37	3.49
Financial Support	3.47	3.67	3.36	3.18	3.76	3.60	3.57
Writing support	3.50	3.30	3.74	3.50	3.85	3.73	3.69
Suitable working space	3.88	3.96	3.34	3.00	4.17	3.94	3.84

Amongst the facilities listed, Doctoral respondents rated the UCT Libraries, Computer Access and Internet Connectivity highest with Access to Technical Support (other than supervisor) and Financial Support lowest. Respondents from the Health Sciences were most satisfied with the facilities they had access to while respondents from the Humanities were the least satisfied.

Apart from Access to Technical Support (other than supervisor), EBE respondents also rated Faculty Administration, IAPO and writing support as low.

The availability of suitable working space was rated particularly lowly by Humanities and Law respondents.

### The quality of interaction with UCT

Overall I am satisfied with the quality of my interaction with UCT	COM	EBE	HUM	LAW	MED	SCI	Total
Strongly Agree	3	4	9	4	26	27	73
Agree	12	13	25	5	24	55	134
Uncertain							
Disagree		8	8	2	4	14	36
Strongly Disagree	1					2	3
No response			1			1	2
Grand Total	16	25	43	11	54	99	248

Approximately 83% of Doctoral respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statements that they are satisfied with the quality of their interaction with UCT, although nearly double the number of respondents merely Agreed (54%) rather than Strongly Agreed (29%) with the statement. The faculty with the largest proportion expressing positive levels of satisfaction with the quality of interaction with UCT was Health Sciences with 93% (50 of 54) while only 68% (17 of 25) of EBE Doctoral respondents expressed positive levels of satisfaction with the quality of interaction with UCT.

### Supervision

Overall I am satisfied with the supervision I am receiving during my research in this degree?	COM	EBE	HUM	LAW	MED	SCI	Total
Strongly agree	6	6	27	5	26	43	113
Agree	1	8	8	4	8	20	49
Uncertain	3	2	2	1	4	7	19
Disagree	2	3	1		8	12	26
Strongly disagree	2	3	4	1	7	13	30
No response	2	3	1		1	4	11
Grand Total	16	25	43	11	54	99	248

Two-thirds of the Doctoral respondents indicated high levels of satisfaction (responding agree (20%)/strongly agree (46%) with the statement) with the supervision they were receiving. Levels of satisfaction

were highest amongst respondents from Law and Humanities (9 out of 11 and 35 out of 43, respectively) and lowest among respondents from Commerce and EBE (7 out of 16 and 14 out of 25, respectively)

Please rate the following aspects of your supervision experience	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Unknown	Grand Total
My supervisor provides expert guidance on topic selection and development	118	51	18	30	30	1	248
My supervisor gives expert advice on appropriate literature	99	63	27	30	28	1	248
My supervisor provides constructive feedback on my work	126	47	17	25	31	2	248
My supervisor understands the challenges I face(d).	112	50	25	28	31	2	248
My supervisor is a source of support (Academic and Personal) throughout	107	50	34	22	33	2	248
Supervision is available when I need it	115	47	32	23	28	3	248

The issue of supervision divided the respondents in that although about two-thirds Strongly Agreed or Agreed with the 6 statements the Doctoral students were asked to rate, two-fifths to a quarter also Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed with the statements.

Please rate the following aspects of your supervision experience	COM	EBE	HUM	LAW	MED	SCI	Total
My supervisor provides expert guidance on topic selection and development	3.60	3.48	4.23	3.73	3.81	3.72	3.80
My supervisor gives expert advice on appropriate literature	3.67	3.28	4.05	3.45	3.76	3.68	3.71
My supervisor provides constructive feedback on my work	3.60	3.58	4.28	4.00	3.87	3.77	3.86
My supervisor understands the challenges I face(d).	3.57	3.60	4.14	3.64	3.72	3.67	3.75
My supervisor is a source of support (Academic and Personal) throughout	3.64	3.44	4.16	3.36	3.74	3.63	3.72
Supervision is available when I need it	4.07	3.13	4.19	3.73	3.81	3.78	3.81
Total Respondents	16	25	43	11	54	99	248

*My supervisor provides expert guidance on topic selection and development.*

Although more than two thirds of respondents indicated very strong or strong agreement with this statement, almost a quarter Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed while the remainder did not answer or indicated uncertain. On average Humanities respondents (4.23) ranked this aspect much higher than respondents from other faculties especially those from Commerce (3.60) and EBE (3.48).

