Guidelines for Undertaking a Dissertation in Bachelor Honours and Masters Degree Programs

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Description

The University requires students to undertake a dissertation component or equivalent outcome in the visual and performing arts in all Bachelor Honours programs, which are offered in the form of an additional full-time year of study following the completion of a Bachelor degree program, and in its Masters degree (Extended and Coursework) programs.

These guidelines set out the University's expectations of students undertaking research at Bachelor Honours and Masters (Extended and Coursework) levels and identifies the role of supervisors in supporting students undertaking such research. These guidelines may be adapted by each Group of the University to meet the expected outcomes of a research project within its defined disciplines.

Related documents

Bachelor Honours Degree (AQF level 8) Policy
Postgraduate Qualifications (AQF Level 8 & 9) Policy
Student Academic Misconduct Policy
Institutional Framework for Promoting Academic Integrity Among Students
Academic Misconduct Policy - Higher Degree Research Candidates
Conflict of Interest Policy
Bachelor Honours and Masters Degree (Extended and Coursework) Programs – Lodgement of a Dissertation after Examination Form

1. THE DISSERTATION

These Guidelines apply in Honours programs involving an additional year of study following the completion of a Bachelor program, and in Masters degree (Extended and Coursework) programs, where students are required to undertake a research-based project, which is normally a minimum of 30CP of supervised independent research leading to a dissertation or equivalent outcome in the visual and performing arts.

The dissertation or its equivalent undertaken within the Honours or Masters (Extended and Coursework) program is normally the first piece of extended research and writing undertaken by students during their university studies. It is the established means of demonstrating a capacity for future independent research at Masters by research and doctoral levels. As such, the dissertation or
Its equivalent in the visual and performing arts, is an important part of training towards higher degree research studies, because it allows students to begin to locate themselves in their particular research culture or tradition.

Undertaking supervised research leading to a dissertation can be divided into five steps:

i. Finding a supervisor and agreeing on a topic;
ii. Submitting a proposal and getting approval to proceed;
iii. Carrying out the practical work of the research;
iv. Analysing the results; and
v. Writing up the research as a dissertation for submission, or producing the final body of work/performance.

2. **CHOOSING A DISSERTATION TOPIC**

In choosing a dissertation or practical topic, the following questions should be considered:

- Is there a recognised need for research in the area?
- Is the research achievable within the allocated time?
- Does the topic match the student's capabilities and interests?
- Is the research area open to further professional development?
- Are research facilities and/or data available to the student to undertake all necessary research in the topic area?

3. **SELECTING A SUPERVISOR**

In selecting a supervisor, the following questions should be considered:

- Is this person well acquainted with the topic of the research?
- Does the person have an active interest in the proposed area of research?
- Is this person's working style compatible with completion of an independent piece of research in a short timeframe?
- Is this person's theoretical framework compatible with the focus of the research?
- Is the person available for the entire supervisory period?
- Is the person appropriately qualified in the relevant discipline for the purpose of supervising the dissertation?

4. **DISSERTATION OR PROJECT PROPOSAL**

If an application for admission is approved, a student will be required to produce a written proposal of the research to be carried out. This process is undertaken in consultation with the proposed supervisor. The proposal should indicate:

- the field of research;
- the research question(s) to be addressed;
- the anticipated outcome(s);
- the research method(s); and
- an indicative bibliography.
The purpose of the proposal is to protect the student from investing effort in an impractical research project. Since it takes several weeks to approve a proposal, it is absolutely critical that students begin to develop the proposal by the end of week 3.

The proposed supervisor's comments on the proposal will be submitted to the Honours Program Director or Program Director for the Masters degree (Extended and Coursework) and the candidature confirmed or the student asked to resubmit the proposal.

5. **CHANGING A DISSERTATION OR PROJECT TOPIC**

A student who wishes to make significant changes to the proposed topic should first discuss them with the supervisor and then apply in writing to the relevant Honours Program Director or Program Director for the Masters degree (Extended and Coursework) for permission. The relevant Program Director will advise the student in writing that the request for the proposed change to the dissertation topic has been approved or not.

