



*Division of Humanities – Ke Kite Aronui*

**Guidelines on  
EXAMINATION OF DISSERTATIONS, REPORTS, and PROJECTS  
AT 400- and 500- LEVEL**

## **1 Purpose**

- 1.1 This document provides guidelines on the processes for the examination of dissertations (as defined below) at 400- and 500-level in taught postgraduate programmes in the Division of Humanities.

## **2 Scope**

- 2.1 These guidelines apply to all dissertations, project reports, research reports, creative components and exegeses that are a significant component of the degree in which the student is enrolled. A significant component is defined as having a points value of 40 points or more up to but not including 90 points.

## **3 Definitions**

- 3.1 *Dissertation* usually refers to a significant piece of research that comprises a points value of 40 points or more and less than 90 points that is undertaken over two semesters or within a 12 month period. In some degree programmes this will include a creative component and an exegesis, or will be termed research report, or project.
- 3.2 *Examination* refers to the evaluation of student dissertations (as defined above) in accordance with the relevant degree regulations.
- 3.3 *Convenor* refers to a person who facilitates the examination process who is usually independent of the student's work (i.e., not a supervisor). The Head of School (HoS) or Head of Programme (HoP) (as appropriate) may take this role or delegate it to someone else. A Convenor will facilitate the examination process by contacting the examiners on recommendation from the supervisors, advise examiners of process, relevant degree regulations, assessment criteria, time frames for examination etc.
- 3.4 *Confirmation of grades* refers to the determination of final grades after moderation (where applicable). Grades are normally confirmed by the Convenor of the examination in consultation with examiners and/or moderators and is checked and signed off by HoP, HoS or Associate Dean (Postgraduate) Humanities as appropriate. This is often combined with the determination of the Level of Award.
- 3.5 *Level of Award* refers to the final degree result and whether the combined coursework and dissertation meets criteria for a pass, credit or distinction in accordance with the relevant degree regulations. For Honours and Postgraduate Diplomas the Level of Award is checked and signed off by the HoP or HoS as appropriate. The level of award for masters degrees

are usually checked and signed off by the Associate Dean (Postgraduate) Humanities.

- 3.6 *External moderation* refers to the monitoring of provisional marks and grades by one or more moderators from outside the University of Otago, to confirm that the standards applied are appropriate and not qualitatively different from those in other universities. External moderators may make recommendations concerning grades for individual students or groups of students, as well as more general comments concerning examination processes and standards. External moderation must occur prior to the final confirmation and release of grades.
- 3.7 *Regulations for the degree* refer to the degree regulations as set out in the University of Otago Calendar in the year the student first enrolled in the degree.
- 3.8 *Programme* refers to the College, Faculty, School or Programme in which the student is supervised.
- 3.9 *Access to resources* refers to the normal resources a student enrolled in a particular programme has access to (such as library facilities, student email, on-campus computing, school or programme support, supervision).
- 3.10 *Referee* refers to a person appointed to adjudicate between grades recommended by examiners when there is a significant difference between them. A referee does not re-examine the dissertation and is normally external to the University.
- 3.11 *External Scholarship* refers to a scholarship which is funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade or similar entity, often with unique guidelines and regulations governing the award.

#### **4 Submission dates**

- 4.1 The Graduate Studies Committee (GSC) is responsible for setting submission deadlines and processes for dissertation submissions. It seeks to ensure all programmes have the same date to ensure equity for students.
- 4.2 In setting the deadline for submission of dissertations, GSC must ensure that:
- (a) Deadlines are set within the relevant Regulations for the degree as specified in the Calendar.
  - (b) Where no deadlines are specified in the relevant regulations, the deadline should be set within the enrolment period of the dissertation paper code.
  - (c) Where external moderation is required, the deadline should be set to enable examination and moderation to occur prior to the date that final grades are made available to the student.
- 4.3 Students must be advised of the submission date at the commencement of their postgraduate degree and at the commencement of their dissertation (if different). Students should be made aware of expectations, and that extensions are given **only** in exceptional circumstances.

#### **5 Extensions**

- 5.1 Extensions to submission dates will only be granted in exceptional circumstances. Exceptional circumstances are those that are unexpected, beyond the student's control, and have significantly impaired the student's ability to meet the deadline.