*My supervisor gives expert advice on appropriate literature*

As with the previous statement, Humanities respondents ranked supervisor advice on appropriate literature (4.05) higher than respondents from other faculties. In this instance respondents from Law and EBE ranked this aspect much lower than the average. Supervisor giving expert advice rated the lowest satisfaction overall amongst the six aspects probed in this section.

*My supervisor provides constructive feedback on my work*

The provision of constructive feedback rated the highest satisfaction level (3.86) amongst the 6 aspects that were probed.

*My supervisor understands the challenges I face(d).*

With the exception of ratings from Humanities respondents (4.14), the ratings from respondents from the other 5 faculties were lower than the average (3.75) rating for the statement: My supervisor understands the challenges I face(d).

*My supervisor is a source of support (Academic and Personal) throughout*

With the exception of the average ratings from the Humanities respondents (4.16), which were on the high side and EBE (3.44) and Law (3.36), which were lower than average, the ratings from the respondents from the other 3 faculties were clustered around the average (3.72).

Supervision is available when I need it

Average ratings for both Commerce (4.07) and Humanities (4.19) respondents represented the higher levels of satisfaction in this group. Average ratings of 3.13 for EBE respondents represented the low end in terms of satisfaction.

Frequency of meetings with Supervisor

How frequently do you meet with your supervisor	COM	EBE	HUM	LAW	MED	SCI	Total
Weekly	3	10	3		18	42	76
Fortnightly	3	3	10	2	15	14	47
Monthly	3	5	11	3	14	14	50
Two monthly		1	3	3	1	7	15
Quarterly	1	1	4	1		5	12
Half Yearly		1	1		1	1	4
Other (please specify)	5	4	11	2	5	16	43
Unknown	1						1
Grand Total	16	25	43	11	54	99	248

Approximately 70% of respondents noted that they met with their supervisor at least once a month. The major proportion that indicated Other, explained that meetings happened on an ad hoc or as needed basis.

**Quality of Doctoral Research**

Overall I am satisfied with the quality of my doctoral research experience	COM	EBE	HUM	LAW	MED	SCI	Total
Strongly agree	7	7	16	7	30	40	107
Agree	4	8	15	2	9	23	61
Uncertain	1	4	6	2	1	14	28
Disagree	2	2	4		5	11	24
Strongly disagree	1	4	2		9	10	26
No response	1					1	2
Grand Total	16	25	43	11	54	99	248

Just over two-thirds of the respondents indicated high levels of satisfaction with the quality of their doctoral research experience. Respondents from EBE were relatively less satisfied (15 of 25) while their colleagues from Law (9 of 11) were relatively more satisfied with the quality of their doctoral research experience.

Overall, I have been free to explore new ideas, select methods, interpret my own findings and generally retain my own independent thought during my research.	COM	EBE	HUM	LAW	MED	SCI	Total
Strongly agree	8	9	23	6	27	53	126
Agree	3	10	11	3	12	19	58
Disagree	2	3	3		8	6	22
Strongly disagree	1	2	1		4	14	22
Uncertain	1	1	5	2	2	4	15
No response	1				1	3	5
Grand Total	16	25	43	11	54	99	248

Responses to the question on Cultural Ethos/ Intellectual climate illustrated a high level of satisfaction with their doctoral experience. Three-quarters of respondents noted that they Agree (23%) /Strongly agreed (51%) with the statement: Overall, I have been free to explore new ideas, select methods, interpret my own findings and generally retain my own independent thought during my research.