



FACULTY OF EDUCATION
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Guidelines for a Dissertation

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The University regulations allow students to complete a 30 or 60 point dissertation under the supervision of a suitably qualified member of staff.¹

This document provides guidelines for the dissertation. It is intended that these guidelines be referred to by both supervisors and students. These guidelines contain:

1. A description of the nature and scope of a dissertation;
2. Information on the processes for enrolment and the requirements to complete a dissertation; and
3. Advice for supervisors and students.

1. The nature and scope of a Dissertation

The purpose of a dissertation is for the student to conduct a small research project that displays the student's grasp of a particular research question and the competent application of an appropriate research methodology, and research methods.

The Faculty of Education Postgraduate Programmes Committee has recommended that a 60 point dissertation be between 15,000 - 20,000 words (approximately 50 pages). A 30 point dissertation will involve fewer words.

¹ A two paper dissertation is normally completed as part of a Postgraduate Diploma. In exceptional circumstances a dissertation can also be part of an MEd, although University regulations indicate that a Masters degree would normally consist of a 90 or 120 point thesis.

The 60 point dissertation is equivalent to two 500 level papers. For the 60 point dissertation, full-time enrolment will be for one semester; and part-time, two semesters. The 30 point dissertation is equivalent to one 500 level paper.

2. The processes for enrolment and the requirements to complete a dissertation

First steps

Students may make an initial approach to the departmental Postgraduate Studies Advisor, the Postgraduate Programmes Co-ordinator or the departmental CoD. However the application process is dependent on the student having identified and having received the agreement from a potential supervisor.

Process for enrolling

1. The potential supervisor and student correspond or meet.
2. The student indicates an intention to enrol and completes the Faculty of Education Dissertation/Directed Study Application Form available at:
http://edlinked.soe.waikato.ac.nz/departments/index.php?dept_id=3&page_id=3613
3. The student submits a 2 page proposal to the potential supervisor (see below).
4. The supervisor makes the decision as to whether or not they are able to supervise the student and signs the Application Form. This form is to be submitted to the Faculty's Postgraduate Studies Office.
5. The Postgraduate Studies Administrator will check with the supervisor named on the enrolment to ensure that they have agreed to supervise this student.
6. Both the supervisor and student will be advised when formal approval for enrolment has been granted by the Postgraduate Programmes Co-ordinator.

The proposal (2 pages)

The proposal should contain:

- A working title
- Research question(s)
- Brief overview of literature regarding the topic
- Brief description of the methodology and methods
- Consideration of ethical issues
- Timeline
- Reference List

Submission for marking

Students should submit two copies of their dissertation to the Postgraduate Studies Administrator. The administrator will distribute the dissertation to the examiner (supervisor) and moderator, and will return it to the student with the report when marking is completed.

Marking of a dissertation

Dissertations are marked by the supervisor and moderated by one internal staff member (within the Faculty of Education if possible).

The moderator's role is to ensure that the supervisor has marked fairly and that the grade awarded is reasonable. Moderators are not required to independently grade the dissertation. However, if requested by the supervisor they may act as a second examiner. If there is a wide variation between the supervisor's grade and the moderator's assessment the moderator will provide a report to the Postgraduate Programmes Co-ordinator who will discuss the grading with the supervisor.

Upon completion of marking, a copy of the examiner's report will be made available to the student by the Postgraduate Studies Administrator. The examiner's report will generally comment on the following areas (where appropriate):

1. Abstract
2. Introduction and literature review
3. Exposition of the research goals or questions, and significance of the research
4. Methodology and appropriate use of methods
5. Presentation of findings
6. Discussion, interpretation of findings, and implications
7. Academic conventions of the dissertation: referencing, grammar, clarity of writing

Submission of final copy of the dissertation

One final hard copy should be submitted to the Postgraduate Studies Administrator after the supervisor-required changes have been made. The Postgraduate Studies Administrator will then forward the dissertation to the departmental administrator who will submit the grade. Spiral or soft bound copies are acceptable. An electronic copy should also be submitted to the supervisor. A dissertation may also be published on-line if it is of excellent quality.

