

# What Makes International Research Higher Degree (IRHD) Students Satisfied with an Australian University

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# Backgrounds

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- ▶ **Australia has the highest proportion of international students in higher education tertiary type A programs in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and accounts for one-tenth of the world market for international higher education (Review of Australian Higher Education, 2008).**

## Overseas student numbers, higher education

Country	Number ('000s) 2006	Average annual growth (per cent) 2000-2006
United States	585	3
United Kingdom	330	7
Germany*	261	6
France	278	12
Australia	185	11

Source: Education At Glance: OECD Indicators 2008

\* Excludes advanced research programs

Australia ranked as the fifth largest recipient of overseas higher education students among OECD countries in 2005 and the third largest English-speaking destination for overseas students behind the United States and the United Kingdom'

(Reserve Bank of Australia 2008, p. 15)

# Description of international student cohort in terms of country of origin, field of study and level of study in 2007

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- Country of origin: Over 80 per cent of international students in Australian higher education are from Asia, including 21 per cent from mainland China;
- over half of total international students are studying in the management and commerce disciplines, with 67 per cent of the Chinese student cohort of 58,588 students undertaking degrees in these subject areas;
- 59 per cent of the international student population is studying at the undergraduate level and a further 28 per cent is studying masters by coursework. Only 3.6 per cent is undertaking a research higher degree (DEEWR 2008).



# International students in Australia

- ▶ Sawir(2005): many international students from Asia, studying in Australia
  - face serious learning difficulties
  - lack confidence in speaking
  - taking a proactive role in classrooms
- ▶ Robertson et al. (2000) concluded that language issues were the major area of unsolved problems facing international students.
  - Academic English
  - Conversational English

# International students in Australia

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- ▶ The students manifest a lack of confidence with English.
- have incomplete understanding of lecturers' spoken English;
- feel unhappy with their oral performances in the presence of Australian classmates
- concern about colloquial language, writing difficulties, and problems of interpretations

# The study

- ▶ **Stage one:** An online questionnaire is distributed among all the IRHD students at the University of New South Wales, aiming to observe the relationship patterns among academic factors and satisfaction, as an essential and key step in understanding IRHD students' learning, research and livelihood in Australia. Another function of questionnaire is to select cases to be studied in the second phase.

