



## **Results of the 2015 Postgraduate Supervision Survey: Internal Report**

**December 2015**

<b>Prepared by</b>	Mohamed Alansari President, PGSA  The University of Auckland
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### **Acknowledgment**

Professor Christine Rubie-Davies is acknowledged for giving permission for PGSA to use the supervision survey which she developed. The author of this instrument should be consulted first before the survey is adapted or used in a different context or for a different purpose from that intended at the time of commissioning this report.

## Survey Background

The purpose of this survey is to inform the University regarding the postgraduate supervision practices that their students are currently experiencing. This includes exploring what supervision practices students find particularly useful, and ways in which supervisors can become more effective. This is the second year the survey has been run within the Faculty of Education and Social Work, and the first year across faculties. If the results prove valuable, then PGSA will continue running the survey on an annual basis.

### Participants

A total of 321 doctoral and postgraduate research students (doing a 30-point research component and above) completed the survey. The majority of students ( $n = 297$ , 92.5%) responded to the survey with reference to their main supervisor. In terms of student gender, 30.5% ( $n = 98$ ) of students were identified as male, 67.9% ( $n = 218$ ) as female, and 1.5% ( $n = 5$ ) as 'other' or undisclosed. Students were also identified as New Zealand European ( $n = 185$ , 57.6%), Asian ( $n = 88$ , 27.4%), Pasifika ( $n = 11$ , 3.4%), Māori ( $n = 8$ , 2.5%), and 'other' or undisclosed ( $n = 29$ , 9%).

Of all student participants, 12.5% ( $n = 40$ ) were enrolled in a postgraduate diploma or an honours programme, 18.1% ( $n = 58$ ) were enrolled in a masters programme, and 69.5% ( $n = 223$ ) were doctoral students. In total, 79.1% ( $n = 254$ ) of students were enrolled full-time, and 33.3% ( $n = 107$ ) of all respondents were international students. Doctoral students also indicated whether they were in the provisional/early-phase ( $n = 89$ , 39.6%), mid-phase ( $n = 67$ , 29.8%), or end-phase ( $n = 69$ , 30.7%) of their programme.

Lastly, students reported belonging to the faculties of Education and Social Work ( $n = 80$ , 24.9%), Medical and Health Sciences ( $n = 70$ , 21.8%), Arts ( $n = 69$ , 21.5%), Science ( $n = 43$ , 13.4%), NICA ( $n = 29$ , 9%), Engineering ( $n = 15$ , 4.7%), and Business ( $n = 15$ , 4.7%).

### Measures and Procedures

In October 2015, an anonymous online survey was sent to all doctoral and postgraduate research students in the University, comprising 24 items on a 5-point Likert Scale (ranging from '1' for 'Strongly Disagree' to '5' for 'Strongly Agree'), followed by two open-ended questions. The survey ends with a final yes/no question ("would you recommend your supervisor to others?") as an overall student judgement of the supervision process. Responses were then collated and analysed for the purposes of this report. All students were invited to complete the survey on a confidential basis.

Means, standard deviations, and percentages were calculated for each of the 24 Likert-scale items, and preliminary *F*-test analyses were run to examine whether there were any differences or patterns in student responses. An analysis of the factorial structure of the instrument suggested that a single score can be created by taking the average score of all 24 items, which was then used as part of the analysis.

## Summary of Results

### Preliminaries

Overall, there were no statistically significant differences in student responses by gender, faculty, ethnicity, programme, enrolment status (full-time versus part-time), or residency (international versus resident students). That is, all students responded similarly. For doctoral students, there were no statistically significant differences between early, mid, or end phase students. Due to sample size constraints, no further statistical analyses were run and the report will solely focus on the basic descriptives, as well as the qualitative comments made by students. Students' evaluation of supervision is treated as an evaluation of teaching, and so items with a percentage of agreement below the 70% threshold were highlighted in yellow.

### Major Findings

While students favourably rated their supervisors across the 24 Likert-scale items, there were some concerns regarding the supervisor's style and role in supporting students with the data collection process and data analyses, as well as the limited provision of exemplars or directions on what needs to be done to write up their studies.