Extensions

Students should follow the time line for completing the dissertation. However, if the student needs an extension, s/he should write a letter to the Faculty of Education's Postgraduate Programmes Co-ordinator stating the reasons for an extension. The Co-ordinator can approve a three-week extension. A longer extension will require the student to re-enrol.

3. Advice for supervisors and students

Starting out

When designing the research project it is important keep in mind the time and length limitations. For example, it might not be appropriate for a student to design her/his own questionnaire or other instrument or interview more than two or three people.

This is a small-scale research project and the student should be required to display competence in conceiving and conducting a clearly defined study. It is important that both the supervisor and student do not become overly ambitious and exceed the boundaries of the dissertation. For example, this study may replicate an existing study in a new context rather than being new or innovative.

Ethical approval

Research projects that involve human participants need to have ethical approval. This means that if the student intends to send out questionnaires, interview, observe or otherwise obtain personal information about other people, they need to obtain ethical approval. To obtain approval for their research projects, the student needs to fill out an application for ethical approval of supervised postgraduate research projects available through Edlinked. With the support of their supervisor, a student should complete the application and submit it to the faculty Ethics Committee.

Additional information can be found in Appendix 4 of the Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations. http://edlinked.soe.waikato.ac.nz/internal/index.php?page_id=768.

Supervision

A dissertation requires one supervisor. Staff from the Faculty of Education who have a masters level degree can act as supervisors to students. Supervisors are not obligated to accommodate any student who requests supervision. A supervisor is entitled to determine/assess whether a student is adequately prepared for independent research before agreeing to supervise.

The supervisor is not responsible for providing readings, finding references, filling out ethics applications or providing interview questions or questionnaires. A supervisor's responsibility is to provide guidance for the student to conduct the research work her/himself.

Meetings between the supervisor and the student

It is important that the supervisor and the student keep in contact regularly to ensure the progression of the dissertation. Early in the process it might be helpful to establish a detailed timeline. Meetings are an important context in which to give formative feedback on progress. Because people have difference working

habits, it is difficult to determine the frequency, duration or content of the meetings. While some prefer weekly meetings, others like to report on their progress in longer intervals. The *Thesis Handbook* suggests that student and supervisor draw a contract between them regarding the details of contact. It offers guidelines for such a contract.

It is suggested that the student keeps a written summary of these meetings and emails them to the supervisor to ensure that the student has understood the supervisor's guidance, and that the student and supervisor are both monitoring progress.

Weekly workload

The anticipated workload for a fulltime postgraduate student is 40 hours a week and a part time postgraduate student 20 hours a week. This means that students can be expected to devote a considerable amount of time for their dissertation.

Reading drafts

An important part of any research process is writing. Often undergraduate students write their assignments only once before handing them in. At the postgraduate level, however, it is important to emphasise that part of any research process is to write several drafts before the research is ready to be presented.

While a supervisor should guide students and assist them to structure their research in a coherent manner, it is not the supervisor's responsibility to write it for them. Supervising postgraduate students is only one part of a supervisor's workload and therefore, students should provide, as far as possible, well organised, grammatically correct written drafts, with correct referencing. This way, supervisors can comment on content which is their major area of expertise.

It is important for students to be aware of how much time is required to comment on a draft, and for students to take this into account when submitting drafts and waiting for feedback. Students may point out specific aspects that they would like supervisors to comment on with their drafts.

Writing drafts

Students may find it demanding writing a longer and more sustained argument than in their previous papers. They may also find that the dissertation requires a greater level of information literacy skills. Supervisors should direct students to the support of subject librarians in the Faculty of Education library, and to Student learning support in Pathways College for additional help.

Socialisation into the research culture

The dissertation is very much a bridge into the research environment. Where possible a supervisor should encourage their students to participate in the wider intellectual life of the university. For example, they should encourage students to attend seminars and conferences, present aspects of their work, attend workshops that help students to develop necessary research skills, introduce students to visiting scholars, and encourage students to publish in appropriate journals. It is also important to keep in mind that postgraduate students have not necessarily been exposed to conferences and research publication and it is the supervisor's responsibility to aid the student's introduction to these parts of the research culture.