# Method: Participants

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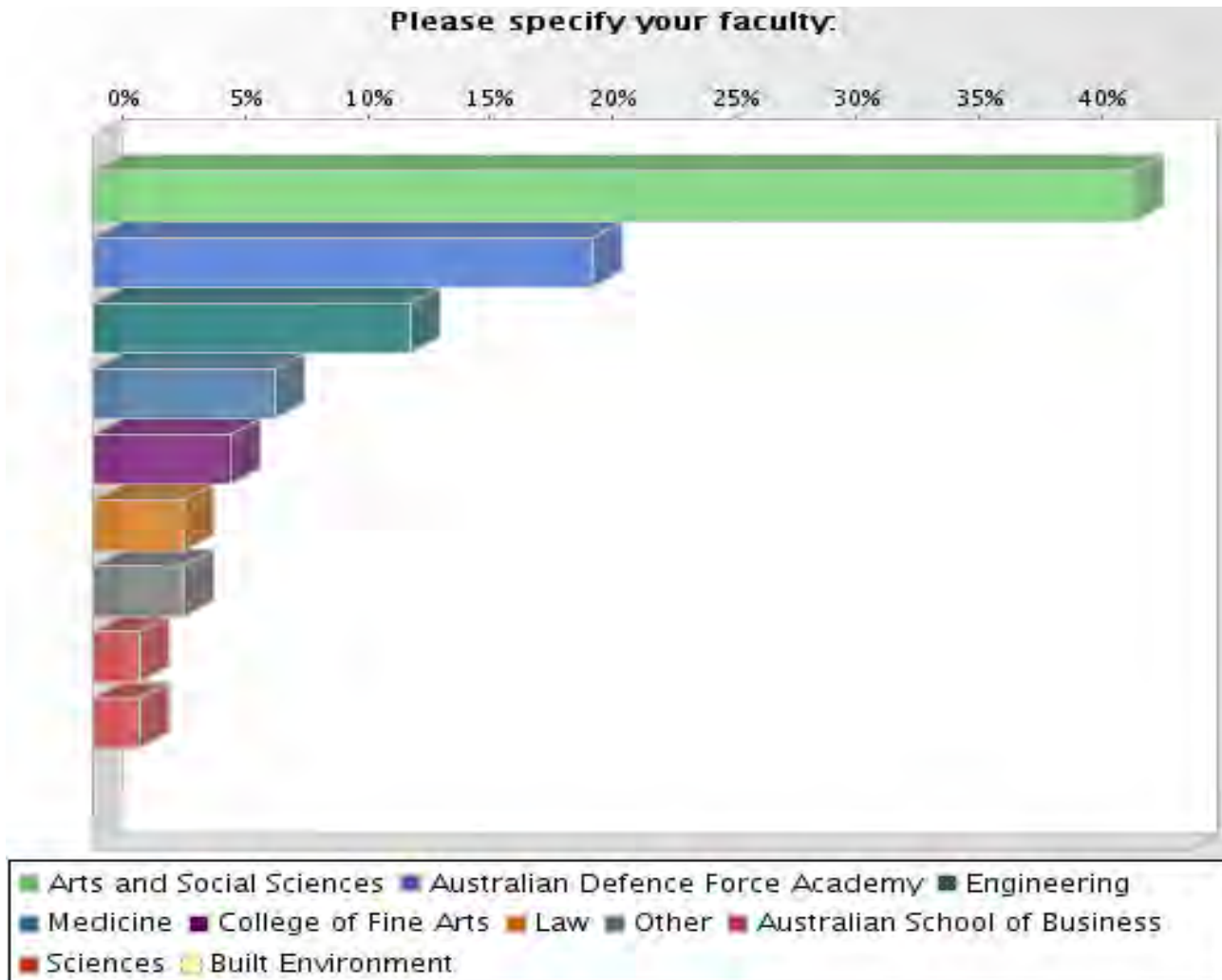
- ▶ **Participants: 64 IRHD students studying the University of New South Wales participated in an online survey**
  
- ▶ **Instrument**
  - Background information
  - Experience in Australia
  - Satisfaction: overall, academic, social
  - Open-ended questions