Other items with a low percentage of agreements indicated that students did not feel their supervisors apply the right amounts of pressure on them to produce results or writing, as well as the lack of support to publish papers from their theses.

An interesting trend in the data was that end-phase doctoral students rated their supervisors lower than those in their mid-phase year, and mid-phase doctoral students rated their supervisors lower than those in their provisional year, suggesting a downward pattern in ratings as students progress through their doctoral programmes.

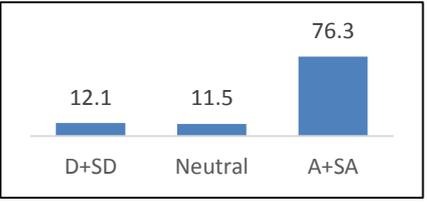
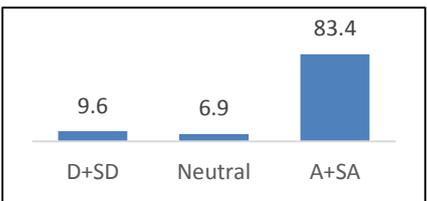
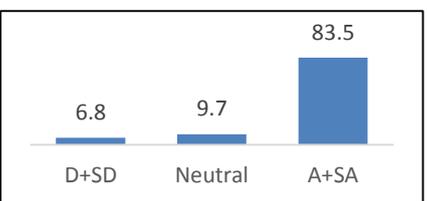
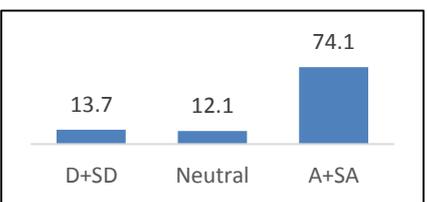
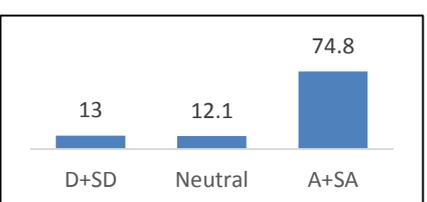
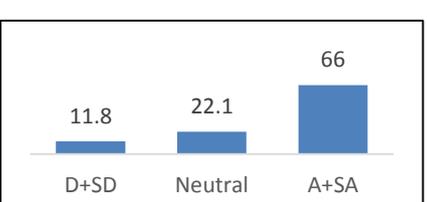
Results also showed a strong positive correlation between student evaluation of supervision and student endorsement of their supervisor. That is, the higher the total score from the supervision survey, the more likely that students would recommend their supervisor to other students to work with.

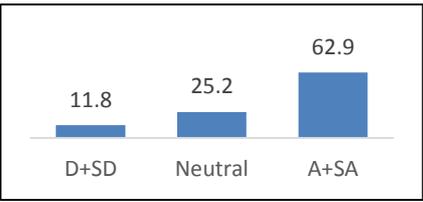
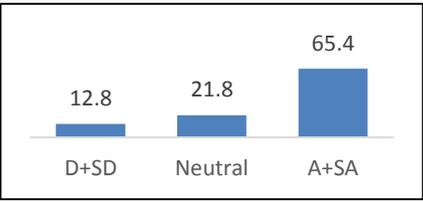
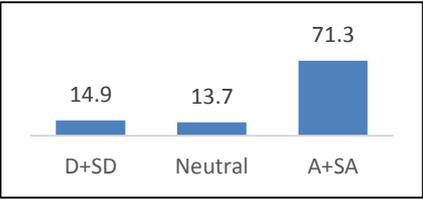
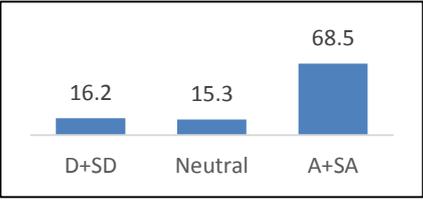
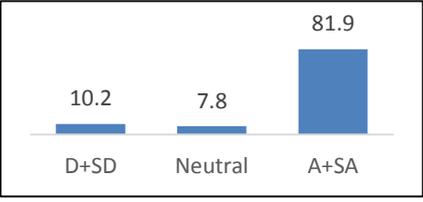
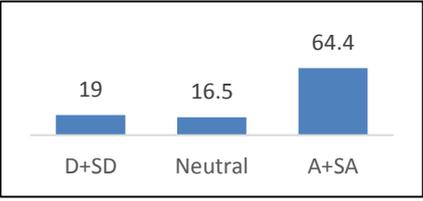
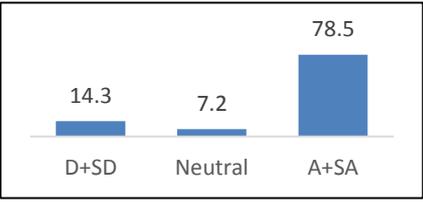
Lastly, students were asked to indicate some aspects of their supervision which they found particularly effective, as well as ways in which their supervisors could improve their supervision practices. Students praised their supervisors for six aspects, and others indicated the lack of these aspects as opportunities for further improvement. These have been ranked below in a descending order of frequency (i.e., from most to least mentioned aspects):

