



University of Melbourne

2022

ANNUAL REPORT

MSD Research Student Association

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1. Executive Summary

The 2022 Research Students Association (RSA) committee was elected to office in February 2022 and since that time it has worked tirelessly to support the research student cohort of the ABP faculty during the relaxation of pandemic restrictions, following a series of prolonged lockdowns. We hope that the work done this year has helped further develop an ethos of support and collegiality among graduate researchers, while providing a strong foundation for the 2023 committee to build on. This year's committee of 11 members comprises an Executive and three sub-committees: Research, Engagement and Advocacy.

The committee's key areas of focus are:

- Developing a culture of mutual support, collegiality and achievement among graduate researchers;
- Providing opportunities for graduate researchers to share success and develop our skills across research and practice;
- Sharing our collective successes and celebrating our work;
- Providing a constructive voice in working with our faculty colleagues across professional and academic staff; and
- Improving the experience of graduate researchers.

This year, the committee has run a series of social and academic focused events. We were successful in securing a Discover UniMelb grant and a Diversity and Inclusion funding to help us to deliver these events. One of the highlights of the year was a graduate research social writing retreat at the University's Creswick campus.

We celebrated the end of the year with a BBQ, and the launch of the Oculus publication. Oculus is an MSD RSA publication that celebrates a selection of the diverse research undertaken by postgraduate researchers within the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning. The publication reflects the research outputs of PhD candidates that cross architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, planning and construction.

This year saw us carrying out another 'pulse check' survey, which sought to better understand the challenges being faced by our peers and to identify opportunities to provide support. The results of the survey allowed us to focus the faculty's support for, and engagement with, the cohort. This also guided the committee's work throughout the year.

Sincere thanks go to Professor Michele Acuto (Associate Dean - Research), Associate Professor Anna Hurlimann (Assistant Dean of Graduate Research), Sally Jones (Manager, Research and Industry) and Caroline Deacon (Senior Research Officer), for their responsiveness and consistent support.

The committee has worked seamlessly and with great camaraderie. This report offers a summary of our achievements, along with lessons learned and opportunities for the future.

2. Reading this report

This report is developed to align with the Graduate Student Association's (GSA) reporting requirements. Membership details and requirements are included in the "introducing us" section of the report. Because of the sub-committee structure of the RSA, each sub-committee's highlights and activities are reported in separate sections.

In addition, the Executive and each sub-committee has provided suggestions for the 2023 committee, with the objective of aiding succession planning and to ensure continuity and further development of initiatives started in 2022.

We thank the GSA for supporting our work and look forward to remaining affiliated with the GSA to advance all opportunities for mutual support and development among graduate researchers.

3. Introducing Us

The 2022 MSD RSA committee includes 11-members – three men and eight women, four domestic and seven international scholars. We are a diverse group, working in a number of disciplines including architecture, planning, placemaking, architectural history and urban design.

Any graduate researcher at MSD is eligible for election to the committee. We run annual elections and conduct our affairs in accordance with our Constitution. There is no fee to apply or join: we want committee membership to be widely accessible and provide an avenue for graduate researchers to get involved in activities that support one another.

Our committee includes a three-member Executive, as well as sub-committees across three areas: Research, Engagement and Advocacy. Given the ongoing nature of the pandemic and its associated lockdowns, activities were mostly limited to interaction events with the faculty and research events geared towards management of candidature and working towards a career in academia.

The committee for 2022 includes:

- Anna Edwards – President
- Merrick Morley – Treasurer
- Savindi Perera – Secretary
- Dorsa Kafili – Research Committee
- Sombol Mokhles – Research Committee
- Shiva Nouri – Engagement Committee
- Dulani Denipitiya – Engagement Committee
- Dinh Huynh – Engagement Committee
- Tim Baber – Engagement Committee
- Rebecca Roberts – Advocacy Committee
- Sue Huang – Advocacy Committee

4. Executive Committee

In addition to providing support to the sub-committees, the Executive committee of the RSA was particularly focused this year on re-engaging our Graduate Research cohort with the campus experience via social and academic events as pandemic restrictions have been lifted. Monthly meetings of the RSA committee have been held. Ad-hoc communication and meetings took place between the RSA committee and faculty staff (Manager, Research and Industry, and Assistant Dean, Research and Training). These meetings provided an avenue for communicating issues that had arisen amongst the cohort and helped to work through the diverse challenges they faced.

Achievements and highlights for the Executive of 2022 include:

- Managing communication and working in collaboration with the other sub-committees throughout the year to support the cohort;
- Engaging Graduate Researchers in discussion via the RSA WhatsApp group, which has grown to more than 100 members;
- Managing communication and working in collaboration with senior faculty staff to optimize our role as an intermediary between the University and the cohort;
- Ongoing publication of the MSD Student Directory (updated quarterly);
- Pulse check of the cohort;
- Individualized communications sent to welcome and inform every candidate at their commencement.

Challenges included:

- While events have had strong attendance, there are fewer Graduate Researchers attending campus on a regular basis than there were pre-pandemic.
- Transitioning from online to hybrid and in-person events was a challenge at the start of the year.