Examples of exceptional circumstances include:

- serious illness or injury
- severe psychological impairment
- bereavement of a significant other
- critical personal circumstances involving the health or wellbeing of a relative or close friend
- other exceptional circumstances beyond the student's control such as natural disaster, damage to significant property, impacts arising from being the victim of a crime.

5.2 An extension is **not** normally granted for:

- Events that occurred prior to the month before the deadline when there has been no previous notification of them
- Anxiety experienced close to the deadline
- Other assessments due in the lead-up to the deadline
- Low-level impairment in the lead-up to the deadline
- Known impairment such as chronic illness (medical or psychological), injury or disability unless medical evidence confirms that the circumstances were exacerbated, despite appropriate management, in the month before the deadline. (Please note that where applications are repeatedly made for the same or similar reason, then the application may be declined on the grounds that the reason is not unexpected).

5.3 A student who is in receipt of an external scholarship shall not be granted an extension until the funder of the scholarship has been consulted. For international students, consultation will occur through the International Office, who will also provide an assessment on the implications an extension may have on the student's visa and insurance.

5.4 An extension to the submission date of less than one month can be granted by the HoS or HoP (as appropriate). The process for such extensions shall be determined by the Programme. Where an extension to access resources is also required for less than one month, the supervisor will email a request to the Associate Dean (Postgraduate) Humanities.

5.5 Any extension to the submission date of more than one month requires the approval of the Associate Dean (Postgraduate) Humanities. The supervisor will complete the 'Extension Request for Dissertation Submission' form and send it to the Associate Dean (Postgraduate) Humanities for approval with supporting evidence (e.g. medical certificate, death notice).

5.6 If a student seeks an extension to the submission date of their dissertation but would prefer that the Programme or School remained unaware of the reasons for the extension, they may approach the Associate Dean (Postgraduate) Humanities directly. The Associate Dean (Postgraduate) will consider such applications on a case-by-case basis.

5.7 Continued access to resources for extensions granted under 5.5 or 5.6 above, is granted by:

- (a) the Associate Dean (Postgraduate) Humanities when the extension is for up to four months
- (b) the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic, on the recommendation of the Associate Dean (Postgraduate) Humanities when the extension requested is for more than four months.

## 6 Examination Procedures

6.1 Students should be made aware of the examination process for their dissertation when they begin their research

6.2 Dissertations will be examined in accordance with the relevant regulations for the degree the student is enrolled in.

- 6.3 Where the regulations do not specify the examination process, the dissertation will be examined by two examiners, one of whom may be external to the university.
- 6.4 Examiners will award a percentage and letter grade, in accordance with the University of Otago grading system. Unless otherwise stated in the regulations, students will not normally make revisions except for minor editorial changes recommended by the examiners determined at the discretion of the Convenor.
- 6.5 The student's supervisor is not normally an examiner, but they may submit a report on the student's work for the examiners and external moderator to consider.
- 6.6 When both examiners are internal to the University, the dissertation will be externally moderated in accordance with clause 10(g) *Guidelines for Assessment of Student Performance*. Moderation must be undertaken before grades are confirmed and released to students.
- 6.7 Where there is no significant difference between examiners' grades the Convenor can determine the appropriate middle grade.
- 6.8 A significant difference is a difference in the recommended grades of more than 10% for the dissertation, or a difference that results in a change in the student's Level of Award for the degree (i.e., credit to distinction or vice versa).
- 6.9 Where there is a significant difference between examiners' grades, the Convenor must facilitate an agreed grade with the two examiners. Evidence of the agreement from the supervisors (eg copies of emails) should be attached to the Final Grade form. Through all correspondence, the examiners should not know who the other examiner is.
- 6.10 Where there is a significant difference between examiners and no agreement on a grade can be reached, the Convenor may seek the opinion of a referee who will normally be external to the University or in the case of internally examined dissertations, the advice of the external moderator before determining the grade.
- 6.11 At the completion of the examination process, the student should receive copies of the anonymised reports provided by the examiners. Before the reports are provided to the student, the following details should be removed or redacted:
- Names or institution of the examiner
  - Whether it is the internal or external examiner
  - Grade recommended by the examiner