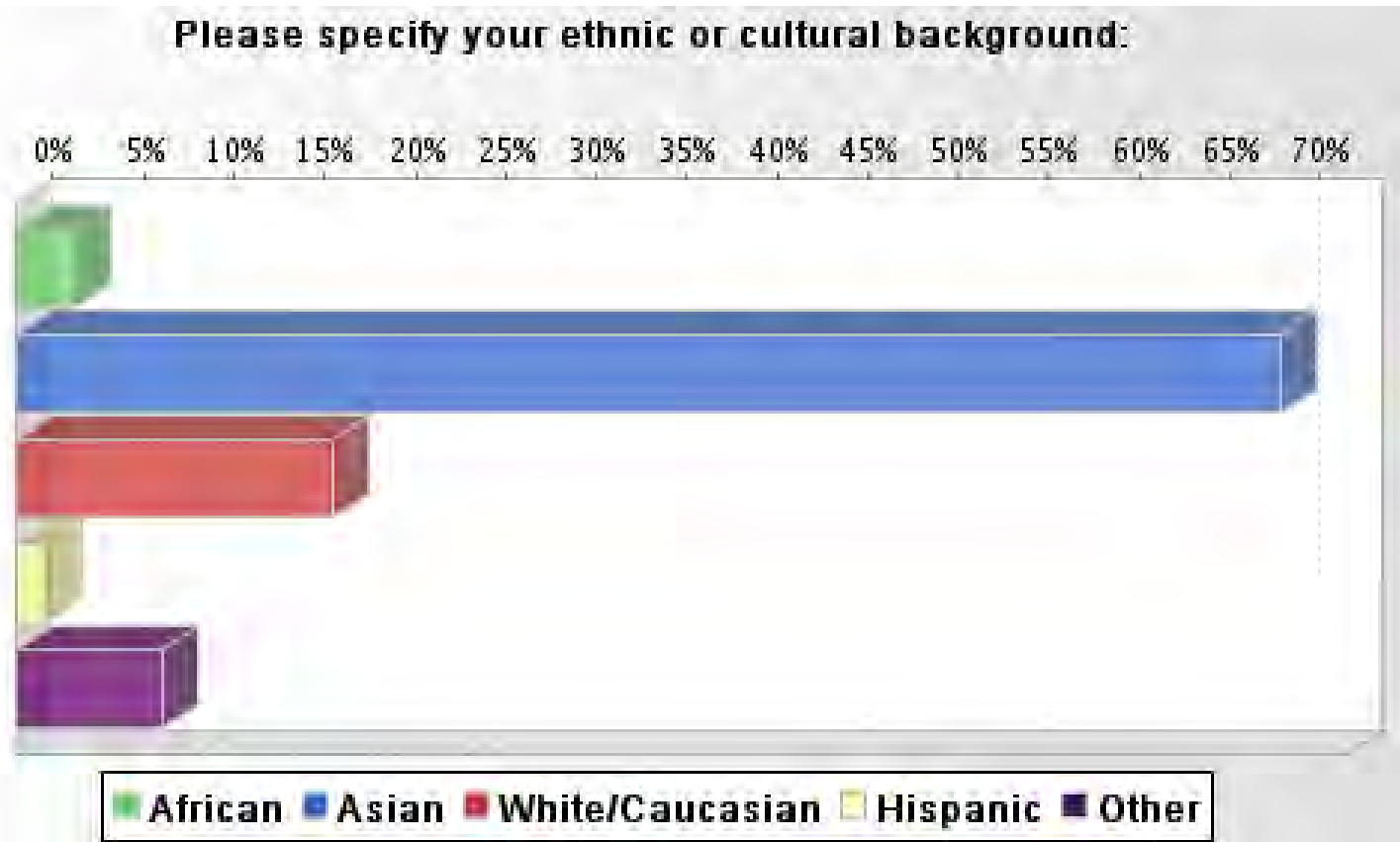
# Demographic information

- ▶ Age: **75 %** are in age of 25-34, **16%** are above 35 and **9%** are below the age of 24
- ▶ Gender: **65%** are females (n=41) and **35%** are males (n=22)
- ▶ **84%** students don't have children.
- ▶ **55%** students are single.
- ▶ **66%** students have other foreign language learning experience other than English.
- ▶ **62%** students do not have previous overseas studying experiences.
- ▶ **71%** students do not stay with their family in Australia.

# Demographic information



# Demographic information



Asian: 69.8% (n=44)