6. **SUPERVISION**

A supervisory relationship is a qualitatively different form of teaching and learning. At the Honours and Masters degree (Extended and Coursework) level it is assumed that:

- the student will generate much of the direction for the dissertation;
- the student will be able to work independently for most of the time.

The relationship between the student and supervisor by its very nature is relatively unstructured. It is meant to meet the diverse needs of students and to be able to deal with the range of individual issues which arise at any time during the production of the research work.

The Honours dissertation is normally undertaken at the University. Honours students will have one supervisor, however an additional supervisor may be appointed where appropriate. For research-based projects within the Masters degree (Extended and Coursework) where the research component is equal to or greater than 30CP, the supervision context is individually based.

The supervisor of Honours dissertations and research-based projects within the Masters degree (Extended and Coursework) is to be appropriately qualified in the relevant discipline for the purpose of supervising the dissertation, normally involved in research, and a member of the Group and/or School that hosts the degree program in which the student is enrolled.

The relationship between the student and supervisor can be enhanced by:

6.1 **Supervisor's Responsibilities**

- recognising that the supervisor has a responsibility to ensure the research training is conducted in an effective manner;
- establishing regular meeting times, identifying a timetable for completion of the various elements of the research proposal, and specifying when written work is to be completed so that progress can be monitored;
- establishing a clear relationship between all parties if there are two supervisors;
- providing adequate feedback, both in terms of the timing and comments;
- providing guidance as to the delineation of a clear topic, methods to use for the research, the relevant body of literature to consult and the timing of the research and writing aspects of the project; and
- keeping notes of advice given at meetings.

6.2 **Student's Responsibilities**

- submitting draft work in a readable form, and indicating briefly where the piece of work fits into the plan of the dissertation as a whole;
- attending meetings with a set of clear questions to be answered; and
• keeping notes of advice given at meetings.

In the majority of cases, it is expected that students and their supervisor(s) will be able to establish and maintain a close consultative relationship. It is recognised, however, that there may be occasions when differences of a personal or professional nature may militate against the development of a productive working relationship. Should problems of this nature arise, students should immediately bring this to the attention of the relevant Program Director and ask him/her to consider appointing an alternative supervisor.

7. WRITING THE DISSERTATION

A dissertation should be a coherent exposition of a research study and follow an ordered sequence in which the research objectives, relationship to other scholarly work, methodology and strategies employed, and the results obtained are identified, analysed and evaluated. The main text should include a discussion of the conclusions or results. The dissertation may take any of a number of forms, depending on the field, e.g., a report, an argument, or a critique. The dissertation or body of studio work or performance will be assessed by experts in the field who will have an expectation that the dissertation meet the commonly accepted standards for a piece of academic research in their field. It is expected that any written component will be in English.

The following strategies may be employed in the work leading to the submission of a dissertation or its equivalent:

• definition or location of a problem, topic or theme;
• identification of a theoretical framework and/or methodology;
• literature review, to establish the relationship of the problem, topic or theme to the scholarly context;
• accumulation of relevant data or creative work;
• analysis of information or material obtained;
• arrival at conclusions in light of material analysed; and
• writing of the dissertation or production of studio/performance work.

Students may benefit from giving early consideration, in consultation with their supervisor, to matters such as the development and presentation of their material. The task of writing the dissertation or producing the practical work is part of the research process and is often best undertaken progressively.

8. LENGTH OF THE DISSERTATION

A dissertation or its equivalent is intended, among other things, to demonstrate the student’s capacity to report on the research in a clear and succinct manner. It is recognised that the extent of a dissertation or project may vary according to the topic and the discipline. Students are advised to consult their supervisor regarding appropriate word limits or expectations concerning the amount of work to be produced in their disciplines.

9. SUBMISSION DATE

The due date for submission of the dissertation is set out in the Bachelor Honours Degree (AQF Level 8) Policy.

