THESIS AND DISSERTATION GUIDELINES
RESEARCH PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

FOR THE
MASTER OF HEALTH SCIENCES

UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO, CHRISTCHURCH

REVISED August 2020

THESIS AND DISSERTATION GUIDELINES

Note 1: Masters students should familiarise themselves with the Regulations for the Master of Health Sciences as printed in the current University Calendar and consult the University's Handbook for Masters Degrees. www.otago.ac.nz/graduate-research/study/researchmaster

Note 2: Candidates undertaking the 120 points research practicum for MHealSc(NUCL) should contact the Centre for Postgraduate Nursing Studies for guidance relating to the research practicum

1. SCOPE OF THE THESIS OR DISSERTATION

Thesis

The thesis represents 12 months' full-time enrolment or 24 months' part-time enrolment. It should contain the results of a piece of independent research. It is distinguished by the relevance of the arguments to the student's discipline, the quality of the evidence collected and the light the thesis sheds on current disciplinary concerns and interests.

Thesis research commonly involves human participants and requires ethical approval from the appropriate Ethics Committee. Multi-region projects are usually beyond the scope of a master's thesis. Secondary analysis of data, such as a systematic review of appropriate size/scope, is also an appropriate thesis project.

Dissertation

The dissertation represents 6 months' full-time enrolment or 12 months' part-time enrolment. It should demonstrate that the candidate has the ability to carry out research and the ability to carry out constructive criticism, and to report the results of such work clearly, accurately, succinctly and critically. It is not required that the results represent a substantial contribution to knowledge in the field. The scope of a dissertation is usually descriptive or explanatory.

It can be a re-working/reinterpretation of existing material. For example:

- A systematic review of moderate scope/size;
- A narrative review with critique/appraisal based on an understanding of a theoretical/conceptual framework;
- An empirical study involving a simple research design, with human participants;
- A case study;
- Programme evaluation;
- Replication study/secondary analysis of existing data
- Policy analysis.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE THESIS OR DISSERTATION

Thesis

The thesis will demonstrate the student's ability to work independently to:

- master theoretically sophisticated subject matter;
- identify and evaluate critically the findings and discussions in scholarly literature and other forms of information;
- design a well-structured, relevant and integrated plan of research;
- carry out such research using appropriate methods of investigation and analysis;
- analyse, argue and reach conclusions which are informed by independent enquiry and other available information;
- engage in rigorous intellectual analysis, criticism and problem solving

Dissertation

The dissertation will demonstrate the student's ability to work independently to:

- master a high level of understanding of the content and theoretical/conceptual basis of their field of study;
- critically evaluate the production of knowledge, and core theoretical/conceptual elements in their field;
- formulate a research question and design and carry out an appropriate investigation to answer it (on the basis of empirical enquiry or evaluation and critique of existing literature);
- demonstrate understanding of the complexity of the production of knowledge generation of theory, by evaluating strengths and limitation of his/her own research project;
- demonstrate ability to identify, define, analyse and solve problems in a flexible manner;
- synthesise findings of the research with the extant knowledge/conceptual base in the field in order to discuss the implication of the findings;
- build a coherent argument on the basis of existing knowledge theory and reflection and own research findings;
- access, organise and communicate knowledge effectively in writing.

3. TOPIC AND PROTOCOL FOR THESIS OR DISSERTATION

Having identified a possible topic area, Master of Health Sciences students should approach an appropriate supervisor/department for supervision. Before commencing investigation, students are required to submit a research proposal (four to six pages in length) for approval by their supervising department's academic convenor or research committee. This must include the cover sheet (provided at the end of these guidelines), a 100 word abstract and would normally provide information under the headings: Aim, Background, Research Design, Intended Analysis, Ethical Considerations and Timeline.

Students should work with their supervisor to obtain **ethical approval** if appropriate (see item 6).

4. LENGTH OF THE THESIS OR DISSERTATION

Thesis

A Master's thesis would normally be limited to 40,000 words of text, excluding appendices, footnotes and bibliographies.

