

# Otago Daily Times

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## Potential undermined by procrastination

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Writers' two greatest vices, procrastination and perfectionism, were highlighted by award-winning educator Hugh Kearns during two motivational workshops for University of Otago postgraduate students yesterday.

Mr Kearns (51), an Irish-born lecturer at Flinders University, in Adelaide, ran the workshops, on "the seven secrets of highly successful research students" and how to "turbocharge your writing", as part of Otago University's annual Graduate Research Month.

The month's activities aim to support postgraduate students and to celebrate their achievements.

Gales of slightly nervous laughter from many of more than 150 postgraduate students attending the afternoon session showed Mr Kearns was close to the mark when he described how a research student's day could be wasted by a series of seemingly plausible avoidance manoeuvres.

A day initially dedicated to a major writing mission often started with a "nice, long shower" and a lingering breakfast, and was further subtly undermined by many other activities, including reordering paper work and filing systems, being distracted by masses of emails, and hunting tangential research references.

Research students often found forcing themselves to write was by far their most difficult problem, rather than undertaking their research or dealing with other challenges, he said.

Writers could make life much easier by breaking up their big writing goals into groups of small but achievable tasks.

These could be completed in relatively short blocks of time, and could be followed by small rewards, such as having a cup of coffee, he said.

University postgraduate researchers were high-achieving people, but many also struggled against perfectionism.

Overemphasising the highest of standards could prevent good work from being done, he said.

Dr Marsa Dodson, who is undertaking a history PhD, after gaining an Otago doctorate in

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[1] University of Otago postgraduate students yesterday applaud comments by visiting educator Hugh Kearns, of Adelaide. Photo by Peter McIntosh.

another field, said the afternoon workshop was positive and useful.

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Dunedin

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