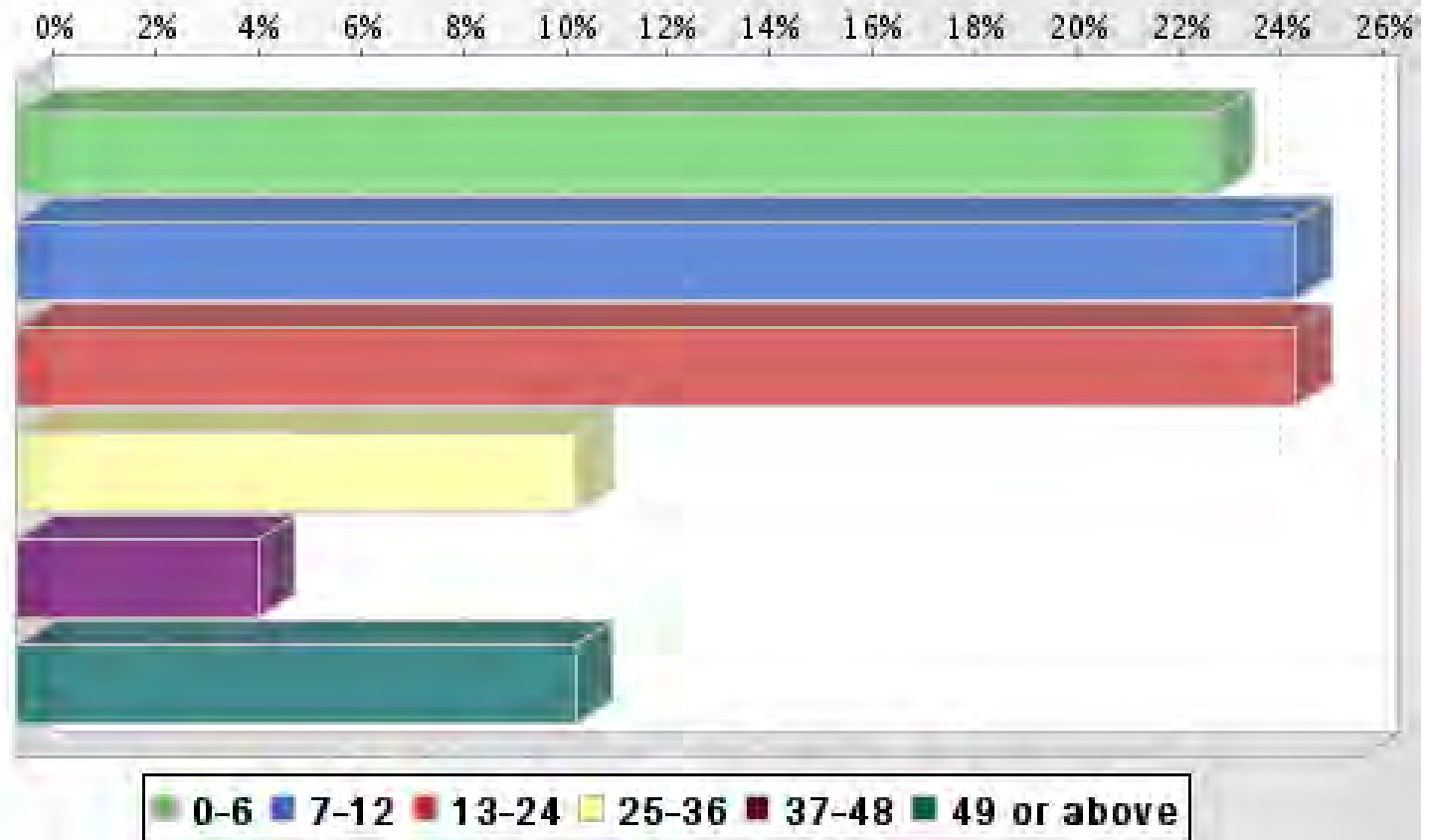
African: 3.2% (n=2)

White/Caucasian: 17.5% (n=11)