Dissertation

A Dissertation would normally be limited to 20,000 words of text, excluding appendices, footnotes and bibliographies.

5. FORMAT OF THE THESIS OR DISSERTATION

The following order is usually observed, but an alternative approach may be adopted if it is more suitable to the method of study used.

A. The Preliminaries
1. Title page
2. Abstract
3. Acknowledgements
4. Table of contents
5. List of tables
6. List of illustrations or figures
7. Glossary (can include abbreviations and acronyms)

B. The Text
1. Introductory chapter
2. Main body of the work divided into chapters (which may include Methods, Results, Discussion)
3. Final chapter which usually includes a summary, conclusions and any recommendations.

C. The Reference Section
1. Bibliography or References
2. Appendix or Appendices (if required)

The **abstract** should be no more than 500 words long. It should consist of a statement of the research question, an explanation of the methods and procedures and a summary of the conclusions.

The **introduction** should contain a review of the relevant literature. It may be divided into chapters but should certainly be subdivided into titled sections. It should provide an overview of the broad topic being studied and indicate how the investigation fits into the overall picture. It should conclude with a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the study.

The **methods** section should clearly specify the method and means of analysis in a sufficiently detailed manner to enable anyone else reading your work to repeat your study, should they be so inclined. If it is a quantitative study, name the statistical analysis used and state the level of statistical probability used to determine significance.

The **results** section should summarise what you have discovered. Although this embodies most of the work you will have done during the semester or year, it is often the shortest part of the final report. In other words, it is generally better to display your results in appropriate tables and/or figures and then simply summarise them in the text.

The **discussion** should place your work in context with what has been done before. You should tie together the information, which you have provided in your introduction with the discoveries that you yourself have made as a consequence of your investigations. It should also include a critical interpretation of the meaning and relevance of the results obtained, and a critical review of the study design in relation to the hypothesis being tested. If methodological problems have occurred during the investigation, you may wish to suggest ways in which these might be overcome in a subsequent study.

The **conclusion** should repeat very simply the objectives of your study, the extent to which they have been achieved and what you feel may be drawn from or proposed as a result of your study.

For further information on layout and referencing, see:
www.otago.ac.nz/library/services-for-research

6. SUPERVISION OF THESES AND DISSERTATIONS

(a) A candidate preparing for a Master of Health Sciences thesis or dissertation shall have two supervisors, at least one of whom shall be a member of staff of the University. The student will be attached to the department of their principal supervisor.

(b) The supervisors shall:

- assist the candidate to define the topic of study and develop the hypothesis to be tested
- assist the candidate to develop a plan of study, including methods to be used, data analysis, numbers in each test category, etc.
- assist in identifying likely resource material and persons
- arrange regular meetings to supervise progress
- provide prompt feedback on drafts as the work progresses and prior to the deadline for the final written presentation

(c) **Ethical Approval**

Also, see separate/fuller guidelines under "Ethical Considerations" in the following pages.

The supervisors should give the student guidance on ethical issues - If ethical issues are involved, the proposal would need to go before the appropriate Ethics Committee.

Which Ethics Committee?

There are four Health and Disabilities Ethics Committees (HDECs) using a system of on-line application for ethics review. Information about this process is available at **www.ethics.health.govt.nz**

In most instances, Master's student research will not be dealt with by HDEC. Students/supervisors should first check if HDEC review is required by the Ministry of Health Screening Questionnaire available through **www.ethics.health.govt.nz**. If HDEC review is required, continue with the on-line process.

All research requires ethics review and if HDEC review is not required, an application will need to be submitted for ethical review to one of the two University of Otago Ethics Committees:

University of Otago Human Ethics Committee (UOHEC)

Considers research involving human participants but which falls outside the jurisdiction of the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee (Health) and the HDEC, i.e. it is not considered to be health research.

University of Otago Human Ethics Committee (UOHEC-Health)

Considers health research (observational and intervention studies) involving consumers of health and disability services but deemed exempt from HDEC.

