

## Frequently Asked Questions

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### 1. What do I need to know about a UniSA Research Degree before I begin?

UniSA has a number of research programs but they can all generally be separated into two:

- Doctoral degree
- Master of Research

**Doctoral degrees** include the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and Professional Doctorate.

The maximum length of a doctoral degree is 4 years (or 8 years part-time) and students are expected to submit their thesis for examination at about the 3.5 year mark.

Generally, the PhD does not include compulsory coursework. The degree is purely research, unlike many overseas PhD programs. Our students are expected to develop a research proposal within 6-12 months of commencing their degree and develop their research project and thesis based on this proposal.

Some PhD thesis will include publications and a few will be submitted as a PhD by Portfolio of publications. The requirements for each type of PhD are provided in the Guidelines for examiners to assist you with your assessment.

A written doctoral thesis will normally comprise of 80,000 words. The exegesis accompanying an artefact thesis is normally 20,000 words for a doctoral thesis. The word count does not include footnotes, appendices, references or tables etc.

The maximum length of a **Master of Research** program is 2 years (or 4 years part time) and students are expected to submit their thesis for examination between 1.5 and 2 years.

Generally, the Master of Research does not include compulsory coursework. Our students are expected to develop a research proposal within 6 months of commencing their degree and develop their research project and thesis based on this proposal.

A written Master of Research thesis will normally comprise of 40,000 words. The exegesis accompanying an artefact thesis is normally 10,000 words for a Master of Research thesis. The word count does not include footnotes, appendices, references or tables etc.

## **2. What if there is a conflict of interest?**

Any real or perceived conflict of interest between the examiner and the student and/or supervisors, whether it be of a personal, professional, or commercial nature, or the University of South Australia within the last five years, or in the near future, should be disclosed when first approached to participate in the examination. When the thesis is dispatched there is another opportunity to disclose any subsequent interactions which may pose a conflict of interest that have occurred since the initial approach.

## **3. What criteria am I assessing against?**

The purpose of the examination is for you to review the thesis and report on its merits based on the University's criteria. In determining your assessment, the University has formulated a number of options based on the degree of revisions needed to ensure that the thesis is of publishable standard.

The criteria are available in the Guidelines that have been provided to you with the thesis. These guidelines are specific to the thesis you are examining.

These assessments are not to be seen as a hierarchical set of grades. They are an indicator of the worth of the scholarship of the thesis. The comments in your report will indicate where you believe the thesis and the writer rank in the scholarship of the field and the quality of the work.

## **4. How long should my report be? Is there a specific format to use?**

There is no set requirement for how long a report should be. However, it is very important to provide clear feedback to the student so that they can address your comments adequately.

Generally, examiners write around five pages of assessment, but may attach appendices listing changes to be made. That is entirely acceptable. The length of report is entirely at your discretion, but we would encourage you to write sufficient so that the candidate and their supervisor can make the appropriate response to the points you raise in your report and the scrutiny which you have given to the thesis. In our experience excessively long reports may make the student's task of revising the thesis more difficult.

We do ask that you assess the thesis for a Master of Research or Doctoral Degree against the criteria outlined in the Examiner's guide, and provide one of the outcomes listed in the examiner's report form.

If the student participates in the defence of the thesis as part of their examination, they will have the opportunity to address the comments you provide in your preliminary written report. After the oral defence concludes, it is expected that you will work with the other examiner to write a final report about the assessment of the thesis that you both agree upon. It is important that your preliminary result is not

indicated in your written report and is only provided on the Examiner's Report form which is not received by the student.

## **5. Do I need to keep the contents of the thesis confidential?**

It is expected you will keep the contents of the thesis confidential until the student completes their degree, unless you have been asked to complete and return a separate confidential disclosure agreement.

The University's Research Degree Procedure AB-58 P6, Section B, 4.a states "Subject to clauses B.4.c. and B.4.d, anonymity must be maintained during the examination process, but normally all reports of examiners are made available to the research degree student, unless indicated otherwise by the examiner.

Please let us know if you would like your identity to remain anonymous at the time the reports are provided to the student and their research supervisor(s). This does not apply if the student participates in the defence of the thesis as part of their examination.

## **6. How long do I have to examine the thesis?**

Our regulations allow six weeks for the review and assessment of the thesis.

The University is concerned about obtaining examiners' reports and requests that the assessment be completed within a certain timeframe. This is particularly important when the student participates in the defence of the thesis as it cannot be held until both examiners return their reports. It is the University's policy to send a reminder two weeks before the report is due.

If you have any concerns about the deadlines set, we would appreciate it if you could liaise with our examination department, +61 8 8302 5880, option 3 (email: [UniSA.HDR.Examinations@unisa.edu.au](mailto:UniSA.HDR.Examinations@unisa.edu.au)) who will be happy to assist you and renegotiate a date with you.