Opportunities for the 2023 committee include:

- Collaboration with Academics Anonymous.
- Collaboration with the ECA Network.
- Managing the process for the collation and publication of Oculus 2023.
- Conduct Pulse Check survey.
- Follow up with the faculty on issues communicated by the Advocacy Committee.
- Continue as the conduit between student concerns and faculty.
- Engaging with Graduate Research Committees in other faculties to scale up advocacy.
- Continue to advocate for in person quarterly town halls between cohort and faculty.

5. Research sub-committee

Achievements and highlights for the Research of 2022 include:

Following a brief hiatus, in 2021 the RSA Research Committee committed to reinstating [Oculus](#) to showcase the work of MSD Graduate Researchers.

The research sub-committee focused this year on the finalisation and publication of Oculus, which was launched at the end of year BBQ in November 2022.

Oculus is a Melbourne School of Design (MSD) Research Students Association (RSA) publication that celebrates a selection of the diverse research undertaken by postgraduate researchers within the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning. The publication reflects the research outputs of PhD candidates that cross architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, planning and construction.

Opportunities for the 2023 committee include:

- Releasing a call for submissions for a 2023 edition of Oculus.
- Managing the process for the collation and publication of Oculus 2023.

6. Engagement sub-committee

Achievements and highlights for the Engagement of 2022:

Thanks to the a Discover UniMelb grant, funding from the Diversity and Inclusion team, and easing COVID-19 restrictions, the Engagement sub-committee was able to hold many in-person social events in 2022 to welcome new graduate researchers (GRs) to Melbourne, as well as to encourage our current cohorts back to campus after a long disruption. The events includes:

- Two Shared Culture Dinners on 3 August and 8 September, where the GRs brought their traditional cuisines and introduced them with the cohorts. There were 12-15 GRs participating in each dinner.
- Two informal Talks with ABP academics (Redento Recio and Judy Bush) during catered lunch and dinner, on 25 August and 19 September. These talks were opportunities for the GRs to hear and share their thoughts about the GRs' journey and career prospects. There were attendance of 20-25 at each talk.
- One movie night at the Cinema Nova Carlton on 12 October with 32 participants.
- The Writing Retreat from 20 to 22 October at UniMelb's Creswick campus. 28 GRs joined the retreat with several research and social activities in the beautiful atmosphere of the campus. This was also a great opportunity for GRs to know each other better and to explore the Creswick areas.
- An end-of-Year BBQ on 17 November, together with the release of Oculus 2022. 60 participants.

The expenditure of these events were mostly covered by the Discover Unimelb Grant 2022 and one Shared Culture Dinners was funded by the Diversity and Inclusion Week initiative.

Besides these official events, there were many spontaneous social drinks at the Clyde bar initiated by either the RSA members or other cohorts, which were great occasions for building the MSD GRs community.

Challenges and opportunities for the 2023 committee:

The average attendance of 2022's events was 20-25 each. Considering the total number or current GRs is around 120, the 2023 committee can seek for initiatives that encourage more engagement from our cohorts. However, since the RSA have not secured further fundings for many social events in 2023, organizing free or heavily subsidized events which attract large numbers of participants might be challenging.

For the collaboration with AA and ECA Network which have already secured fundings for several events in 2023. Although these events focus more on research and skills activities, there are opportunities to incorporate social and engagement activities. This can keep the momentum from 2022 to welcome our cohorts back to campus and to build a stronger and more engaged MSD GRs community.



Shared Culture Dinner 3 August



Lunch and Talk 19 September



Creswick Writing Retreat 20-22 October



End of Year BBQ 17 November

7. Advocacy sub-committee

Achievements and highlights for the Advocacy of 2022 included:

- Advocated for student wellbeing and working conditions as we continue to adapt to changes during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Developed the 2022 MSD RSA Pulse Check survey to better understand GRs' present needs and concerns;
- Conducted the Pulse Check survey and shared the findings with the RSA (which helped inform RSA's planning and activities for the year), the faculty, and students;
- Met with the faculty to address the requests and concerns of the GR cohort that emerged from the Pulse Check survey, and disseminated relevant information to the cohort, e.g., instructions on booking meeting rooms, reporting office facilities issues;
- Advocated for additional support regarding student Ethics application, to which the faculty responded by arranging an informative GR forum on ethics
- Continued to support ongoing town halls/GR forums with faculty and cohort.

Challenges included:

- There were some constraints in faculty budget and building spaces in terms of creating better social spaces for GRs, but the faculty and RSA have been working on available options to improve existing spaces such as the Level 3 GR kitchen;
- Response rate to the Pulse Check survey could be higher (32.5%, consisting of 39 completed and 9 incomplete surveys, out of a cohort size of roughly 120)—though we are confident the responses received were a good representation of the cohort.

Opportunities for the 2023 committee include:

- Conduct Pulse Check survey, update questions as appropriate to GRs'/RSA's needs;
- Create posters advertising the Pulse Check Survey, including a QR link to the survey, and place them on L3 and L4 GR Lounge doors and notice boards. This will create more visibility for the survey and potentially recruit more respondents;
- Follow up with the faculty on issues communicated previously, notably the improvement of GR social spaces;
- Continue as the conduit between student concerns and faculty, including cohort-wide surveys and statistics to support proposed actions;
- Engaging with Graduate Research Committees in other faculties to scale up advocacy;
- Continue to advocate for in person quarterly town halls between cohort and faculty.