(d) **Departmental Expectations and Resources**

The candidate should establish whether they have access to:

- a study place
- computing and/or laboratory facilities
- photocopying, interloan fees, etc.
- financial assistance towards research expenses

Does the department expect the student to give seminar presentations of work-in-progress?

7. SOURCES OF FUNDING SUPPORT

Most awards for Masters Study are tenable only for the thesis year of the degree.

(a) Each year the University offers a number of Postgraduate Awards to full-time students to support the thesis year. Such an award covers payment of tuition fees and a one year emolument of $15,000. See **www.otago.ac.nz/graduate-research/scholarships**

(b) The Health Research Council offer scholarships to students of Maori Health and Pacific Islands descent to support the thesis year. This award covers payment of tuition fees and a one year emolument of $20,000. Applications open in May and close 5 July. Application forms are available from the Research Office in the Medical Schools or from **www.hrc.govt.nz**.

8. HOW DO I WORK WITH MY SUPERVISOR?

The key to working with your supervisor is communication. It is strongly recommended that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for supervision is completed before the project begins; this process encourages the expectations of both student and supervisor to be explicit from the outset. Negotiating the MOU includes agreeing the responsibilities of supervisor and student, timelines, deadlines, methods of communication and frequency of meetings, etc. A template for the MOU can be obtained from your programme administrator, or from **postgrad.uoc@otago.ac.nz**

9. SUBMISSION OF THESES AND DISSERTATIONS

(a) Candidates must submit **three copies** of the thesis or dissertation for examination as follows:

- In **Christchurch**
  Thesis: to your programme administrator or to Manager, Research Degrees, Christchurch campus
  Dissertation: to your programme administrator or to Amanda Clifford, Co-ordinator Student Experience, Christchurch campus
- - In **Wellington** - to your programme administrator, or to Trevor Williams, Co-ordinator Student Experience, Wellington campus.
- In **Dunedin** - to the student's department

(b) These shall be submitted for examination "softbound." Inquiries concerning binding can be made to the Manager Research Degrees (Christchurch students), to Trevor Williams (Wellington students), to the Bindery Department, University Library (Dunedin students). See (f) below.

(c) For guidance on layout of the thesis or dissertation, see http://otago.libguides.com/thesisinformation

(d) Every copy of a thesis or dissertation submitted must include an abstract, not exceeding 500 words, in a form suitable for publication.

(e) Theses or dissertations shall be in typescript on A4 size paper with a margin for binding of not less than 30 mm. All costs associated with thesis or dissertation presentation are the responsibility of the student.

Declaration Forms - Compulsory

(f) The **softbound** copies submitted for examination should contain the signed University of Otago form *Declaration Concerning Thesis* indicating that the work was entirely that of the student and confirming that it has been checked for plagiarism. Thesis students can find this form at: **www.otago.ac.nz/softbound-thesis**

Christchurch dissertation students can obtain the dissertation form from their programme administrator or from postgrad.uoc@otago.ac.nz

The **final** thesis [after examination] is now required to be submitted as a pdf [from 2020 the University no longer required hardbound copies to be submitted]. It should be submitted with the signed University of Otago Author Declaration form found at: **www.otago.ac.nz/research/graduate/otago025559.pdf**.

Christchurch dissertation students can obtain the dissertation form from your programme administrator or from postgrad.uoc@otago.ac.nz

(g) **Enrolment**
Master's candidates are required to enrol and pay the prescribed fees for each year until the thesis or dissertation is submitted. Candidates must be formally enrolled when they submit. The thesis year runs from January to December.

10. EXAMINATION OF THESES AND DISSERTATIONS

(a) The thesis or dissertation shall be assessed by at least two examiners. For the thesis, at least one examiner shall be external to the University. For the dissertation, the external examiner can be one who is external to the school in which the candidate is enrolled. The candidate's supervisors shall not normally be examiners but may make a report on the work of the candidate for the Examination Convenor to consider.