In the unfortunate circumstances that the report is overdue by more than two weeks from the due date and we have not had any response to our attempts to contact you, it is our normal practice to begin to appoint a new examiner; however we would like to talk with you prior to this happening. Delays in the examination process can cause financial and employment issues for the student.

The University reserves the right not to pay an examiner if the report is not received within the agreed timeframe.

## **7. How do I request an extension on the report submission date?**

If you are unable to complete your report within the 6 week timeframe you may request an extension via email. We ask that you contact us about this as early as possible so that we may keep the student and supervisor informed of the possible delays.

If we do not receive the report within 2 months of dispatch, or if we are unable to contact you regarding the report submission, we may need to proceed with an alternative examiner. Delays in the examination process can cause financial and employment issues for the student.

## 8. How many examiners are involved in the process?

There are two examiners involved in examining a thesis.

## 9. Does UniSA have defence of the thesis?

PhD students commencing from 1 January 2016 will be required to undertake a defence of the thesis as part of their thesis examination.

Research degree students who commence prior to 1 January 2016 are not required to undertake a defence of the thesis but can elect to undertake a defence of the thesis as part of their examination, in consultation with their supervisor.

As an examiner, if you agree to participate in the defence, you will be contacted by the Exams & Results Team to arrange a date and time. You will also be provided with the necessary guidelines and support.

**Note:** a defence normally occurs via video conference between 8-10 weeks after the thesis has been dispatched for examination.

PhD students who do not undertake a defence of their thesis must make changes as requested by the examiners and, if necessary can clarify or rebut examiner comments in their summary of amendments where the thesis is being returned to the examiner to check corrections or re-examination.

## 10. What happens if my grade is different to the one given by the other examiner?

Where grades differ between examiners the lower of the 2 grades will stand unless the student appeals the grade.

The student is required to address the comments and changes requested by both examiners.

**Note:** Students participating in the defence of the thesis will receive one final result agreed by both examiners. They will be expected to address the final list of agreed comments/matters provided by the examiners unless they appeal the grade.

A research degree student may submit an appeal to the Research Degree Examinations and Quality Panel to have the thesis re-examined once only, provided that evidence is submitted to the satisfaction of Research Degree Examinations and Quality Panel that one or more of the examiners:

- a. was unqualified to examine the work, or
- b. substantially misinterpreted the work, or
- c. was prejudiced or biased in the assessment of the thesis.
- d. the oral defence was not conducted in accordance with D.9 of Guideline AB-58 AD8: Oral Defence of the Thesis in Research Degrees.

A research degree student may also appeal to have an adjudicator review their results to pronounce on the relative soundness, correctness and appropriateness of the initial two examiners' recommendations. This usually occurs where the comments of the examiners are very similar but the results received are significantly different.

## 11. How does the appeal process work?

The research degree student will submit their appeal to the Research Degree Examinations and Quality Panel. The Panel is chaired by the Dean of Graduate Studies and members include Deans of Research and Research Education.

The Panel will determine whether the appeal should be upheld or rejected. The Panel may determine the following:

- a. dialogue be conducted with all or any one of the examiners, or between the examiners
- b. another examiner be appointed
- c. an independent adjudicator be appointed, or
- d. any other action as deemed appropriate.

The Panel cannot approve an alternative result to that provided by the examiners.

You will be notified by the Exams & Results Team if a student decides to appeal your result and the action decided by the Panel.

## 12. Can I communicate with the student or supervisor during examination?

Under the University's Research Degree Policies and Procedures, an examiner is not permitted to communicate with the student and/or their research supervisor(s) throughout the examination process. The examination process commences once the student submits their thesis for examination and concludes once they submit their final thesis for completion.

If you wish to contact the student and/or supervisor please contact our office detailing the reasons why and we will seek approval from the Dean of Graduate Studies on your behalf.

If the student participates in the defence of the thesis as part of their examination, confidentiality, as specified above, is applicable except during the thesis defence meeting.

## 13. Will I see the other examiner's report?

Unless the student (and the examiners) participates in the defence of the thesis as part of the examination process, it is not normal practice for examiners to see each other's reports. If you wish to view the other examiner's report, please notify our office and we will pass this request on to the student and their research supervisor(s). If they agree to this request our office will arrange for an anonymised version of the second report to be sent to you.

## 14. Who do I contact if I have additional questions?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the examination process please contact the Exams & Results Team, Student and Academic Services via [UniSA.HDR.Examinations@unisa.edu.au](mailto:UniSA.HDR.Examinations@unisa.edu.au) or +61 (08) 8302 5880.