

Master's Thesis Work

Policy and Guidelines

Category:	Academic
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Introduction:

Guidelines for Master's thesis work have been developed to assist students, supervisors, and Heads of Department/School (HOD/HOS)* in the efficient completion of a Master's thesis and to help prevent difficulties and disputes, or assist in their resolution should they arise.

These guidelines apply generally to Master's thesis students but since the regulations vary substantially among the wide range of Master's degrees, it is important that these guidelines are read alongside the appropriate degree regulations in the *Calendar* and alongside specific guidelines prepared by individual departments. In any situation where the guidelines seem inconsistent with the relevant Master's regulations, the regulations prevail. The Code of Practice for Heads of Department/School, Supervisors, and Students, with respect to *Research Work for a Master's or PhD Thesis*, available at the Postgraduate Studies website <http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/postgrad/>, should also be referred to. These documents are also available in the [UC Policy Library](#).

**The HOD/S may delegate to a programme director or other suitable person, and in the case of a student enrolled in a Research Centre, the Director of the Centre should act as HOD/HOS. It is noted that in the College of Education, thesis student matters are coordinated through the Associate Dean of Postgraduate Studies in Education in the College Office. Students and supervisors in the College of Education should make themselves aware of these College-specific processes, and especially where the role of the HoS as specified in this document is actually undertaken by the Associate Dean in the College of Education. Relevant information can be obtained from the College of Education.*

Definitions:

Senior Supervisor - The supervisor who takes the major responsibility for the provision of academic advice to the candidate and acts as the coordinator of the supervisory team. The senior supervisor also takes on the administrative responsibilities on behalf of the supervisory team (e.g., completing progress report forms).

Co-Supervisor - A supervisor who takes a major responsibility for provision of academic advice to the candidate.

Associate Supervisor - A supervisor who provides additional academic advice to the candidate but provides less input than the senior supervisor or co-supervisor.

External Examiner - An examiner who is external to the University and to the supervisory team.

Internal Examiner - An examiner who is usually an academic staff member of the University but not be a member of the supervisory team.

Guidelines:

1. Admission

- 1.1 Master's thesis work commonly follows a period of course work which is also part of the Master's degree. The prerequisites for such course work are given in the Calendar. In other cases, the Master's degree may be gained by thesis alone, typically if the candidate already possesses a Bachelor's degree with Honours. It is essential that the Calendar be consulted for detailed information on the requirements for entry to Master's thesis work as they vary from Faculty to Faculty and subject to subject.
- 1.2 Admission to thesis study may depend on the grades obtained by the candidate in his or her prior study. Intending candidates should ascertain from the Department/School what standard of performance is required for admission.
- 1.3 The Department/School and each prospective candidate should discuss, in general terms, possible research projects before the student enrolls for Master's thesis work. In the case of a student enrolling for a Master's degree that comprises both coursework and a thesis, preliminary discussion of possible areas of research should occur prior to initial enrolment. This is to ensure that suitable supervision and resources to support the study can be provided.
- 1.4 The student should be given the Departmental/School guide to policies and procedures relating to Master's thesis work. Included with that material should be a copy of this document. This document is also available from the Postgraduate Studies website <http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/postgrad/>.

2. Nature of Master's thesis work

- 2.1 Master's thesis work involves a period of individual scholarship and research, usually uninterrupted by other studies, though concurrent enrolment in required coursework is often the case for the ME and is possible for the MSc. Typically a thesis is completed within one or two years of full-time study, or the part-time equivalent, but the time limits and restrictions vary from subject to subject. The Calendar must be consulted for definitive information. Notwithstanding the time limits available for completion of a thesis, the thesis should comprise a body of work which could, in the given discipline, be completed in the equivalent of one full calendar year of full-time study (i.e., 1 EFT).
- 2.2 A Master's thesis is expected to demonstrate the student's ability to undertake independent research under guidance, using the established methods of research and analysis appropriate to the particular discipline or subject area.

