

Master's Thesis Work Policy and Guidelines

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Introduction

Guidelines for Master's thesis work have been developed to assist students, supervisors, and Heads of Department/School (HOD/S)* in the efficient completion of a Master's thesis, to help to prevent difficulties and disputes, and to assist in the resolution of disputes and problems 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 \(University Regulations website\)](#) and specific guidelines prepared by individual departments. In any situation where these guidelines seem inconsistent with the relevant Master's regulations, the regulations prevail. The [Research Work for a Masters or PhD Thesis Code of Practice \(PDF, 279KB\)](#) should also be referred to.

**The HOD/S (which also includes Directors of Research Centres) may delegate responsibility for management of a Master's programme to a Programme Director or other suitable person. 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, especially where the role of the HOD/S (as specified in this document) is actually undertaken by the Associate Dean. Relevant information can be obtained from the College of Education.*

Definitions

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

Co-Supervisor – a supervisor who takes substantial responsibility for provision of academic advice to the candidate, under the coordination of the Senior 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 is not usually a member of the supervisory team.

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

Guidelines

1. Admission

- 1.1 Master's thesis work commonly follows a period of course work that 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 when the candidate already possesses a Bachelor's degree with Honours. It is essential that the [Calendar \(University Regulations website\)](#) be consulted for detailed information on the requirements for entry to Master's thesis work since they vary from College to College and from 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 A prospective candidate should discuss, in general terms, with members of the department/school possible research projects before enrolling 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 to ensure that suitable supervision and resources can be provided to support the study.
- 1.4 Prospective students should be given the departmental/school guide to policies and procedures relating to Master's thesis work. Included with that material should be a link to the current version of this document via the [UC Policy Library \(University UC Policy Library website\)](#).

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 coursework and thesis 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 its completion, a 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 EFTS).

- 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 within 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 the time the coursework is being completed. Normally a provisional research proposal would be submitted to the department/school postgraduate research committee, or postgraduate coordinator, for consideration, discussion and feedback. 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 the research work. It should include a realistic planned timetable including deadlines, a list of objectives, resources required (including technical assistance), and description of methods to be used. 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 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 relevant College.
- 3.3 Where a research proposal involves a contract other than the "Supervision Agreement" (which is part of the standard registration form) the additional contract must be signed by [Research & Innovation \(University Research & Innovation website\)](#).
- 3.4 If the research is dependent on the approval of the University's [Human Ethics Committees \(University Human Ethics website\)](#) or Animal Ethics Committee, or any other committee or organisation, the approval should be obtained prior to

registration of the proposal (whenever possible). No aspects of the research that require approval from an ethics committee will proceed until 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 Master's 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 Dean will formally appoint a Senior Supervisor to supervise the work of the candidate. The Senior Supervisor will normally be a member of the continuing academic staff of the University, and (apart from in exceptional cases) a member of the department/school in which the candidate is registered. Sometimes pressure of work may mean that a candidate's first choice of Senior Supervisor will not be allocated.
- 4.2 The candidate and Senior Supervisor will be supported by a Co-Supervisor and/or one or more Associate Supervisors and/or a supervisory committee, appointed by the HOD/S in consultation with the candidate and Senior Supervisor. 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. The names of the members of the supervisory team will be recorded in the College Office. When appropriate, an EFTS split between departments/schools at the University will be recommended.
- 4.3 All supervisors will normally have a research interest and/or methodological expertise relevant to the proposed research of the candidate.
- 4.4 For good reason, which may include the existence of a dispute between the candidate and a member of the supervisory team, the 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 Dean who may take the matter to the Dean of Postgraduate Research.
- 4.5 Whether the thesis work is being done at the University 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 Approval for periods of study and research, including field work, at places in New Zealand other than the University of Canterbury or overseas, must be gained in advance as detailed below:
- For periods of less than one month approval must be obtained from the HOD/S.
 - For periods greater than one month approval must be obtained from the Dean.

In all cases, 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, or some third party.