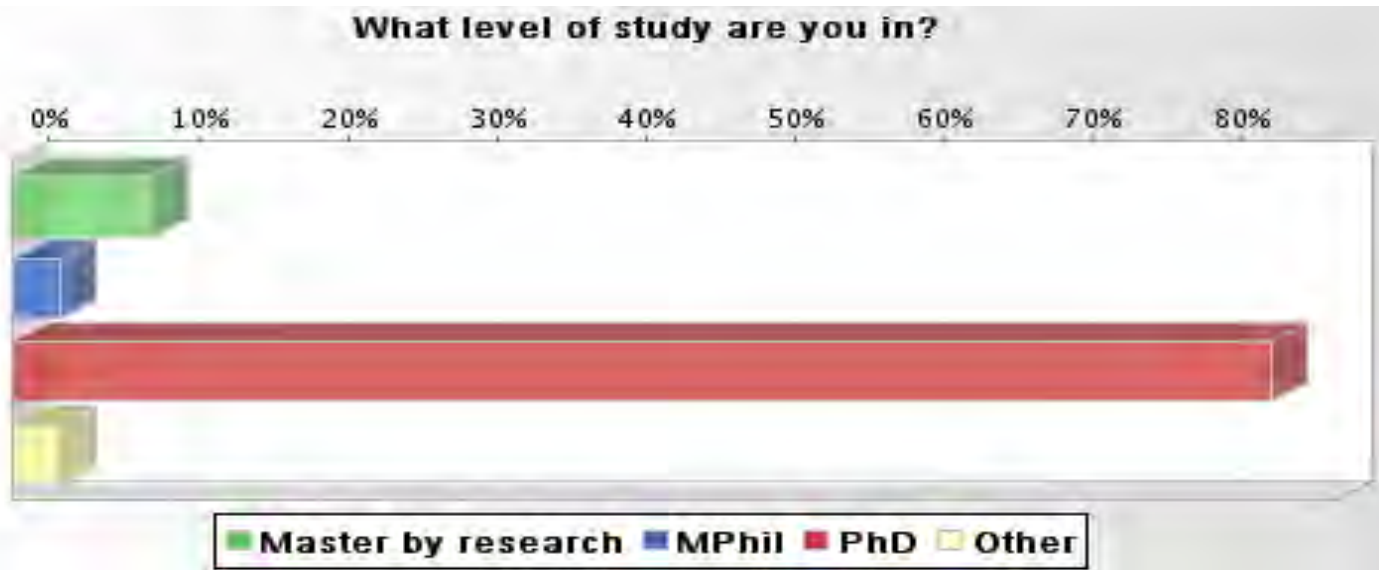
Hispanic: 1.6% (n=1)

# Demographic information

How many MONTHS have you been in Australia?