(b) **Procedure:** The supervisor contacts the proposed examiners informally to gain their consent to act as examiners. The programme administrator completes the necessary forms [for the thesis this is via eVision] and forwards for approval. When the approval is received the programme administrator (on behalf of the convenor) writes formally to the examiners. For the thesis, this process is done via eVision.

(c) Written reports are required from all internal and external examiners, together with a recommendation on the grade. The Exam Convenor calculates and makes the recommendation to the University's Student Records Office on the level of award of the degree.

Note: The grade for the thesis or dissertation is A+, A, A-, B+, etc. The level of award of the degree, which may depend on paper results as well as the thesis or dissertation result, is with distinction, with credit, pass, or fail.

(d) Where examiners cannot agree on a result, the Exam Convenor shall arrive at a decision after consulting a referee who would normally be external to the University.

(e) If the thesis or dissertation is deemed unsatisfactory, the Exam Convenor may, on the recommendation of the examiners, recommend that it be revised and resubmitted by a specified date.

(f) Once the final result has been approved, the University's Student Records Office will inform the student in writing.

(g) For the thesis, once the award of the degree has been approved, from 2020, the University requires one pdf to be submitted together with the Author Declaration form found at: **www.otago.ac.nz/research/graduate/otago025559.pdf**. When the University approves the final submission, they include instructions to the candidate on how to upload the pdf

(h) Re-submission of a thesis or dissertation is not permitted except on the recommendation of the examiners.

(i) Where a thesis or dissertation has been rejected, the author is not precluded from being a candidate on a future occasion for the degree in which he/she has previously failed.

Some Notes about the Examination Procedure

- The examination process usually takes at least three months.

- It is important that thesis students understand that, as a result of the examination of their thesis, revisions may be required - sometimes these are minor; sometimes these are substantial.

- Students should be aware that when they submit their thesis for examination it is read and critically evaluated by at least two examiners. There is no guarantee of the outcome of any examination process. A thesis may pass; it may fail; it may require revision. When you submit your thesis, you and your supervisor may believe that it is ready to be examined. However, submitting the thesis for examination does not mean that you have "completed" your thesis. It means that you reached the point where you believe that your work is ready to be scrutinised by people knowledgeable in your field of study.

- If revisions are required, then this may affect when you are able to graduate. It is important to be realistic about that.

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSION OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL FOR THESIS OR DISSERTATION

UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO, DIVISION OF HEALTH SCIENCES

These guidelines have been written to assist students and their supervisors with the development of a research proposal for an MHealSc thesis or dissertation. All students are required to obtain approval of their research and supervisors **before** the research begins. This includes review of your proposal.

Each programme has a local Programme Administrator and a Programme Academic Leader who will co-ordinate the review of your proposal. This offers a robust peer review process for all proposals for Master's research which will be submitted for examination. Those reviewing your proposal will have different individual research interests and expertise and the collective knowledge will assist to quality-assure all proposals.

General Guidelines

Give your proposed project a title, and put your name, student number, and the date on the first page of the proposal. Proposals do vary in length but should be no more than six A4 pages in length (excluding references). The following formatting rules should be applied:

- Text should be double or one and a half line spaced
- Times New Roman size 12 font
- Please use a header or footer on each page to include your name, and page number.

Note: You should ensure that you reference your proposal appropriately, and include your references list at the end of your proposal.

Structure of the Proposal

Subheadings are suggested below. These can be modified to suit the type of research or approach to enquiry. The questions given below each subheading are intended to provide some guidance about what the reviewers consider in the review process.

Abstract

Has the content of the proposal been accurately summarised in not more than 150 words?

Background or introduction

Is this a reasonable summary of relevant previous research?
Are seminal works in the field cited as appropriate?
Has the student made a case for the merit (scientific and/or clinical) of the proposed research?

Aim or research question or research objectives

Is the research question (or the research objectives) clearly articulated?

Research design or methods

Are the methods appropriate to the question?
Is there sufficient detail of the methods given to be sure that the candidate understands the chosen approach to enquiry?