1. **Feedback:** Students appreciated written feedback on their work and progress. In particular, students appreciated the feedback being honest, timely, constructive, and critiquing their ideas and arguments as opposed to their spelling and grammar only.
2. **Academic and personal support:** Students commented on effective supervision including the supervisor "checking in" on students, ensuring students have the resources

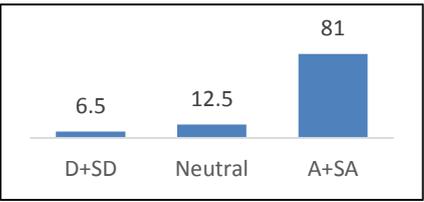
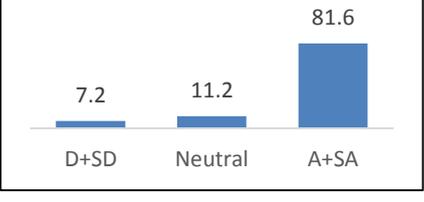
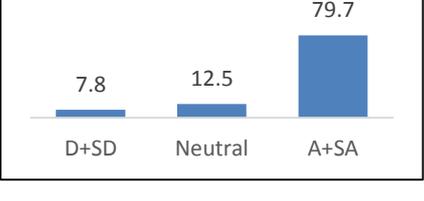
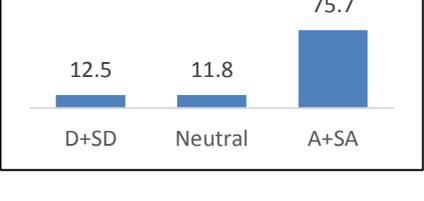
they need to conduct their research, and being mentored throughout their doctoral journey.

3. **Supervision expertise:** Students highlighted three types of knowledge and experience they wanted their supervisors to possess: knowledge around the student's research area, knowledge around the university regulations and processes, as well as knowledge of how their students work/learn best.
4. **Supervisor workload, availability and regular contact:** On one hand, students commented on how the heavy workload, or many responsibilities, of their supervisors serves as a barrier to the frequency of supervision meetings, and how timely students receive feedback on their written work. On the other hand, students who were happy with their supervisors commented on the availability and approachability of those supervisors, with some having an "open-door" policy for their doctoral students.
5. **Student autonomy:** Students commented on how they wanted to have ownership over their work by contributing to the research design and project. Those students felt their supervisors were too "hands-on", requesting minimal input from students and leading the majority of the work. Other students expressed their satisfaction with supervisors who helped them develop their independence, and allowed them to contribute to the research project by introducing new ideas or tailoring the project to suit their interests.
6. **Clarity and communication of expectations:** Students praised their supervisors for the clarity of their instructions, and laying out their expectations of students at an early phase of the supervision process. Other students wanted to have more conversations with their supervisors about their expectations of each other, how often they anticipate meeting, who is in charge of which part of the supervision process, as well as discussing how the supervision team works best.