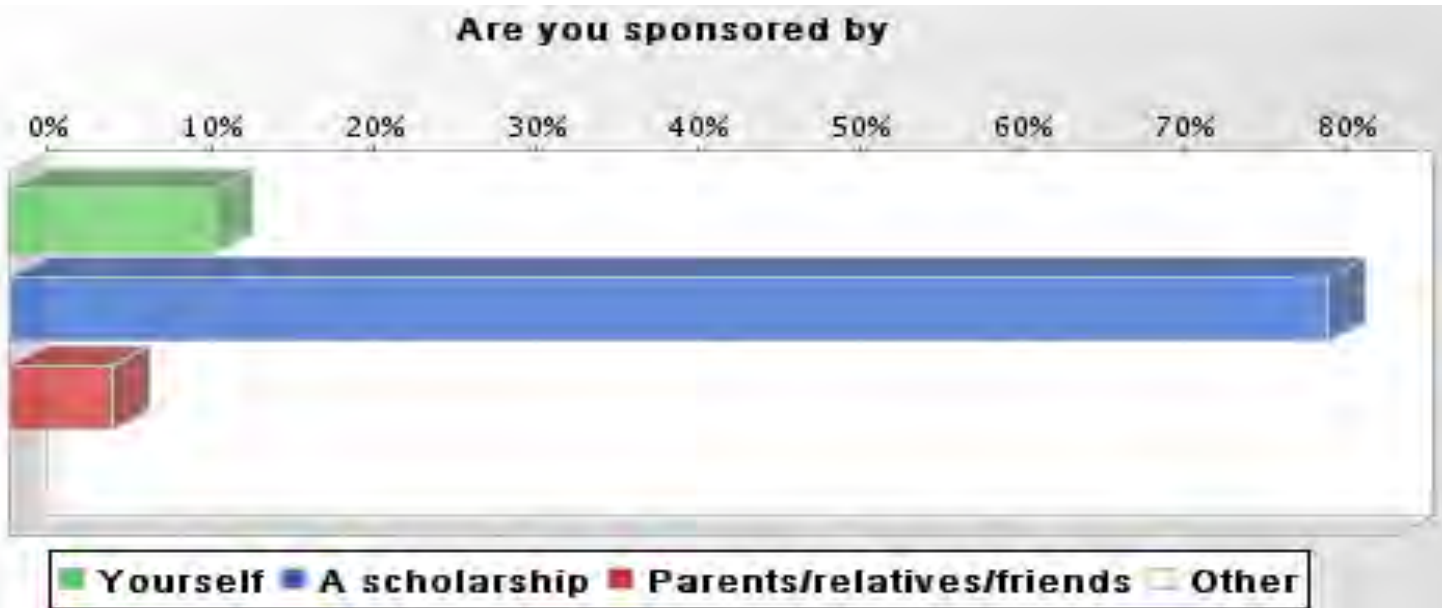
# Demographic information



	Percent	Total
PhD.	84.4%	54
Master by research	9.4%	6
MPhil	3.1%	2
Other	3.1%	2



# Demographic information



	Percent	Total
Scholarship	81.2%	52
Yourself	12.5%	8
Parents/relatives/friends	6.2%	4

# Academic factors related to satisfaction

1. I understand the classes I take at university.
2. My research is progressing well.
3. The university facilities (library, cafeteria, etc) are easy to use.
4. I meet with my supervisor frequently.
5. My supervisor's advice is helpful.
6. The university's curriculum is well suited to me.
7. I have a good friend to enjoy life with.
8. I enjoy the housing conditions and environment of the place where I live.
9. I am well adjusted to life in Australia.
10. I spend a lot of time at part-time jobs.
11. I am confident in my English proficiency.
12. I can communicate successfully in Australia.
13. Friends from my own country help me adapt to Australian life.
14. Frequent contact with my supervisor means a lot to the progress of my research.

# Factor analysis of variables related to the satisfaction of learning and livelihood of IRHD students

Variables	Factor I: Learning and Research	Factor II: living and Adaptation	Factor III: Intercultural Contact Ability	Factor IV: Co-national Network	Commonality
5. Supervisor's advice	.813	.032	-.038	.213	.709
6. Suitability of curriculum	.773	.241	.012	.222	.705
14. Frequent contact with my supervisor	.757	.042	.060	.103	.589
4. Frequent meeting with supervisor	.716	.006	-.011	-.104	.524
3. Use of facilities	.707	.425	-.207	-.152	.747
1. classes understanding	.629	.412	.071	.104	.581
2. Progress of my research	.610	.160	.102	.148	.430
8. Housing condition	-.137	.907	-.102	.218	.900
9. Good life adjustment in Australia	.161	.763	.223	-.131	.676
7. A good friend	.250	.463	-.002	.035	.279
10. Time at part-time jobs	-.256	-.091	.865	.220	.871
11. Confidence in English proficiency	.373	.514	.587	-.196	.786
12. Successful communication in Australia	.503	.497	.555	-.118	.822
13. Mother country friends help adaptation	.324	.049	.102	.908	.942
Variable explained (%)	30.578	18.421	10.975	8.304	
Accumulative Variable Explained (%)	30.578	48.999	59.974	68.278	



# Correlation matrix among academic factors related to satisfaction

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	F1	F2	F3	F4
F1: Learning and research	1			
F2: Living and adaptation	.277*	1		
F3: Intercultural contact ability	.292**	.265*	1	
F4: Co-national network	.294*	.154	.096	1



## Levels of satisfaction in different academic aspects

Aspects	Mean	S.D.	Ranking
Supervisor's support	1.89	.83	1
Your research progress	2.17	.85	2
Teaching quality	2.26	.87	3
Course relevance	2.27	.79	4
Research support from the school or faculty	2.34	.90	5
Your social life in Australia	2.42	.93	6
Course availability	2.46	.89	7
Range of courses offered	2.50	.90	8
Overall education experience	1.98	.83	

