Author's response to reviews

Title: Jack-of-all-trades, master of none: Postgraduate perspectives on interdisciplinary health research in Australia

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Author's response to reviews: see over
To Dr Annabel Phillips,

Thank you for the invitation to resubmit ‘Jack-of-all trades, master of none: Postgraduate perspectives on interdisciplinary research in Australia’ to *BMC Health Services Research*.

Please find changes we have made, in response to the reviewers comments, detailed below.

**Changes**

1) We have addressed Robyn McDermott’s comment of whether our university has a policy for encouraging interdisciplinary work, by adding this statement in our introduction (page 3):

“It is worth noting it this juncture, that many universities, ours included, do not explicitly seek to recruit or encourage interdisciplinary postgraduate study. However, researchers are encouraged to pursue interdisciplinary research when applying for grant funding and there is an increased investment into interdisciplinary activity at broad institutional levels that has resulted in an implicit encouragement of postgraduate interdisciplinary research.”

We have also addressed this concern by including an additional section to the paper (page 10), as detailed below:
“We propose that many of these tensions can be alleviated by increased awareness and debate around the issues that postgraduate interdisciplinary students, and their supervisors, face. Through this increased awareness and debate, we hope that universities and research institutions take a leading role in acknowledging the conundrums faced when bridging two or more disciplines. This can be achieved by formalizing university policies and practices that deal specifically with the issues raised in this paper.”

2) Robyn McDermott advised that we explore specific discipline frameworks and the contestation that arises between such frameworks.

We contend that whilst this is a useful suggestion, and certainly warrants investigation, this is not within the scope of this paper. We wish to provide commentary on this area in-order to begin the process of analysing interdisciplinary research from a student perspective. We believe that detailing such discipline specific debates would narrow both the focus and the audience of the paper.

In response to Robyn McDermott’s comment, we have included the following paragraph in the introduction (page 4) to clarify the scope and purpose of the paper:

“From the outset we want to provide clarification about what the focus of this paper is and is not. With increased interdisciplinary activity at all levels, the epistemological differences and difficulties of conducting such research have come under academic scrutiny. Although we acknowledge that this is a concern for interdisciplinary students such as ourselves, this is not a paper on epistemological disparities. The debates and concerns that have been raised in this area have tended to focus somewhat narrowly on the differences between specific disciplines [10-12]. There has been little analysis of the special institutional and intellectual demands of interdisciplinarity in health research, and the especial skills and resources required to meet them [13]. In particular, postgraduate student perspectives have almost entirely been absent from that discussion which has occurred. In this paper we wish to appeal to researchers attempting to shape the future of interdisciplinary research, rather than focusing on those who appreciate specific disciplinary frameworks and epistemological conundrums. The purpose of this paper is to create debate and provide inspiration for interdisciplinary postgraduate
students to critically reflect on the administrative and intellectual challenges they face. We therefore envisage that this is a starting point of a much broader conversation about how to provide adequate support for students who are engaged in interdisciplinary research.”

3) We have included five additional references in the paper to support our changes. These include:


We trust that the changes we have made to our paper address the concerns of the second reviewer, Robyn McDermott, and that our paper will be accepted for publication, as per the recommendation of the first reviewer, Michael Traynor.

We look forward to hearing from you in the very near future.

Yours Sincerely

Gemma Carey & James Smith