3. Research Proposal

- 3.1 A student enrolled to do a Master's thesis may in some cases adopt a research proposal already formulated by the Department/School. In other cases, the student works under the guidance of an academic staff member (a potential supervisor) to develop a research proposal. If the student is doing course work preparatory to a Master's thesis, a tentative research plan may be developed during that time. Normally it would be expected that a provisional research proposal be submitted to the Department/School postgraduate research committee, or coordinator of postgraduate research, for consideration and discussion. The final form of the research proposal should be presented in sufficient detail for the potential Senior Supervisor and HOD/S to be able to comment on its suitability for Master's thesis work and the availability of resources to support it. It should include a realistic planned timetable including deadlines to be met, a list of objectives, resources required (including technical assistance), description of methods to be used, and it should provide details of any special supervisory arrangements (for example, provision of alternative supervision in the case of the Senior Supervisor taking study leave). There should be statements about who has been consulted about the project, including general staff whose assistance may be required in the course of the work.
- 3.2 Once the proposal has been approved within the Department/School, it must be submitted to the appropriate College Office for registration and approval by the Faculty Dean. This must be done within two months from the date of enrolment for thesis work for full-time students, or four months for part-time students and full-time students enrolled concurrently for thesis and coursework. The proposal must be accompanied by the standard form "Application for Approval of Registration of Master's Research Proposal", available from the Postgraduate Studies website <http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/postgrad/>.
- 3.3 Research proposals involving a contract other than the "Supervision Agreement" which is part of the standard registration form will need to acknowledge the signing of the contract by Research and Innovation.
- 3.4 If the research is dependent on the approval of the University's Human Ethics Committee or Animal Ethics Committee, or any other committee or organisation, the approval should have been obtained prior to registration of the proposal whenever possible. No aspects of the research that require approval from an ethics committee shall proceed until the appropriate approval has been acquired. Whether ethical approval is needed for a given research project must be specified on the research proposal registration form.

4. Supervisors

The most common situation for Masters candidates is to have a Senior Supervisor and one Associate Supervisor but this does not preclude other arrangements being made as appropriate.

- 4.1 As part of the process of approving the research proposal, the Faculty Dean shall formally appoint a Senior Supervisor to supervise the work of the candidate. This supervisor shall normally be a member of the continuing academic staff of the University, and only exceptionally will the Senior Supervisor not be from the candidate's Department/School.
- 4.2 In addition to the Senior Supervisor, there shall be a Co-Supervisor and/or one or more Associate Supervisors and/or a supervisory committee to support the Senior Supervisor and candidate. Members of the supervisory team, other than the Senior Supervisor, may be from outside the Department/School in which the candidate is registered, and may be from another university or from outside the university system. Members of the

supervisory team will be appointed by the HOD/S in consultation with the candidate and Senior Supervisor, and their names will be recorded in the College Office. When appropriate, an EFTS split between UC departments/schools shall also be recommended.

- 4.3 All supervisors will normally have a research interest and/or methodological expertise relevant to the proposed research of the candidate. Sometimes pressure of work may mean that a candidate's first choice of Senior Supervisor will not be allocated.
- 4.4 For good reason, which may include the existence of a dispute between the candidate and a member of the supervisory team, the Faculty Dean may replace a Senior Supervisor, and the HOD/S may replace any other member of the supervisory team. If the HOD/S is the supervisor with whom the student is in dispute, the matter should be addressed by the Postgraduate Research Committee or coordinator of postgraduate research in that department/school, or if that is not possible, by the Faculty Dean who may take the matter to the Dean of Postgraduate Research.
- 4.5 In all cases, whether the thesis work is being done at the University of Canterbury or elsewhere (see below), it is the responsibility of the HOD/S and Senior Supervisor to ensure that there is a satisfactory means of communication between student and the supervisory team during the course of the thesis work. If the work is done elsewhere, the liability for meeting costs of communication should be determined in advance.

