Graduate Research School

Thesis Submission Seminar

Pam Mort
Associate Professor Jonathan Morris
Sean Goodwin
From Start to Finish

Writing your thesis with the end in view

Pam Mort
Learning Advisor, UNSW Learning Centre
What can we learn from research into what examiners look for in a thesis?
“A PhD is a stepping stone into a research career. All you need to do is to demonstrate your capacity for independent, critical thinking. That’s all you need to do. A PhD is three years of solid work, not a Nobel Prize” (Examiner)
What examiners say

- Examiners approach reading a thesis with an air of expectation and even enthusiasm, but this disappears if the thesis is not reader-friendly.
- General impression and overall presentation of the thesis seems particularly important to the examiners.
- The reader needs to be assisted through the use of summaries, logical sequencing, signposts and removal of excessive repetition.
- *All* readers require assistance to understand the work.
- They feel distracted and irritated by poorly presented work.
- They appreciate well-written, interesting and logically presented arguments.
First impressions count

- Experienced examiners decide very early whether assessment of a thesis is likely to be ‘hard work’ or ‘an enjoyable read’

- Initial impression of quality of thesis usually formed by end of 2nd or 3rd chapter – often by end of lit. review
Research Findings

- Experienced examiners want students to be awarded the PhD & see their feedback as helping this to happen.

- Experienced examiners should be sought, not avoided, because of their high degree of tolerance.

- Experienced examiners expect thesis to pass
  - Reluctant to fail students
  - Of total of more than 300 theses examined only 10 reported failing a thesis
Warnings to candidates

- Careful attention to detail and the avoidance of sloppiness are essential. Sloppy presentation indicates to the examiner that the research might well be sloppy.

- Actually doing what one says one is going to do, or explaining how and why changes have been made is important.

- Experienced examiners check carefully for the link between the introduction, where students outline their intentions, and the conclusions, where the intentions should have been realised.
Typical guidelines for examiners

- The thesis demonstrates authority in the candidate’s field and shows evidence of command of knowledge in relevant fields.
- It shows that the candidate has a thorough grasp of the appropriate methodological techniques and an awareness of their limitations.
- It makes a significant contribution to knowledge.
- Its contribution to knowledge rests on originality of approach and/or interpretation of the findings and, in some cases, the discovery of new facts.
- It demonstrates an ability to communicate research findings effectively in the professional arena and in an international context.
Originality can be...

You say something no one has said before

You do empirical work that has not been done before

You synthesise things that have not been put together before

You make a new interpretation of someone else’s material/ideas

You do something in this country that has only been done elsewhere

You take an existing technique and apply it to a new area

Your work across disciplines, using different methodologies
You test existing knowledge in an original way

You add to knowledge in a way that has not been done before

Your look at topics that people in your discipline have not looked at

Your write down a new piece of information for the first time

You give a good exposition of someone else’s idea

You continue an original piece of work
What else do favourable reports comment on?

They included phrases related to:

- complexity
- originality
- critical thinking
- scholarly work
- significant contribution to a field
- novel concepts
- innovative ideas
- publishable outcomes
Creating a research space

Establish a research territory
- Show that the general research area is important, central, interesting, problematic, relevant
- Introduce & review items of previous research

Establish a niche
- Indicate gap in previous research / raise a question about it / extend previous knowledge

Occupy the niche
- Outline purpose; announce principal findings/significance/contribution; indicate structure of thesis
Creating a research territory

- In these areas, reducing groundwater recharge is an important step in reducing land degradation caused by salinity.

- The Magellanic Clouds provide a unique environment in which to study many interesting and astrophysically challenging problems.

- Speech has arguably been the most important form of human communication since languages were first conceived.

- The modeling of fluid flows is of great interest to Engineers and Scientists alike, with many engineering problems and issues of scientific interest depending upon complex flow phenomena.
Establishing a niche

- One class of quality improvement which has *not received much attention* is enhancement by broadening the bandwidth of coded speech without an increase in the bit rate. *This is surprising* since the notion of quality as a function of speech bandwidth is anticipated to become more pervasive.

- Due to the complexity of the flow problems *there are few analytic models* of fluid flows, but the advent of digital computers has stimulated the development of numerical method for the modeling of flow.

- Although it became accepted that episodic recharge might be a factor in the agricultural areas of Western Australia (e.g. Nulsen 1993), *no systematic analyses of* where and when it occurred, and how important it was in the overall picture of groundwater recharge and salinity were carried out.
Significant contributions - egs

- Significantly, this research has shown that to exclude or minimise particular user groups from the design and implementation processes leads to problems for this group in utilising this technology effectively.