The Honours Program Director or Program Director for the Masters degree (Extended and Coursework) may approve an extension of time to submit the dissertation no greater than 20 working days on the grounds of illness, accident, disability, bereavement or other compassionate circumstances. In granting the extension, the Honours Program Director is to ensure the length of the extension is commensurate with the time the student was unable to work on their dissertation and the extension does not unduly advantage the student over those who submitted in accordance with the University’s deadline.
10. DISSERTATION PREPARATION AND FORMAT

Responsibility for the format of the dissertation or project rests with the student after consultation with the supervisor. A major consideration in the presentation of the work is the ease with which an examiner can undertake the task of examination.

It is recommended that a written dissertation be prepared as follows:

- Printed on good quality International A4 (297mm x 210mm) bond paper on one side of the page only;
- The font size should be at least 10 point;
- The lines of the text should be in 1.5 or 2 line spacing;
- Each page should have a left-hand margin of at least 4cm;
- Top, bottom and right-hand margins should be at least 2cm;
- The pages should be numbered sequentially; and
- Depending on the referencing system used, references/footnotes should be consistent and appear either in the body of the text, at the bottom of each page, or at the end of each chapter.

The supervisor within a defined discipline will determine the format and preparation required for a visual or performing arts product.

The front page of the written dissertation should contain the following information:

- the full title of the dissertation;
- the full name and academic qualification of the student;
- the name of the Group in which the program was undertaken, and the name of the University;
- the name of the degree for which the dissertation is submitted including the words: “Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of”; and
- the date (month and year) of submission of the dissertation.

The contents of the written dissertation normally should take the following order:

- a short synopsis of approximately 700 words;
- a table of contents, a list of all diagrams and illustrations and a list of supplementary material if any;
- a © copyright statement and optional open licence information;
- a statement acknowledging the extent and nature of any assistance received in the pursuit of the research and preparation of the dissertation;
- a signed statement of originality including the words: “This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the dissertation contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the dissertation itself.”;
- the main text;
- appendices (including a confidential appendix where appropriate);
- the bibliography/references; and
- supplementary material separate from the bound dissertation and submitted as part, or in support, of the dissertation such as computer print-outs, DVDs, models, music scores, recordings, etc.

Small diagrams and tables should be incorporated into the text. For the purposes of preparing the hard copy (printed), which will be forwarded to the examiners, full page diagrams should be inserted on the page immediately facing the text that describes the diagrams.
11. USE OF COPYRIGHTABLE MATERIALS

Responsibility for seeking permission to use third party or copyrightable materials, such as images, diagrams, maps, is the responsibility of the student. Copyright is a set of legal rights that apply to any creative work. If the dissertation contains copyrightable material, the student must obtain written permission from the rights holder, which is usually the publisher, to allow the copyrightable material to be included in the digital copy of the dissertation, which will be publicly available.

When the student submits the final, revised version of the dissertation, the student is required to sign a statement as part of the Lodgement of Honours/Masters Degree (Extended and Coursework) Dissertation after Examination Form in which the student certifies that he or she has obtained written permission from the owner(s) of each copyright matter, including third party copyrighted matter which is included in the research. In signing this form, students also certify that they have permission from the publisher(s) to allow images in the digital copy to be available on the web.

12. REFERENCING AND BIBLIOGRAPHIC DETAILS

Other researchers upon whose work or publications the dissertation has drawn must be acknowledged. Adequate documentation of sources is expected and relied upon by the dissertation examiners who may wish to consult sources quoted in a dissertation. Failure to adequately document sources could lead to a concern that a breach of academic integrity has occurred. Only recognised referencing styles should be employed. Students should consult with their supervisors on the most appropriate form of referencing for the field in which they are working.

All third party materials mentioned in the body of the dissertation must appear in the bibliography/references. The form in which a bibliography is presented may vary depending on the field of research. Supervisors can advise on what is appropriate for the field of research.

Each student is required to sign an academic integrity declaration on every assessment item they submit, including dissertations in Honours and Masters (Extended and Coursework) programs. The University has a standard form of words for the declaration, and every school/department and program is required to use it.

The University supports the institutional use of ‘text matching’ software to deter students from academic misconduct by reducing the opportunities for misconduct. The software is available for use by students and supervisors as an educational tool in the production of the dissertation and to assist academic staff in the detection of breaches of academic integrity.