5. Place of research and study

(a) For candidates who are not enrolled extramurally

- 5.1 Thesis work will be undertaken at the University of Canterbury, unless an alternative agreement is reached between the supervisors, HoD/S and the student.
- 5.2 Periods of study and research of less than one month's duration, at places in New Zealand other than the University of Canterbury, may be approved by the HOD/S. For longer periods of study and research outside the University of Canterbury, other than field work, and any study overseas, including field work, approval must be obtained in advance from the Faculty Dean. In any case, the HOD/S and the Dean must be satisfied that the resources (financial or otherwise) necessary to support such work have been discussed and made available, either by the student, the University of Canterbury, or some third party.

(b) For candidates who are enrolled extramurally

- 5.3 With the approval of the Faculty Dean, and on the recommendation of the HOD/S, a candidate may enroll extramurally for Master's thesis work. Approval will not be granted unless the department/school can show that adequate supervision can be provided, and that the necessary resources are available or can be made available to the candidate.

6. Reports on Progress

- 6.1 Master's students doing thesis work must submit written progress reports to the HOD/S, through the Senior Supervisor, every six months (although the HOD/S or the Faculty Dean can require more frequent reporting), with the first report submitted six months after the date of registration of the research proposal.
- 6.2 The candidate's report should give (i) a summary of progress to date; (ii) an outline of the proposed programme for the next six months; and (iii) an outline of any difficulties experienced whether in respect of supervision, resources, or otherwise.
- 6.3 The HOD/HOS will submit the candidate's report, together with a report from the Senior

Supervisor on the candidate's progress, to the Faculty Dean. The Senior Supervisor's report will be on a standard form available from the Postgraduate Studies website <http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/postgrad/>. The student must see the supervisor's comments, shall also sign this report, and may add comment if he or she wishes.

- 6.4 If the report is unsatisfactory, or if progress is unsatisfactory, or if there is a dispute between student and any member of the supervisory team, the Faculty Dean, in consultation with the HOD/S and/or the Senior Supervisor, if appropriate, will take appropriate action. This may include discussing with the HOD/S and/or the Senior Supervisor ways in which progress may be improved, it may include the issuing of a formal warning to the student if progress is unsatisfactory, and, in the case of a dispute, it may include an attempt at resolution of the dispute.
- 6.5 If at any time the student is dissatisfied with the supervision provided or the resources available or with any other matter affecting his or her progress, the student should report the matter to the HOD/S or the appropriate person or committee in the department/school. If the student is still dissatisfied, he or she may take the matter to the Faculty Dean. The candidate may seek the advice of the Academic Manager in the College Office, the Student Advocate at UCSA, or the Dean of Postgraduate Research before reporting the matter to the Faculty Dean.

7. Transfer from Master's to PhD

- 7.1 A candidate doing thesis work for a Master's degree may seek the approval of the Dean of Postgraduate Research to transfer to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (see PhD regulation 3(d)). In some cases, a Department/School may invite a student to seek such approval. If a Master's candidate transfers to PhD studies, the date of enrolment will be backdated to the date at which the Master's thesis or project work was commenced. Relevant forms can be found on the Postgraduate Studies website <http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/postgrad/>

8. Submission of thesis

- 8.1 The student should consult the Library's guide to the production of theses (<http://library.canterbury.ac.nz/collserv/thesis.shtml>). When the writing of the thesis is completed, the student must submit two copies of the thesis to the Registry.
- 8.2 Candidates should ensure that sufficient extra copies of the thesis are prepared to provide for those that might be required by the Department/School, examiners, and any sponsor of the work.
- 8.3 The thesis should normally be soft (not ring) bound at its initial submission. The University Library will hardbind one copy of the thesis after any revisions requested by the examiners have been completed, and after the award of the degree has been recommended. A fee to cover the cost of hardbinding must be paid in the Registry, and examination of the thesis will not proceed before the fee has been paid.
- 8.4 The thesis will not be sent out for examination until the candidate has obtained a fees clearance form from Student Administration in Registry.
- 8.5 Once the award of the degree has been recommended, it is the candidate's responsibility to lodge a final version of the thesis ready for hardbinding and an electronic (.pdf) version with the University Library. A candidate is unable to graduate until the thesis has been lodged in the University Library.
- 8.6 Candidates should make themselves familiar with the University's "Thesis Availability

Policy” in the [Policy Library](#) website, and the “Intellectual Property Guide” at the Postgraduate Studies website <http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/postgrad/>, which covers such issues as the borrowing and consultation of theses, and the possibility of imposing an embargo on the use of a thesis. The “Use of Thesis form” is to be found at <http://library.canterbury.ac.nz/thesis/deposit.shtml>.

