



Seven secrets of doctoral success

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IT is 9am and emails are ready to be opened, the smell of coffee is wafting down the corridor and it is too early to start work on the PhD.

According to Flinders University staff development and training unit head Hugh Kearns and his colleague Maria Gardiner, distractions and procrastination are just two reasons students struggle to complete their PhDs on time.

During the past 15 years the pair has studied why students battle with perfectionism, over-commit, self-sabotage and lose motivation and focus while writing a PhD. "It comes down to a feeling of: 'Am I good enough to do this?'" Mr Kearns told the *HES*.

"We'll have a group of probably 10 confident PhD students and at the end of probably an hour and a half they're all saying: 'I don't think I'm good enough to do this.'"

"Those negative feelings lead to procrastination and other feelings."

Ms Gardiner said negative feelings often

led to delays in the completion of PhDs, wasted time, missed deadlines and people abandoning their work.

But she said the problem did not lie in students not being intelligent enough to complete their work.

"It's not about people who are stuck and miserable who are not able to finish their PhD, it's about achieving elite results and coming up with good results in the end."

Ms Gardiner said most PhD candidates struggled, not just the stereotypical perennial students.

"It's not necessarily the long haired, lazy PhD students, it's more that they're being allowed to run feral with patterns of work they can't understand," she said.

PhD candidate Tim Moore was a prime candidate for Ms Gardiner and Mr Kearns' workshops on overcoming self-sabotaging thoughts and actions.

"I was the coffee shop's No.1 customer," Mr Moore said. "I was the sort of person who sat around talking and not doing much."

But after learning he did not have to be perfect and his work was unlikely to be

worthy of winning a Nobel prize, Mr Moore finished his PhD on schedule.

"It helped me to understand it wasn't the most important thing in the world ... and recognition that it didn't have to be perfect," he said.

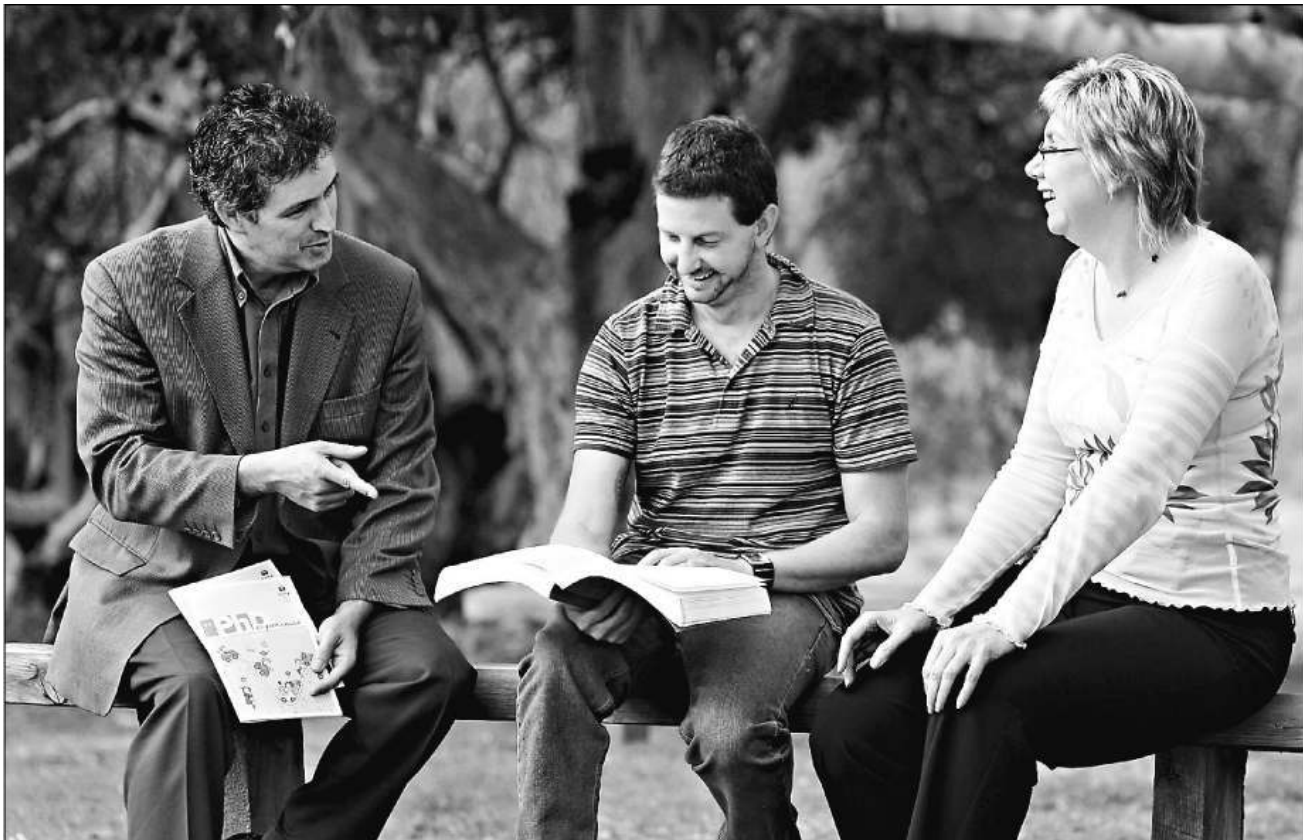
Ms Gardiner and Mr Kearns offer free workshops and seminars to Flinders University PhD students, attracting hundreds of students to "the seven secrets of highly successful PhD students" seminar.

The sessions have led to the production of two books that will be distributed to all Australian universities.

The seven secrets — revealed in detail in the books — are maintaining a close relationship with a supervisor, writing, showing work and meeting short-term deadlines, being realistic on the quality of the PhD, saying no to distractions, keeping office hours, seeking help when needed and confidence that "you can do it".

"To undertake a PhD you need 10 per cent intelligence and 90 per cent persistence," Mr Kearns said.

"You've got the intelligence to do it but it's whether you can cope with what life throws at you at the same time."



Overcoming procrastination: Hugh Kearns, left, and seminar partner Maria Gardiner, right, coach Flinders University PhD student Tim Moore

Picture: Brett Hartwig