Dissertation

Outline

A Dissertation consists of a small piece of original research completed under the guidance of an academic supervisor. The purpose is for the student to display:

- Understanding of a particular research question
- The competent application of an appropriate research methodology. A two-paper dissertation is normally 15,000-20,000 words (approximately 50 pages).

First steps

Students should begin by contacting a proposed supervisor – normally a lecturer from one of their taught postgraduate papers. Academic staff with a masters degree are eligible to supervise a dissertation. A supervisor is entitled to establish whether a student is adequately prepared for independent research before agreeing to supervise.

If a student is unable to find a supervisor they should contact the Faculty Administrator – Postgraduate educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz. Finding a supervisor can take time, so students are encouraged to start this process a few months before their intended Dissertation start date.

Entry into the dissertation normally requires:

- A B average or higher across a student's prior postgraduate papers
- Completion of an approved research methods paper
- Approval by the proposed supervisor
- Approval by the School Postgraduate Leader.

A dissertation paper has individual start and finish dates and students may enrol at any time during the academic year. It is a 60-point paper and should normally be completed within six months full time, or 12 months part-time.

Enrolment process

The student submits a completed Dissertation/Directed Study Application Form AND a two page proposal (see below) to the potential supervisor

- The student applies online for the Dissertation paper
- The supervisor agrees to supervise the student and signs the Dissertation/Directed Study Application Form
- This form and a copy of the proposal are given to the school Postgraduate Leader for approval
• The form and proposal are given to the Faculty Administrator- Postgraduate for online processing

• Both the supervisor and student are advised when formal approval for enrolment has been granted

The proposal (two 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 and marking of a Dissertation

Students should submit two softbound copies of their Dissertation to the Faculty Academic and Student Administration Office at Reception, and an electronic copy to their supervisor before 4pm on their submission due date.

Extensions

A student who expects their Dissertation will not be ready for submission by the due date may apply for a 21 day grace period for submission. It is not possible to suspend a Dissertation.

A grace period for submission of 21 days does not require re-enrolment or payment of additional fees. To request a 21 day grace period a student should:

• Confirm the 21 day grace period with their supervisor

• Ask their supervisor to contact the Faculty Administrator -Postgraduate educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz to request the grace period. The Faculty Administrator - Postgraduate will notify the student when their supervisor when the grace period has been granted.

Extensions of over 21 days require re-enrolment and incur additional fees. To apply for an extension of longer than 21 days, students should complete the Application for Change of
Conditions of Enrolment Form available from the Faculty Administrator – Postgraduate educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz

Withdrawal

A student wishing to withdraw from their Dissertation paper should do so prior to the end of the enrolment period by:

- Consulting with their supervisor
- Completing a change of enrolment through i.waikato.ac.nz  Students are responsible for ensuring that their withdrawal from a paper is registered. Failure to do so can result in an 'Incomplete' grade (IC=fail) on the student’s academic record once the enrolment period is complete. This may prevent the student from re-enrolling in their degree.

Medical or compassionate withdrawals and extensions

If a student has exceptional circumstances outside of their control mean that they feel unable to complete their Dissertation, they should contact the Faculty Administrator – Postgraduate educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz, for advice on how to withdraw. Requests for full or partial fee refunds for withdrawals made on exceptional medical or compassionate grounds are considered by the Head of the University’s Student Experience and Administration Office, not by the Faculty.

Marking of a Dissertation

Dissertations are marked by both the supervisor and an examiner. The examiner is an internal staff member who is nominated by the supervisor. The Faculty Administrator – Postgraduate educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz will send out copies of the Dissertation to both the supervisor and the examiner and ensure these are returned in a timely manner.

Both the supervisor and examiner submit a report and recommended. These grade recommendations are then moderated by the relevant School Postgraduate Leader. Where there is a discrepancy between the two grades, the examiner’s grade will take priority.

Markers’ reports will generally comment on the following areas (where appropriate):

- Abstract
- Introduction and literature review
- Exposition of the research goals or questions, and significance of the research
- Methodology and appropriate use of methods
- Presentation of findings
- Discussion, interpretation of findings, and implications
Once a final mark has been confirmed, the Faculty Administrator – Postgraduate will:

Return a copy of the Dissertation to the student

Inform the student of their final mark and grade

Provide the student with copies of the markers’ reports (with the grade recommendations and identifying comments removed to preserve the anonymity of the markers).

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.

Research ethics 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. With the support of their supervisor, a student should complete the online application and submit it to the Faculty’s Ethics Committee.

Meetings between the supervisor and the student

It is important that the supervisor and student keep in contact regularly to ensure the progression of the dissertation. Students should aim to keep a written summary of these meetings and email a copy to the supervisor. This ensures that:

• The student has understood the supervisor’s guidance

• 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 Education Library, and to Student Learning for additional help. The dissertation is very much a bridge into the research environment. Students are encouraged to take every opportunity to participate in the wider intellectual life of the university. Supervisors will encourage you to attend seminars and conferences, present aspects of your work if there is an opportunity, attend workshops that help you to develop necessary research skills, introduce you to visiting scholars, and where applicable encourage you to publish in appropriate journals.