9. Examination of a Master’s thesis

9.1 Appointment of Examiners

- a) Two examiners shall be nominated by the Senior Supervisor, considered by the Departmental/School postgraduate coordinator, and endorsed on the Masters Examiner Request form by the HOD/S, or appointed delegate, for approval by the Dean of Postgraduate Research. Nominations must be received no later than two weeks after submission of the thesis. The form is available from the Postgraduate Office or the Postgraduate Studies website <http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/postgrad/>. Careful consideration should be given to the subject of the thesis so that an external examiner with appropriate expertise is chosen.

If the Senior Supervisor has not made such nominations within the required time, the HOD/S shall nominate suitable examiners. To shorten the examining process, it is desirable that the HOD/S or delegate approach the proposed examiners informally prior to submission of the thesis to ascertain their willingness to examine. Potential examiners should be informed of the likely submission date and told that it is expected that examiners’ reports be returned within six weeks.

- b) If the HOD/S is a supervisor, a delegate should be appointed for the purposes of administering the examination, including the endorsement of examiners.
- c) Prior to the nomination of examiners, the HOD/S will inform the candidate of the names of the proposed examiners. The candidate has the right to make a case to the Dean of Postgraduate Research that a particular person not be appointed as an examiner.
- d) One examiner shall be external to the University and the supervisory team. The internal examiner will usually be a member of the academic staff of the University, but will not be the Senior Supervisor and will not normally be a member of the supervisory team. Where there is no suitable internal examiner it is possible for two external examiners to be appointed.

When forwarding the Dean of Postgraduate Research the nominations of proposed examiners, the HOD/S must comment briefly on the suitability of the proposed examiners and must also certify that there is no relationship between either examiner and any member of the supervisory team or the candidate which might reasonably be thought to impair an examiner’s ability to judge the thesis objectively.”Guidelines for the selection of thesis examiners” can be found at <http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/postgrad/phd/formsstaff.shtml> .

- e) Supervisors of the thesis and the candidate must not discuss any matters relating to the thesis with the examiners once the examiners have been appointed, until after the examination process has been completed.

- f) Where a nominated examiner is unwilling to continue to act, or fails to perform the duties of an examiner in an appropriate and timely manner, the Dean of Postgraduate Research may appoint a suitably qualified person as a replacement examiner. Before making such an appointment, the Dean of Postgraduate Research will consult the HOD/S. The Senior Supervisor will inform the candidate of the identity of the replacement examiner and the candidate will be given the opportunity to make a case to the Dean of Postgraduate Research that that person not be appointed.

9.2 Supervisors' Report

- a) The Senior Supervisor must, on behalf of the supervisory team, provide a Supervisors' Certificate, available on the Postgraduate Studies website <http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/postgrad/> on the candidate's thesis within two weeks of the date of submission.

The Supervisors' certificate should provide brief information about the working relationship between the student and the supervisory team, the role of the supervisors in the development of the research ideas and in the preparation of the thesis and some comment on the extent to which the thesis is the candidate's own work (especially in cases where the thesis work was done in close collaboration with others).

- b) The Department/School may provide the Postgraduate Office with a general statement, to be forwarded to the examiners, about its normal requirements for a Masters thesis (such as maximum length etc.) and departmental requirements and grading practices where these differ from any standard University requirements or practices.