Scores of variables vary from 1 (very satisfied) to 5 (very dissatisfied) on a 5-point Likert scale

# Correlation matrix between academic factors and satisfaction

Variables	Learning and research	Living and adaptation	Intercultural contact ability	Co-national network	Overall satisfaction	Academic satisfaction
Learning and research	1					
Living and adaptation	.277 <sup>*</sup>	1				
Intercultural contact ability	.292 <sup>**</sup>	.265 <sup>*</sup>	1			
Co-national network	.294 <sup>*</sup>	.154	.096	1		
Overall satisfaction	.429 <sup>**</sup>	.151	.235 <sup>*</sup>	.271 <sup>*</sup>	1	
Academic satisfaction	.676 <sup>**</sup>	.171	.264 <sup>*</sup>	.379 <sup>**</sup>	.689 <sup>**</sup>	1
Socio-cultural satisfaction	.168	.431 <sup>**</sup>	.294 <sup>*</sup>	.072	.134	.237 <sup>*</sup>



# The study

- ▶ **Stage two:** on a voluntary basis, four IRHD are participating the second stage, a face-to face interview.
- Each informant was interviewed for about 1.5 hours to understand their experiences and perceptions about overall, academic and socio-cultural adaptation as well as their inter-relationships.

# Background Information on the informants

Name	Gender	Nationality	Discipline	Time in Aus
Jaa	M	Malaysia	Medicine	Within 6 Months
Rebecca	F	USA	Social Science	Year 1
Nico	M	Germany	Creative Arts	Year 2
Yuan	F	Chinese	Education	Year 2

# General adaptation: Future Career Plan

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- ▶ “few of them know whether what they learned after hard working can be used in their own country. Things are always incompatible. ” (Rebecca)

# General adaptation: Expectations and Personality

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- ▶ “Most of them were not satisfied with their living conditions and everything else. I know why they were so disappointed, because they had higher expectations before arriving here: they would be welcomed like guests by nice families.” (Yuan)

# General adaptation: Positive psychology

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- ▶ “You have to know what is you are pursuing at the moment. Always think the positive side of the life you are living. That is the key to enjoying life.
- ▶ Maybe that is why I never cried for missing my family, I know they are with me all the time. And I have to say such experience make me more mature physically (negative) and psychologically .” (Nico)



# Academic Adaptation: Academic development and publications

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- ▶ “Although I just started my PhD in the mid of August, to have a publication within a first year would be a huge encouragement for me and also add a credit in my academic performance. Thus, I am trying to work as efficiently as I can.” (Jaa)

# Academic Adaptation: An experienced and responsible supervisor

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- ▶ “With the guidance of an experience supervisor, it makes it easier and faster to progress in my experiment without wasting too much time optimizing the protocols. My supervisor is able to pin point the possible problems in my experiment, and suggest ways to overcome it with very convincing reasons. And I do learn a lot from him. ...”  
(Jaa)

# Academic Adaptation: Learning Support

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- ▶ “Student Centre operates on a quite personal level – most of the time my enquiries were answered quickly. Regarding any research related matters, there is one responsible person and I have met her several times.” (Rebecca)

# Socio-cultural Adaptation: Family's support and attachment

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- ▶ “She is the only daughter in her family, and she therefore knows what she means to her retired parents. In order to company with parents and look after them, she decided to go back to China to work. ” (Yuan)

# Conclusions

- ▶ IRHD students' overall and academic satisfaction in Australia are highly related to each other, and they may be strongly influenced by their learning and research, moderately influenced by co-national support and intercultural contact ability.
- ▶ Socio-cultural satisfaction seems to belong to a different domain from academic satisfaction because it may be explained by a different set of variables such as living and adaptation and intercultural contact ability.

# Implications

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- ▶ International students: psychological preparation and academic preparation for the new study
- ▶ Host institute: language support and study space
- ▶ Supervisors: more understanding and communication with the IRHD students



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Thank you!