(b) For candidates who are enrolled extramurally

- 5.3 With the approval of the 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 undertaking thesis work must submit written progress reports to the HOD/S, through the Senior Supervisor, every six months (although the HOD/S or the Dean can require more frequent reporting), with the first report submitted six months after the date of registration of the research proposal. Candidates will be advised of specific requirements and location of relevant forms.
- 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 on the candidate's progress from the Senior Supervisor, to the Dean. The student must see the supervisor comments, shall sign the report and may add comment.
- 6.4 If the report is deemed unsatisfactory, or if progress is reportedly unsatisfactory,

or if there is a dispute between student and any member of the supervisory team, the Dean, in consultation with the HOD/S and/or the Senior Supervisor, if appropriate, will take suitable 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 Dean. The candidate may seek the advice of the Academic Manager in the College Office, the Student Advocate at the University of Canterbury Students' Association (UCSA), or the Dean of Postgraduate Research before reporting the matter to the Dean of their College.

7. Transfer from Master's to PhD

- 7.1 A candidate undertaking 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 \(University Postgraduate Studies website\)](#) can be found on the Postgraduate Studies website.

8. Submission of thesis

- 8.1 The student should consult the Library's [Thesis Guide \(University Library website\)](#). When thesis writing has been completed, the student must submit an electronic (PDF) version of the thesis to the Postgraduate Office for examination.

Note: A student may request to submit a hard-copy of the thesis for examination rather than a PDF version if the format of the thesis requires such.

- 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, and any sponsor of the work.
- 8.3 The thesis will not be sent out for examination until the candidate has obtained a fees clearance form from [Student Services and Communications \(University Student Services and Communications website\)](#).
- 8.4 Once the award of the degree has been recommended, it is the candidate's responsibility to lodge an electronic copy of the final version of the thesis with the University Library. A candidate is unable to graduate until the thesis has been lodged in the University Library.

- 8.5 Candidates should make themselves familiar with the [Thesis Availability Policy \(PDF, 128KB\)](#), and the [Intellectual Property Policy \(PDF, 418KB\)](#). These policies relate to issues such as the borrowing and consultation of theses, and the possibility of imposing an embargo on the dissemination and use of a thesis. Refer to the [Restrictions on the use of your thesis \(University Library website\)](#) page for further information.

9. Examination of a Master's thesis

9.1 Appointment of Examiners

- a) Two examiners will be nominated by the Senior Supervisor, considered by the Departmental/School postgraduate coordinator, and endorsed on the Master's 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](#). 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 does not nominate examiners within the required time, the HOD/S will be requested to 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 the thesis. Potential examiners should be informed of the likely submission date and told that it is expected that examiners' reports be returned within six weeks of their receipt of the thesis.

- b) If the HOD/S is a supervisor, a delegate should be appointed from within the Department/School 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) The external examiner will 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 should 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 each examiner and must also certify that there is no relationship between either examiner and any member of the supervisory team or the candidate that might reasonably be thought to impair an examiner's ability to judge the thesis objectively.

- e) In the period between the examiners' appointment and completion of the examination process the candidate and members of the supervisory team must not discuss with the examiners any matters relating to the thesis.
- f) Where a nominated examiner is unwilling to continue to act in such a role, 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) Within two weeks after the date of thesis submission the Senior Supervisor must, on behalf of the supervisory team, provide a [Supervisors' Certificate \(University Postgraduate Studies website\)](#). The Supervisors' Certificate is sent with the thesis to the examiners.

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) Any additional guidelines from a given department/school outlining specific requirements for a Master's thesis in that discipline must be provided to the Postgraduate Office and these will be sent to the examiners along with the University guidelines.

9.3 Process of examination

- a) Once examiners have been nominated, all communications regarding the examination must be through the Postgraduate Office to ensure the integrity and transparency of the examination process. If necessary the Postgraduate Office will contact the relevant department/school or supervisor for advice before responding to the examiners.
- b) The two examiners will each submit an independent written report on the thesis, and the completed Master's Examination Grade form, to the Dean of Postgraduate Research (via the Postgraduate Office).
- c) A final grade for the thesis will be determined as follows:
 - i. Where there is a discrepancy of one grade in the recommendations made by the two independent examiners, the higher grade will be awarded.

- ii. Where there is a discrepancy of two grades in the recommendations of the two independent examiners, the mid-point grade will be awarded.
- iii. Where there is a discrepancy of more than two grades between the independent recommendations of the two examiners an attempt will first be made to determine whether consensus on a recommended final grade can be reached between the two examiners. If consensus cannot be reached, an adjudicator will be appointed. Where appointed the Adjudicator's recommended grade will be that awarded to the thesis.