9.3 Process of examination

- a) Once examiners have been nominated, all communications regarding the examination must be through the Postgraduate Office to ensure transparency of the examination process. If necessary the Postgraduate Office will contact the relevant Department/School or supervisor before responding to the examiners.
- b) The two examiners shall each submit an independent written report on the thesis to the Postgraduate Office, which will forward the reports to the HOD/S.
- c) Where there is no, or little, discrepancy between the grades recommended by the examiners the examiners' reports must be considered by a departmental/school postgraduate coordinator or research committee, as appropriate, and a recommendation made as to whether the degree be awarded and, if so, the mark or grade to be awarded to the thesis and whether it be awarded with Honours or Distinction. In making its recommendation, any department/school/University policies on the correspondence between grades and/or percentage points and classes of Honours should be taken in to account. Such consideration must take place within four weeks of the receipt of the examiners' reports.
The HOD/S must, within seven days, notify the Postgraduate Office of the result of the departmental recommendation regarding the thesis.
- d) If there is a discrepancy between the internal and external examiners' assessments of the thesis, the HOD/S or delegate (but not a member of the supervisory team) will be asked by the Dean of Postgraduate Research to communicate with the examiners to see whether a consensus may be reached. If deemed necessary the HOD/S or delegate may also discuss the examiners reports with members of the supervisory team. If a consensus cannot be

reached, the Dean of Postgraduate Research may appoint a suitably qualified individual, nominated by HOD/S to adjudicate. In this, the result of the thesis examination shall be determined by the adjudicator.

- e) Oral examinations are not normally held for Masters candidates. However, the examiners may recommend that the candidate attend an oral examination prior to determining the grade to be awarded to the thesis. Such a recommendation must be approved by the Dean of Postgraduate Research who will, with the recommendation of the HOD/S, appoint a suitably qualified independent person to organise and chair the oral examination. Those involved in the oral examination will be the organiser, the candidate, and one or both examiners.

The Dean of Postgraduate Research may approve the appointment of a substitute examiner for the purpose of the oral examination. The candidate may be accompanied by an observer and/or support person, but those persons cannot take an active part in the examination.

- f) The Department will give the candidate and the senior supervisor copies of the examiners' reports, with the recommended grade removed - on the thesis on completion of the examination process.

9.4 Corrections to Master's thesis

- a) The examiners may recommend that, as a condition of the award of a particular grade for the thesis, editorial corrections or amendments be made to the thesis before it is deposited in the University Library.
- b) The examiners shall not require, nor allow, substantive revision or correction of the thesis.
- c) The examiners' recommendation must state the exact nature of the corrections or amendments required.
- d) The candidate shall make the required corrections or amendments within six weeks of notification of the examiners' recommendations, unless the Dean of Postgraduate Research grants a longer period.
- e) The internal examiner shall normally be responsible for notifying the Postgraduate Office when the student has made the required corrections/amendments. Where there is no internal examiner, the Dean of Postgraduate Research may nominate a continuing member of staff of the University to certify that the required corrections have been made.
- f) The Postgraduate Office shall formally notify the candidate of the final result once this has been determined.

9.5 Deposit of thesis

- a) After a candidate has been approved for the award of the degree of Masters, he or she shall deliver two final copies to the University library, one in soft-bound or unbound form for hard binding and the other in electronic form as a pdf file. The degree will not be awarded until both copies of the thesis are deposited in the Library.

9.6 Variation

- a) The Dean of Postgraduate Research shall have the power to vary these regulations in respect of a particular candidate where special or unusual circumstances warrant it.

Policy Statement:

- [Thesis Availability Policy](#)
- [General Course and Examination Regulation L: Theses](#)
- [Intellectual Property: Policy for Staff and Students](#)
- [Notes for Master's Thesis Examiners](#)
- [Research Work for a Master's or PhD Thesis: Code of Practice for Heads of Department /School, Supervisors and Students](#)
- [Master's Research Proposal Application](#)
- [Master's Thesis Progress Report](#)

Version Control Table		
Action	Approval Body	Date Amended
Modification <i>Review date was rolled over for one more year. New replacement policy in the pipeline to be finalised possibly by the end of 2008.</i>	Chair, Academic Board	04 March 2008
Annual Review <i>Policy has been rewritten. Tracked changes available from Postgraduate Committee Secretary.</i>	Chair, Academic Board	31 May 2010
Annual Review <i>Amendments made</i>	Chair, Academic Board	02 March 2012

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