Intended analysis
Is the approach to analysis clearly articulated, and appropriate to the question? Does the study have sufficient statistical power? What is the minimal sample required in the power analysis?

Please note that many proposals (particularly those from the quantitative paradigm) will require the student to have consulted with a statistical supervisor/advisor before the proposal is submitted for review. Where the supervisor is very experienced in the required statistical requirements of your project, this consultation can be with the supervisor.

Ethical considerations
Has the candidate demonstrated that they will be an ethically responsible researcher? Key elements to consider are:

Whether the candidate has identified which ethics committee the proposal will be sent to.
Whether the candidate has anticipated any ethical issues specific to their proposal.
Whether the candidate has addressed any potential conflict of interest arising from the clinician/researcher interface.

In addition, are there any other issues to consider such as ownership of the work or data, or commercial sensitivity?

Note: see separate written guidelines on ethical considerations. All student research projects require consideration from an Ethics Committee and in most cases, this will be the University of Otago Ethics Committee.

The supervisor will guide the student regarding this.

Timeline
Is the anticipated workload appropriate to the choice of dissertation or thesis?
Is the timeline realistic and does it meet the regulations?

Additional relevant information
In addition to the usual resources available from your supervising department, are there any specific extra resources required to complete the project (if known) and how will these be sourced? For example, will the researcher need to travel to collect data, or is data collection contingent on the purchase of equipment? If applicable, please give brief details only.

It would also be useful to note any limitations to your study, or any obstacles that you may anticipate in your research and how you intend to overcome them.

Is the topic examinable? A highly esoteric or unusual topic/methodology may result in extreme difficulty assigning potential examiners later on.

Submitting the completed research proposal
All proposals should be accompanied by a completed research proposal coversheet, signed by both supervisors.

Once completed and signed off, the cover sheet and research proposal should be submitted to your programme administrator. Once submitted, the proposal will be forwarded to the relevant programme academic leader (or delegated committee) and promptly sent out for review.

For students studying through Christchurch campus:

Postgraduate Nursing research proposals can be submitted to
Administrator Client Services
Centre for Postgraduate Nursing Studies
University of Otago, Christchurch
P O Box 4345
Christchurch 8140
email nursingstudies.uoc@otago.ac.nz

Mental Health research proposals can be submitted to
Administrator Client Services
Department of Psychological Medicine
University of Otago, Christchurch
P O Box 4345
Christchurch 8140
email psychmed.uoc@otago.ac.nz

Musculoskeletal Management and Pain research proposals can be submitted to
Administrator Client Services
Department of Orthopaedic Surgery and Musculoskeletal Medicine
University of Otago, Christchurch
P O Box 4345
Christchurch 8140
email msmandpainstudies.uoc@otago.ac.nz

Health Management research proposals can be submitted to
Administrator Client Services
Department of Population Health
University of Otago, Christchurch
P O Box 4345
Christchurch 8140
email publichealth.christchurch@otago.ac.nz

Other Christchurch campus proposals can be submitted to
Co-ordinator Student Experience
University of Otago, Christchurch
email postgrad.uoc@otago.ac.nz

MHEALSC THESIS, RESEARCH PRACTICUM, OR DISSERTATION: RESEARCH PROPOSAL COVERSHEET

☐ Thesis ☐ Dissertation

Name: _____

Student ID: _____Student cell phone: _____

Student email address: _____

Supervisor(s):
Primary: _____

Secondary: _____

Department(s) in which research will be undertaken (*Please assign relativities if more than one department is involved)*

_____

Title of project: _____

_____

Papers already taken/approved to be taken for Masters:

Paper code	**Paper name**	**Year**	**Grade** (if completed)

Signature: _____
(Supervisor)

Signature: _____
(Supervisor)

Signature: _____
(Candidate)

Date Proposal Submitted: _____

Please forward completed Coversheet and Research Proposal to your Programme Administrator

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN WRITING YOUR RESEARCH PROPOSAL

UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO, DIVISION OF HEALTH SCIENCES

These guidelines have been written to assist students with consideration of ethical issues in research, and to underpin the writing of the research proposal for the Master of Health Sciences.