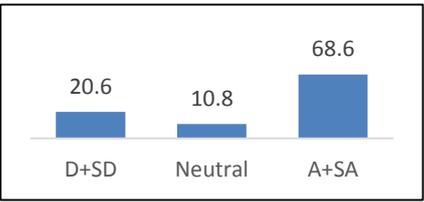
Item	Percentages	Descriptives								
1. My supervisor has made the expectations of the thesis and supervision process clear.	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>12.1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>11.5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>76.3</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Percentage	D+SD	12.1	Neutral	11.5	A+SA	76.3	<p>Mean: 3.97 SD: 1.06</p>
Category	Percentage									
D+SD	12.1									
Neutral	11.5									
A+SA	76.3									
2. My supervisor helped me in developing my research topic or project.	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>9.6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>6.9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>83.4</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Percentage	D+SD	9.6	Neutral	6.9	A+SA	83.4	<p>Mean: 4.14 SD: 1.04</p>
Category	Percentage									
D+SD	9.6									
Neutral	6.9									
A+SA	83.4									
3. My supervisor encouraged me to include my own ideas into the choice of my thesis topic.	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>6.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>9.7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>83.5</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Percentage	D+SD	6.8	Neutral	9.7	A+SA	83.5	<p>Mean: 4.26 SD: 0.99</p>
Category	Percentage									
D+SD	6.8									
Neutral	9.7									
A+SA	83.5									
4. My supervisor has discussed the significance of my research topic with me.	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>13.7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>12.1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>74.1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Percentage	D+SD	13.7	Neutral	12.1	A+SA	74.1	<p>Mean: 3.94 SD: 1.13</p>
Category	Percentage									
D+SD	13.7									
Neutral	12.1									
A+SA	74.1									
5. My supervisor has helped me to plan my research project.	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>13</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>12.1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>74.8</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Percentage	D+SD	13	Neutral	12.1	A+SA	74.8	<p>Mean: 3.93 SD: 1.10</p>
Category	Percentage									
D+SD	13									
Neutral	12.1									
A+SA	74.8									
6. My supervisor has ensured that I have the skills to do the analyses.	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>11.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>22.1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>66</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Percentage	D+SD	11.8	Neutral	22.1	A+SA	66	<p>Mean: 3.76 SD: 1.03</p>
Category	Percentage									
D+SD	11.8									
Neutral	22.1									
A+SA	66									

7. My supervisor has adequately prepared me to collect my data.	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>11.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>25.2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>62.9</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Percentage	D+SD	11.8	Neutral	25.2	A+SA	62.9	Mean: 3.72 SD: 1.03
Response	Percentage									
D+SD	11.8									
Neutral	25.2									
A+SA	62.9									
8. My supervisor has helped to guide me in generalising from my results.	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>12.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>21.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>65.4</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Percentage	D+SD	12.8	Neutral	21.8	A+SA	65.4	Mean: 3.72 SD: 1.09
Response	Percentage									
D+SD	12.8									
Neutral	21.8									
A+SA	65.4									
9. My supervisor has provided exemplars or directions on what is required in order to conduct my study.	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>14.9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>13.7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>71.3</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Percentage	D+SD	14.9	Neutral	13.7	A+SA	71.3	Mean: 3.80 SD: 1.14
Response	Percentage									
D+SD	14.9									
Neutral	13.7									
A+SA	71.3									
10. My supervisor has provided exemplars or directions on what is required in order to write up my project.	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>16.2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>15.3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>68.5</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Percentage	D+SD	16.2	Neutral	15.3	A+SA	68.5	Mean: 3.74 SD: 1.15
Response	Percentage									
D+SD	16.2									
Neutral	15.3									
A+SA	68.5									
11. I have had regular emails/ meetings with my supervisor to discuss my progress.	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>10.2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>7.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>81.9</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Percentage	D+SD	10.2	Neutral	7.8	A+SA	81.9	Mean: 4.15 SD: 1.07
Response	Percentage									
D+SD	10.2									
Neutral	7.8									
A+SA	81.9									
12. My supervisor applies the right amount of pressure to produce results or writing.	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>19</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>16.5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>64.4</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Percentage	D+SD	19	Neutral	16.5	A+SA	64.4	Mean: 3.72 SD: 1.18
Response	Percentage									
D+SD	19									
Neutral	16.5									
A+SA	64.4									
13. My supervisor provides feedback on my work in a timely manner.	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>14.3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>7.2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>78.5</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Percentage	D+SD	14.3	Neutral	7.2	A+SA	78.5	Mean: 4.01 SD: 1.12
Response	Percentage									
D+SD	14.3									
Neutral	7.2									
A+SA	78.5									