13. THE USE OF CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

It is recognised that there will be instances when a dissertation will contain confidential information which cannot be made freely accessible. Wherever possible, confidential information should be used as supplementary material rather than as the principal basis for the dissertation. If practicable, confidential material should form a separate confidential appendix. Supervisors can advise on what is appropriate to include in a confidential appendix.

14. DISSERTATION SUBMISSION

Students are required to submit physical copies of their dissertation and any accompanying supporting materials for examination.

In preparing the contents of the written dissertation, diagrams exceeding A4 size should be placed after the main body of the dissertation and bound in such a manner that they may be opened out and read when the dissertation is closed. This entails a left-hand margin of at least 2cm.

Supplementary material, such as DVDs, which cannot be bound together with the dissertation, should be placed in a suitable storage container which can be accessed readily by the examiner(s).
15. COPYING AND BINDING

Two copies (both spiral bound) of the dissertation are to be submitted to the School or Group that hosts the Honours or Masters degree (Extended and Coursework) in which the student is enrolled by the due date. Copying and binding of the dissertation are the student's responsibility. It is the student's responsibility to allow sufficient time before the submission deadline of week 13 for copying and binding to occur and to keep a copy in case of accidental loss. The bound copies are forwarded to examiners for marking by the School or Group. Where possible, examination copies of the dissertation will be returned to the student.

16. DIGITAL SUBMISSION OF DISSERTATION AND RELATED MATERIALS

When the student has completed any changes to the dissertation as recommended by the examiners and the Dean (Learning and Teaching) is satisfied that the student has completed all academic requirements for the specific postgraduate award in the case of Masters degree (Extended and Coursework) or accepts the recommendation of the Honours Program Director for the Honours classification, the student is to submit a digital copy of the dissertation and any supporting materials to the School that hosts the Honours or Masters degree (Extended and Coursework) in which the student is enrolled. The School is responsible for forwarding the digital copies to Information Services – eResearch Services and Scholarly Application Development.

17. SEMINAR PRESENTATION

A requirement of a course of supervised research leading to the completion of a dissertation or project in some Honours or Masters degree (Extended and Coursework) programs may be the presentation of the major findings of the research project in a seminar format. The seminar is used as a vive voce to check the student's conceptual understanding of the findings of the piece of supervised research that they have independently undertaken. It is usual for the examiners of the dissertation to also assess the seminar presentation as one of the elements contributing to the mark they assign to the dissertation.

18. CRITERIA BY WHICH EXAMINERS WILL BE ASKED TO EVALUATE THE DISSERTATION OR EQUIVALENT PROJECT

Important requirements that form the basis for examiners' assessments are:

- a contribution to knowledge through independent research;
- evidence of the exercise of scholarly judgment;
- clear presentation - including definition of research questions, organisation of argument, clarity in terms of writing style and illustrative materials;
- execution of research;
- selection of appropriate techniques and justification of methodology;
- ability to locate, use and synthesise published literature and source materials;
- ability to analyse data and to present logical conclusions; and
- ability to present in a seminar format the findings of the research.
19. ACCESS TO DISSERTATIONS AFTER EXAMINATION

It is the University's expectation that most dissertations accepted for the award of a degree will be immediately available for consultation by staff, students and other bona fide inquirers. By lodging a digital copy of the dissertation in the University’s Information Services, a student consents to its free access by the public for private study and research.

It is the responsibility of the student to complete the Lodgement of Honours/Masters (Extended and Coursework) Dissertation after Examination Form and submit this form with the final digital copy of their dissertation to the School or Group that host the Honours or Masters (Extended and Coursework) program in which the student is enrolled. It is the responsibility of the School or Group Office to forward the final digital copy of the dissertation and the completed form to INS.

In completing the Lodgement of Honours/Masters (Extended and Coursework) Dissertation after Examination Form a student may request approval to restrict access to and/or embargo the copies of the dissertation retained by the University after the degree is awarded, on the following grounds:

- where the dissertation contains confidential or sensitive material;
- where the student intends to publish from the dissertation;
- where the student is seeking to register a patent.

The embargo period normally granted will be twelve months.