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POLICY FOR EXAMINATION OF HDR THeses

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Purpose and Scope

This policy specifies requirements for the examination of HDR (Higher Degree by Research) theses. The policy applies to all candidates enrolled in an HDR program at Excelsia College, and their supervisors, together with those in management positions responsible for the administration of HDR candidature. The policy should be read together with HDR examination procedures and guidelines.

Policy Statement

1. The Thesis

All HDR candidates are required to prepare a thesis in partial or complete fulfilment of their degree. The thesis must be prepared under supervision; be the sole work of the candidate, except where due reference is made to other sources; demonstrate a thorough understanding of the subject matter of the thesis; contribute to knowledge (theoretical or practical) and understanding in the field of study concerned; and demonstrate the capacity of the candidate to carry out research.

A PhD may be presented as a series of papers. For specific policies regarding a PhD by publication of a series of papers, see the Policy for Presentation of HDR Theses by Publication. In exceptional cases, work done jointly with other persons may be accepted, provided that the Research Committee is satisfied as to the candidate’s part in the joint research and the contribution is weighted accordingly.

The thesis must be of a nature and length prescribed in the relevant course regulations. Excelsia College does not prescribe a word limit and candidates should seek the advice of their supervisory panel. However, 100,000 words are considered to be the upper limit for doctorates. Most disciplines have a general expectation of a minimum of 60,000 words for a doctorate.

The language of the thesis must be English. A candidate may not submit as the main content of the thesis any work or material which has been previously submitted for any degree. However, the thesis may incorporate such work or material if the candidate identifies the work or material which has been so incorporated and if it does not form part of the main content of the thesis. Any component(s) of the thesis in media other than text will be submitted in a form approved by the Research Committee.

A candidate will submit to the Registrar’s Office three copies of the written component of the thesis prepared in a form approved by the Research Committee. The submission will include a certificate of authenticity signed by the candidate to the effect that the work has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other institution. The candidate will indicate in the thesis the sources of information and the extent to which the candidate has used the work of others.

2. Notification of Intention to Submit (NOITS)

NOITS must be completed at least 2 months prior to the expected thesis submission date via the method outlined in the HDR examination procedures. The supervisory panel must be satisfied that the thesis meets suitable academic standards, and format and presentation requirements, before it may be submitted for examination by the candidate.
If the supervisory panel does not agree that the thesis is ready for examination, the candidate may refer the matter to the Research Committee for determination. If the examination is refused the candidate will be asked to remain enrolled and to take further academic advice from their Principal Supervisor.

3. **Time of Submission**

A thesis will normally be submitted after completion of the study program and not earlier than three years (or six semesters) after full-time enrolment in a PhD or two years (or four semesters) after full-time enrolment in a Masters by Research degree. Maximum and minimum periods of candidature are specified in the relevant course regulations. However, the Research Committee may approve submission of a thesis for examination after less than the minimum number of semesters of enrolment, on consideration of the body of research completed, and the recommendation of the Supervisor and Academic Director, and evidence that the academic readiness of the work would not be increased by a further period of candidature.

4. **Method of Submission**

The candidate will submit, in temporary binding, three copies of a PhD thesis and two copies of a Masters Research thesis. With the thesis, the candidate must submit a signed statement affirming that the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made, and that it contains no work which the student has previously presented for an award of the College or any other educational institution.

5. **Selection of Examiners**

At least six weeks before the planned submission date, the Research Committee will appoint three (3) external examiners, including a reserve, for PhD theses, and two (2) examiners, at least one of whom is external, for Masters Research theses. An external examiner is a person who is neither a current employee of WI, nor an employee within the last three years prior to the thesis submission. There will not normally be more than one examiner from any one institution. A past Supervisor of the candidate cannot act as an examiner.

The Research Committee may seek advice from the Principal Supervisor, Co-supervisors, Head of School or any other member of the academic staff regarding potential examiners. Candidates may advise their Principal Supervisor if there is a particular person in their field whom they would prefer not to have as an examiner or whom they would particularly like to have as an examiner. At the time of appointing examiners any potential conflicts of interest relating to the examiners will be assessed.

Examiners are expected to be academically reputable in the field of the thesis, with a body of published work, or other publicly recognised output as appropriate for their discipline. Examiners should typically hold a qualification at least equivalent to the level of the award being examined.

6. **Anonymity of Examiners**

As a general principle, examiner identity remains confidential until reports of the thesis examination are submitted and considered.
The identity of examiners will not be disclosed to the candidate if anonymity is requested in the examination report or if the Research Committee determines that it would be in the interests of the College to withhold the name.

If a candidate infers the identity of examiner/s, they must not contact the examiner/s concerning the thesis after submission of the thesis for examination and prior to report. Violation of this requirement may be construed as an attempt to influence the examination and may give rise to a charge of academic misconduct.

At any other time, the candidate must seek permission from the Supervisor or Research Committee before contacting the examiner/s. Any permission granted shall be in writing and require the prior agreement of the examiner concerned.