14. My supervisor is responsive to my requests for help.	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>8.7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>82.2</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Percentage	D+SD	8.7	Neutral	9	A+SA	82.2	Mean: 4.19 SD: 1.05
Category	Percentage									
D+SD	8.7									
Neutral	9									
A+SA	82.2									
15. My supervisor has provided suggestions for improvement during all phases of the process.	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>10.6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>10.6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>78.8</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Percentage	D+SD	10.6	Neutral	10.6	A+SA	78.8	Mean: 4.07 SD: 1.09
Category	Percentage									
D+SD	10.6									
Neutral	10.6									
A+SA	78.8									
16. My supervisor has helped me with the possibility of publishing papers from my thesis.	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>24.6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>14</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>61.3</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Percentage	D+SD	24.6	Neutral	14	A+SA	61.3	Mean: 3.56 SD: 1.29
Category	Percentage									
D+SD	24.6									
Neutral	14									
A+SA	61.3									
17. My supervisor is contributing to my mastery of my topic.	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>13.7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>14.3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>72</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Percentage	D+SD	13.7	Neutral	14.3	A+SA	72	Mean: 3.87 SD: 1.13
Category	Percentage									
D+SD	13.7									
Neutral	14.3									
A+SA	72									
18. My supervisor's style helps me to learn.	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>16.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>13.4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>69.8</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Percentage	D+SD	16.8	Neutral	13.4	A+SA	69.8	Mean: 3.81 SD: 1.20
Category	Percentage									
D+SD	16.8									
Neutral	13.4									
A+SA	69.8									
19. My supervisor is developing my independence and confidence.	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>11.5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>10.9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>77.6</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Percentage	D+SD	11.5	Neutral	10.9	A+SA	77.6	Mean: 4.00 SD: 1.11
Category	Percentage									
D+SD	11.5									
Neutral	10.9									
A+SA	77.6									
20. Overall, my supervisor is effective.	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>12.5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>10.9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>76.6</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Percentage	D+SD	12.5	Neutral	10.9	A+SA	76.6	Mean: 4.03 SD: 1.13
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Neutral	10.9									
A+SA	76.6									

21. Overall, my supervisor has good rapport with me.	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>6.5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>12.5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>81</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Percentage	D+SD	6.5	Neutral	12.5	A+SA	81	Mean:4.21 SD: 1.01
Response	Percentage									
D+SD	6.5									
Neutral	12.5									
A+SA	81									
22. My supervisor has demonstrated knowledge of my topic.	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>7.2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>11.2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>81.6</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Percentage	D+SD	7.2	Neutral	11.2	A+SA	81.6	Mean: 4.21 SD: 0.99
Response	Percentage									
D+SD	7.2									
Neutral	11.2									
A+SA	81.6									
23. I have confidence in my supervisor.	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>7.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>12.5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>79.7</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Percentage	D+SD	7.8	Neutral	12.5	A+SA	79.7	Mean: 4.17 SD: 1.06
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D+SD	7.8									
Neutral	12.5									
A+SA	79.7									
24. I would consider asking my supervisor to work with me on future projects.	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>12.5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>11.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>75.7</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Percentage	D+SD	12.5	Neutral	11.8	A+SA	75.7	Mean: 4.07 SD: 1.16
Response	Percentage									
D+SD	12.5									
Neutral	11.8									
A+SA	75.7									

**Note:** Doctoral student responses ( $n = 223$ ) to item 16 are shown below.

16. My supervisor has helped me with the possibility of publishing papers from my thesis.	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>D+SD</td> <td>20.6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>10.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A+SA</td> <td>68.6</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Percentage	D+SD	20.6	Neutral	10.8	A+SA	68.6	Mean: 3.74 SD: 1.26
Response	Percentage									
D+SD	20.6									
Neutral	10.8									
A+SA	68.6									

