

Concurrent Session I
Wednesday 2 September
10.15am – 11.05am



Session 5

What Do Academics Think of Professional Staff and What Should We Do About It?

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Stephen Gray is the Centre Manager of the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Climate System Science (ARCCSS). ARCCSS is a multi-institutional research centre that spans five Australian universities and a suite of national and international partner organisations. Stephen is based at the Centre's lead node, UNSW. Stephen has held the role of Centre Manager since the Centre's inception in 2011.

Prior to this role, Stephen worked since 2006 in a number of administrative and executive support roles at UNSW with a focus on research administration and management.

Stephen is an Associate Fellow of the Association of Tertiary Education Management.

In 2014 Stephen graduated with a Master of Tertiary Education Management from the University of Melbourne's LH Martin Institute. His particular area of interest is in the day to day working relationships between academic and university professional staff.

Professional staff comprise just over half of the workforce of Australian universities. This study, conducted as part of the LH Martin Institute's Master of Tertiary Education Management program, investigated the attitudes of a sample of academics towards professional staff; both to staff at the local, departmental level and to those in centralised or shared services units.

Academics from five universities were surveyed and interviewed to collect data to begin to answer the question "what do academics think of professional staff?" Are professional staff seen as allies or quite the opposite? Is there a difference in views of locally situated professional staff versus those in central units? Is the relationship healthy or is it on the brink of divorce?

From the literature on professional staff five themes emerged that are historically representative of the relationship between academics and professional staff. Those themes, which are elucidated in the presentation, are: *the professional other; managerialism; an expensive bureaucracy; complementary agendas; and the third space and beyond.*

The findings of the surveys and interviews based on a framework of the preceding five themes will be presented along with a discussion of what the findings mean in practice for the academic and professional staff working relationship.

The session will conclude with an opportunity for discussion and reflection among members of the audience based on their own experiences of the professional/academic working relationship. The aim of the session is for attendees to gain a greater depth of understanding of the complementarities (and tensions) between the work of professional and academic staff. More importantly, this understanding should help tertiary education professionals to consider ways that the skills of both staff cohorts can come together to progress the strategic ambitions of their departments or institutions.