

Fieldwork

Related articles:

- [Scholarships, resources and funding for HDR students](#)
- [Harassment, discrimination and bullying](#)
- [Sexual assault and domestic violence](#)

Please note: in February 2021 a new digital system, **Research Education Candidature System (RECS)** was launched to allow HDR candidates to manage many administrative tasks that were previously the responsibility of HDRAC or Sydney Student. Some of our information regarding these processes might be outdated. We are currently in the process of updating it.

If you have difficulties with RECS contact HDRAC for assistance.

HDR thesis projects may require you to complete field research and spend time collecting data away from campus – this could include working outdoors, or in another country. Fieldwork can be adventurous, affirming, and fulfilling; it should also be well planned and fully supported by your supervisors for its duration. HDR candidates are entitled to be safe while carrying out fieldwork and to have access to the University's support services. A student on fieldwork should have access to continuous supervision.

Preparation and approval

While on fieldwork you remain enrolled but will be required to take what is known as '**counting time away**' leave. You must include fieldwork activities in your research plan and obtain faculty approval before heading to a field site. **Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Faculty of Sciences** students should [follow their faculty procedures](#) for getting approved travel arrangements (see the bottom of the linked page for information). All University of Sydney **team fieldwork activities** will have fieldwork safety plans, and be led by experienced personnel. Some HDR candidates may also embark on independent low risk fieldwork. Start the conversation with your supervisors about fieldwork early in your candidature. Things to discuss include:

- risk assessment of intended activities
- travel

- funding
- supervision arrangements while you are away
- your fieldwork safety plan and nominated on-campus University Contact
- ethical responsibilities on data collection when off-campus
- insurance
- relevant University policies.

In most cases your on-campus University Contact will be your lead supervisor. **You must submit and have approved a 'counting time away' [request for leave](#)**, through Sydney Student.

Familiarise yourself with the fieldwork safety plan and the [University's policy on travel insurance](#) for the purposes of University business, which includes field research, conferences, and work health and safety (WHS) standards. If you receive a grant or other funding you will need to know the reporting requirements for these. Don't leave for the field without a proper briefing by your supervisors on procedures for contact, especially in an emergency. If you are undertaking fieldwork with a University team you will be required to participate in a team briefing. It is essential to disclose and discuss medical information that may impact your health and safety during fieldwork, with your lead supervisor or fieldwork supervisor. Note that **international students may request leave under limited circumstances**, so make sure you discuss with your supervisors.

Time in the field

Some candidates become so familiar with their field site they find it difficult to leave it and their on-site colleagues. Others may count the days until their fieldwork is completed. If, for whatever reason, you find you need to extend your fieldwork, be aware that for a full-time PhD you are required to complete at least **2 research periods** of the whole candidature on a University of Sydney campus. While in the field remember that it is your responsibility to regularly check-in with your nominated on-campus University Contact.

If things go wrong

Experiencing an injury, illness, emergency, or misadventure while in the field can be made more difficult by being away from home and your regular support networks. If something does go wrong:

- Reach out to someone you trust. This may be a fieldwork supervisor, or leader, or your nominated on-campus University Contact. SUPRA can also support you through any difficulties that arise from fieldwork, even if you are overseas.
- Keep a record of unexpected events, critical incidents, episodes of harassment, or assault – sign and date your records, and email them to yourself or a trusted person. These may be used as evidence in future, if needed.
- If you are overseas and experience assault, follow your fieldwork safety plan and report incidents to your fieldwork supervisor or on-campus University Contact. Access local support services, if possible.
- If you are in Australia, if you have access to phone or internet, you can contact Usyd's [Counselling and Psychological Services](#) (CAPS).

Fieldwork-related injury, emergencies and misadventure can have unexpected mental health impacts on you, either at the time or after the event. If you find yourself feeling unsure or worried about something that happened while in the field, you have a right to [access appropriate, professional assistance \(such as from CAPS\)](#).

Sexual harassment and sexual assault while working in the field

If you experience sexual harassment or assault while in the field in Australia or overseas, you can [contact the University of Sydney's Safer Communities Office](#).

If you can't – or don't feel ready to – report an incident of sexual harassment or sexual assault while still in the field, you have the right to [report an incident or file a complaint to the University](#) once you have access to phone or internet, or have returned home. You can also [contact SUPRA for advice and assistance](#).

[The nearest Australian embassy, consulate, or high commission can assist Australian citizens who experience sexual assault overseas.](#)

If you are an international student, you may also consult your home government about what assistance they can provide if you experience sexual harassment or sexual assault in a field site outside of Australia.

Other resources

- [Thesis Whisperer](#)

- [University of Sydney advice on travel and fieldwork](#)

Policies

- All University of Sydney policies can be found at the [University Policy Register](#)
- [Travel Policy 2018](#)
- [Travel Procedures 2018](#)

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