7. Examination Process

The examiners will be asked to assess the work to determine if:

- the thesis as a whole makes an original contribution to the knowledge of the subject with which it deals;
- the thesis provides a sufficiently comprehensive study of the topic appropriate to the degree in the discipline area/s;
- the methods adopted are appropriate to the subject matter and are appropriately applied;
- the research findings are suitably set out, accompanied by adequate exposition and are discussed critically in the context of the discipline; and
- the quality of English and general presentation is satisfactory.

Each examiner is asked to report in writing to the Registrar’s Office within ten weeks of the date of posting of the thesis. Examiners may be replaced if a report is not received within three months unless the examiner is given leave to report late.

8. Outcome of the Examination

Each examiner must clearly recommend an outcome from the following:

a. the degree be awarded;

b. the candidate be required to undertake minor rewriting of an editorial nature before the degree is awarded;

c. the candidate be required to undertake rewriting that is of greater magnitude than minor editorial changes but less than full resubmission (as identified by the examiners) to the satisfaction of the Research Committee before the degree is awarded;

d. the candidate be required to revise and resubmit for further examination within a specified time (only available for the initial examination); or

e. the degree not be awarded.

The Registrar’s Office will forward the examiners’ reports to the Director of Research who will forward the reports to the Principal Supervisor for comment and advice. The Principal Supervisor will prepare for the Research Committee a written report that will recommend an initial outcome and list in detail any recommended changes to the thesis.
Where the examiners present recommendations of a or b (award degree or minor rewriting) the Research Committee may endorse the initial examination outcome and report its finding to the Registrar’s Office for communication to the candidate.

Where one or more examiners recommend c, d or e (major rewriting, or revise and resubmit, or not award the degree) the Research Committee will seek the advice of the Supervisory Panel before making a determination. Where rewriting or revising is required, the Research Committee may specify the time period within which any additional work shall be completed. Normally all corrections will be made within one session of the candidate being advised to make changes or rewrite for re-examination.

Where outcome e (not award) is given the Research Committee may recommend the awarding of a Research Master degree to the Registrar. In this instance the thesis may require resubmission and re-examination for the Research Masters award.

In circumstances where the outcome is not clear, before making any determination the Research Committee may take one or more of the following actions:

a. appoint an additional examiner;
b. appoint an arbiter;
c. invite the examiners to confer with each other and/or with the Research Committee with a view to the presentation of a consolidated recommendation; and/or
d. direct that the candidate undertake such further oral, written or practical examinations as the Research Committee may specify.

9. Resubmission and re-examination

The Research Committee must not classify a thesis as 4)-revise and resubmit unless, having considered the examiner’s reports and any other relevant information, it agrees that the thesis shows some merit and may, by a specified amount of further work under approved supervision, be sufficiently improved for re-submission.

A re-examination will be conducted on the basis of specific advice on what must be achieved and given to the candidate in rewriting. The instructions to the candidate for rewriting for re-examination will be prepared by the Supervisory Panel, and approved by the Research Committee. These instructions will be provided to the examiner for the re-examination as they will form the basis of the second examination. No new criticisms may be introduced by the examiner in the second examination. The examiner(s) who recommended that the thesis be re-examined shall normally be invited to undertake the re-examination.

A candidate whose thesis is classified as requiring resubmission must:

a. resubmit within the timeframe advised by the Research Committee; and
b. submit with the thesis a detailed report on the revisions, signed by the principal supervisor; and
c. re-enrol and remain enrolled until the thesis is re-submitted for re-examination.

The re-submitted thesis and the report on the revisions are submitted to:
a. one or more of the original examiners who have indicated that they are willing to reexamine the thesis; or
b. one or more of the original examiners and a new examiner; or
c. at least two new examiners.

Examiners of a resubmitted PhD or Masters Research thesis will recommend an outcome corresponding to a (award), b (award after minor revisions) or e (fail). In response to recommendations a, b or e the Research Committee will determine the outcome and inform the candidate accordingly. A resubmitted Masters Research thesis must, after re-examination, be classified as Passed or Failed. A resubmitted PhD thesis must, after re-examination, be classified as Passed, Passed for the award of Master, or Failed.

10. Completing the examination process

The Research Committee will approve the awarding of the degree when all requirements of the degree have been met. As soon as possible after the Research Committee meeting at which the awarding of the degree is approved, the candidate will be informed of the result and given a copy of the examiners’ reports. The candidate is required to lodge one digital (CD in PDF format) version of the thesis incorporating all amendments and/or revisions as specified during the examination process. The digital version of the thesis will normally be lodged in the Gordon Moyes Library unless otherwise determined under the Intellectual Property Policy. In addition, the candidate is required to lodge four bound copies of the thesis: one copy to be placed in the Gordon Moyes Library and the remaining copies to be given to members of the supervisory panel.

11. Appealing the outcome

Procedural appeals against thesis examination may be made in writing to the Academic Director (or delegate), who will review the appeal. Grounds for procedural appeal will normally be restricted to irregularities in the conduct of an examination. In all appeals, the decision of the Academic Director (or delegate) shall be final. For further details see the HDR Appeals Policy.

References Consulted

University of Notre Dame (2012) Regulations: Research Degree

University of Western Sydney (2006) Doctorate Policy