- In light of its importance in a sensor system, a new spectral-overlap multiplexing technique using AMCFBGs was proposed.
Discussions and drawing conclusions

- Connections with findings

- A positive comment eg:
  ‘A very good effort is also made at tying the results back into the existing literature.’

- A less positive comment eg:
  ‘I was a bit amazed that relatively few references were given in the discussion and conclusion sections, which are typically the parts of the work in which the results are compared to the earlier work.’
So…

- Work backwards from intended submission date
- Leave yourself ample time for proof-reading, editing, redrafting. Use checklist in Evans, Gruba & Zobel, ch.11
- Make sure your thesis has a clear organising structure/argument
- Remember - Presentation is vitally important
Learning Centre Support

- Individual consultations
- Workshops
- Thesis writing support groups: https://student.unsw.edu.au/thesis-writing-support-program-postgraduate-research-students
- Thesis writing bootcamps with the GRS
‘Shut Up and Write’ Café Meet-ups

When: Tuesdays 9am – 10am
Where: Bar Navitas Café
     Ground Floor Tyree Building
Bring: Writing equipment (laptop, tablet, pen and paper)
References

- UNSW Notes for Examiners for Doctor of Philosophy Theses
Tips for thesis preparation and submission

Associate Professor Jonathan Morris
Deputy Dean, Graduate Research
Don’t try to do it alone

- You don’t have to “invent” the PhD thesis - read other people’s chapters/theses to get a feel for how it is done.
  - Do this early in your PhD
  - Offer to read other people’s work during the middle phase of your program

- Don’t work in isolation. Get comments from your supervisor, other PhD students, anyone who writes well and is willing to help. Don’t forget all the UNSW resources/workshops.
It may not be perfect the first time

Meet with your supervisor frequently
Try to get a draft chapter to them EARLY so you can receive feedback which can allow to write the rest in the most appropriate way

Remember: a thesis is a working document
It is OK to have to do multiple drafts, especially early on

BUT.....
Write early, write often

- Don’t leave all your writing until the end
- It’s never too early to start writing
- Try to write papers as you go
Have a plan!

- Prepare a thesis outline
  - Should have chapter headings
  - Break up chapters into sub-headings
- Discuss it with your supervisor
- It is never too early to do it!
Have a plan!

- Helps keep you on track
  
  HINT: use colour coding to show progress
  
  - Black – work complete
  
  - Red – work to do

- It is OK to change or modify the plan, but keep your eye on the prize
Use a timeline on your outline

- Use your outline to plan your time
- Remember that your supervisor needs time to read it and give feedback
  - Discuss the time-frame with them
Struggling? Strategies to cope

Jot down a series of bullet points
- Don’t worry about order at first
- Once you have it down, put them in a logical order
- Now….expand each of the bullet points

Prepare the figures first
- Write a Figure caption that is very descriptive
- Once you have that, write a paragraph justifying the importance of the Figure
How to submit your thesis

Sean Goodwin
Manager, Graduate Research School Thesis Team
Notification of Intention to Submit

- Lodged via Thesis Examination Management system

- **Earliest date for submission**
  - End of six semesters full-time equivalent for PhD
  - Masters and MPhil – three semesters

- **Early submission**
  - Needs support of supervisor and Head of School
  - Final approval is given by the Higher Degree Committee (HDC)
Nomination of examiners

- Supervisor and/or Postgraduate Coordinator is responsible for nomination

- 2 *external* examiners for all major research degrees (reserve also required)

- Supervisor and Co-supervisor *cannot* be examiners

- You have the right to indicate any potential examiner that you *prefer not* to examine

- The names of the examiners appointed are *not* released to you until the examination process is complete

- Final approval of examiners is made by the HDC
Supervisor’s Certificate

Must

- Be completed by your Supervisor
- State that your thesis is in a format suitable for examination

Important to note

- If supervisor unable or unwilling to sign the form, you must discuss with Postgraduate Coordinator and/or Head of School
Submission Day

- Submit 2 temporary bound copies and 1 electronic
- Each copy
  - Signed originality statement
  - Completed and signed thesis/dissertation sheet
Examination process

Examiners are given

- The conditions for the award of the degree
- Notes for examiners
- Examiners report form to complete

Examiners are directed to return their report within 6 weeks of receipt of your thesis.
Examiners are sent a reminder by the Graduate Research School 2 weeks prior to due date

After the report due date it is the responsibility of the Head of School or Postgraduate Coordinator to contact the examiner for a revised date

If a satisfactory revised date is not achieved then the School must nominate a replacement examiner
What we can tell you…

- If examiners have been approved
- If the thesis has been sent to examiners
- If the examiners have been reminded of the due date
- If any reports have been received
- If all reports received, the date sent to the School
- If the School has made a recommendation and the date that the recommendation will be considered by the Faculty
- The Faculty decision when known
What we can’t tell you…

- The names of examiners
- The recommendations of the examiners prior to Faculty consideration
- The recommendation of the School
Once examination is complete

- Once all reports are received they are sent to the Head of School or Postgraduate Coordinator for consideration.