The relevant Department/School Postgraduate Coordinator may make a case to the Dean of Postgraduate Research that the usual processes as described in a) and b) above not be used for a given student when there are exceptional circumstances.

If there is a discrepancy of more than two grades between the independent recommendations of the two examiners, the relevant Department/School Postgraduate Coordinator, or (in the College of Education) the Associate Dean of Postgraduate Studies in Education, will be asked by the Dean of Postgraduate Research to communicate with the examiners to seek consensus over the grade to be recommended. If consensus cannot be reached, the Dean of Postgraduate Research will appoint a suitably qualified individual, nominated by the Senior Supervisor and endorsed by the HOD/S or nominee, to adjudicate. The adjudicator will be requested to write an examiner's report, provide comment on the previously submitted examiners' reports and recommend a grade. The grade awarded for the thesis will be that recommended by the adjudicator. If deemed necessary the Dean of Postgraduate Research may also discuss the examiners reports with members of the supervisory team.

- d) Oral examinations are not normally held for Master's candidates. However, the examiners may recommend that the candidate undertake an oral examination prior to determining the grade to be awarded for the thesis. Such a recommendation must be approved by the Dean of Postgraduate Research who will, with advice from 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 such persons cannot take an active part in the examination.

- e) The Postgraduate Office will provide to the candidate and the Senior Supervisor copies of the examiners' reports, on completion of the thesis 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 corrections of the thesis.
- c) The examiners' recommendation must state the exact nature of the required corrections and/or amendments required.
- d) The candidate will make the required corrections and/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 will normally be responsible for notifying the Postgraduate Office when the student has made the required corrections and/or 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 will 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 Master's, he or she shall deposit an electronic copy (PDF) of the final version of the thesis to the University Library. The degree will not be awarded until the copy of the thesis has been deposited in the Library.

9.6 Variation

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

10. Appeals

A candidate may appeal to the Academic Appeals Committee against the outcome of the thesis examination made by the Dean of Postgraduate Research, as per [General Course and Examination Regulation \(GCER\) O: Appeals and Grievances \(University Regulations website\)](#). An appeal can only be made on the grounds that the procedure adopted in arriving at the decision breached a University Regulation or the laws of natural justice. Please refer to the [Academic Appeals and Grievances Principles and Procedures \(PDF, 344KB\)](#) for further guidance.

Related Documents and Information

Regulations

- [General Course and Examination Regulation \(GCER\) O: Appeals and Grievances \(University Regulations website\)](#)

UC Policy Library

- [Academic Appeals and Grievances Principles and Procedures \(PDF, 344KB\)](#)
- [Research Work for a Masters or PhD Thesis Code of Practice \(PDF, 279KB\)](#)
- [Thesis Availability Policy \(PDF, 128KB\)](#)

UC Website and Intranet

- [Calendar \(University Regulations website\)](#)
- [Human Ethics Committees \(University Human Ethics website\)](#)
- [Relevant forms \(University Postgraduate Studies website\)](#)
- [Restrictions on the use of your thesis \(University Library website\)](#)
- [Research & Innovation \(University Research & Innovation website\)](#)
- [Student Services and Communications \(University Student Services and Communications website\)](#)
- [Supervisors' Certificate \(University Postgraduate Studies website\)](#)
- [Thesis Guide \(University Library website\)](#)
- [UC Policy Library \(University UC Policy Library website\)](#)

Document History and Version Control Table			
Version	Action	Approval Authority	Action Date
<i>For document history and versioning prior to 2013 contact ucpolicy@canterbury.ac.nz</i>			
1.00	Converted document onto new template.	Policy Unit	Oct 2013
1.01	Updated hyperlinks.	Policy Unit	Nov 2013
1.02	Document review date pushed out.	Policy Unit	Mar 2014
1.03	Approval Authority changed from Chair, Academic Board to Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic).	Policy Unit	Mar 2014
1.04	Hyperlinks updated.	Policy Unit	Sep 2014
2.00	Scheduled review conducted by Contact Officer. Appeal information added. Approval Authority changed to Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research).	Policy Unit	Nov 2015
2.01	'Faculty' references removed/changed to 'College' to reflect College-Faculty merger.	Policy Unit	Jun 2016
2.02	Approval Authority updated to Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation).	Policy Unit	Mar 2017
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