- They may also be considered by the Faculty HDC
5 Possible Recommendations

A  Thesis merits award of degree

B  Minor corrections needed

C  Further work needs to be undertaken

D  You may revise and re-submit your thesis

E  Non award
Information for International Candidates

If your student visa expires whilst your thesis is under examination you may apply for a visa extension for a period of six months.
Policies and Guidelines

Visit the Graduate Research School website
https://research.unsw.edu.au/forms-procedures-and-policies-research-candidates

- Thesis Examination Procedures
- Conditions for Award of Degrees
# Thesis Examination Management System

## Examination Status Enquiry

Up to date record of milestones reached in this thesis examination. View events which have taken place so far in the examination process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This student submitted the Notification of Intention to Submit on:</td>
<td>18/11/2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This student intends to submit thesis on:</td>
<td>31/01/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nomination of Examiners</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The supervisor nominated examiners on:</td>
<td>09/02/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The examiners nominated by the supervisor were approved by the School on:</td>
<td>09/02/2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>The examiners nominated by the supervisor were approved by the Faculty on:</td>
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<td><strong>Supervisor Certificate</strong></td>
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<td>The supervisor submitted a Supervisor Certificate, approving the thesis on:</td>
<td>05/06/2017</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Thesis Submission</strong></td>
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<td>The student’s thesis was submitted on:</td>
<td>31/05/2017</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Examiner Management</strong></td>
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<td>The thesis was sent to the examiners on:</td>
<td>08/06/2017</td>
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<td>Examiner A acknowledged receipt of the thesis on:</td>
<td>13/06/2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examiner B acknowledged receipt of the thesis on:</td>
<td>19/06/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examiner A requested an extension on:</td>
<td>12/07/2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examiner A was granted an extension on 12/07/2017, and the new due date is:</td>
<td>04/08/2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examiner B requested an extension on:</td>
<td>31/07/2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examiner B was granted an extension on 31/07/2017, and the new due date is:</td>
<td>14/08/2017</td>
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<td>Examiner A is due to send their report by:</td>
<td>04/08/2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examiner B is due to send their report by:</td>
<td>14/08/2017</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Receipt of Examiners’ Reports</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Examiner A – report received on:</td>
<td>07/08/2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examiner B – report received on:</td>
<td>14/08/2017</td>
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<td><strong>Dispatch of Examiners’ Reports to School/Faculty</strong></td>
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<td>The examiner reports were sent to the school/faculty on:</td>
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<td><strong>School/Faculty Recommendation</strong></td>
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<td>The Postgraduate Co-ordinator has made a recommendation of Award Degree on:</td>
<td>04/09/2017</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Satisfied Requirements</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The requirements of this degree were satisfied on:</td>
<td>04/09/2017</td>
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**Thesis Task Timeline**

**Preparation Phase**
- **12 - 6 months prior to submission**
  - ‘Notification of Intention to Submit’
  - Liaise with supervisor/PGC about potential examiners
- **3 - 2 months prior to submission**
  - Submit abstract on TEM
- **Submission of thesis**
  - Lodge application with DIBP for visa extension
- **1 - 7 weeks after submission**
  - Make minor corrections or do further work
  - Revise and resubmit thesis for examination
- **2 - 6 months after submission**
  - Submit digital final library copies

**Examining Phase**
- **Grading**
  - Thesis sent to examiners
  - Reports due in 7 weeks
  - Reminder sent to examiners 2 weeks before report due
- **HDC**
  - All reports sent to School
  - HDC advised of any late reports
  - HDC makes recommendation
  - GRS advised when corrections done
- **Completion**
  - Completion letter sent to candidate

**Graduation**
Embargo or restricted access

- Embargo 2 years or less – apply when you submit final copies to the Library

- Submit formal application if:
  - Embargo period is greater than 2 years
  - Strict confidentiality is required during the examination process

Application must be submitted 6 months before thesis submission
Preparing for Graduation

- Lodge a digital copy with the Library
  - http://www.library.unsw.edu.au/servicesfor/academic/deposit.html
- Make sure all outstanding fees have been paid
- Further Graduation information
  - https://student.unsw.edu.au/graduation
Questions?