Ethical reflection on your research and independent ethical review by a research ethics committee are a requirement of the University of Otago and wider research community. Neither is a substitute for the other. Attention to ethical concerns should be a primary concern of all researchers throughout the preparation and execution of the research.

When filling out the "ethical issues" section of the research proposal, students need to think about the ethical implications of their proposed research. The University of Otago requires that research 'is conducted in accordance with the highest ethical standards'. It is also expected that all researchers engaged in research will act ethically with respect to participants, data analysis and storage and publishing. This document provides some areas of ethical concern and some examples. Thinking about these issues now will be an important process for your reflection on ethics in your research and for completion of the application for approval of an ethics committee.

It may be a temptation for students (particularly those who are health professionals), to think that their intentions with regard to their research are honourable in that they wish to improve the wellbeing of their patient group, or that they are able to identify the needs of their clients and therefore to look out for their interests without consultation. But health professionals also undertake research for their own reasons – to publish, obtain degrees, and advance their own profession. There is always potential for the interests of participants to be subsumed to those of the researcher. It is exactly for these reasons that external review is important and that all proposed studies should be assessed by research ethics committees who have no vested interests in the research (World Medical Association, 2000).

General Principles

Consent

Obtaining the consent of a person to participate in research is plainly important. Consent functions as a protection for participants, ensuring that they are never subject to research which they don't want. In the wider context of the development of ethics in health professions over the past 25 years or so, the power to refuse to take part in research, can be seen as one of the most significant expressions of the value of autonomy, the right to take control over what happens to you. Typically, in fulfilment of consent, potential participants need to be adequately informed about what is proposed. This means writing an information sheet for participants which is clear, fully states the purpose of the research, any attendant risks, costs and compensations, as well as what the information is to be used for. Other information may include how data is to be stored, and for how long. Furthermore, participants are generally assured that they can withdraw their consent at any point in the research, without the need to give any reason, and without any penalty or come back.

Students will from time to time want to carry out research on people who are not competent to consent. If consent to research were ethically absolutely necessary, such people could never become participants. But this might restrict the ability of researchers to develop properly evidenced therapies for some groups of clients, or to improve our understandings of these groups. The golden rule in this area is where the same research can effectively be carried out on a competent group; an incompetent group should not be used. But where incompetent people must be used, a highly detailed application to an ethics committee would be necessary and instruction should be sought on proper practice.

Care needs to be taken in assuming that groups of people are incompetent to consent. For example intellectually disabled people may be thought to be unable to give consent but this should not be assumed. It may just mean that they need more time and more effort put in to explaining the research rather than just assuming that they lack the competence to consent. A rule of thumb in this area is that there should be a presumption of competence in all cases. Incompetence must be proved, never assumed.

There are some populations who are rendered vulnerable by wider social attitudes and their reliance on others. This group may include prisoners, elderly people in long stay care and children. For example an elderly person in long term care may feel unable to refuse to participate if he/she believes the care will be affected by a refusal. Particular care needs to be taken with these groups that information is given appropriately and full opportunity given to refuse consent.

Relationship to participants

Does the researcher have a conflicting role in the area to be researched? Examples include: a researcher who is also a health care worker in the centre where patients are to be interviewed, or a researcher (employed as a supervisor) who is planning to interview junior staff. The relationship that exists between the researcher and the participants may make it difficult for participants to refuse to participate. Even though the researcher may not feel that there is an imbalance of power between participants and researcher, this may be viewed differently by participants. This does not mean that the research should not take place, but this issue needs to be identified and considered in the project, and in the application to the appropriate ethics committee.

Occasionally there may be an issue with the nature of the information gained from participants. For example, a staff member (who is also the researcher) may plan to interview methadone users about their criminal activity. In this example the researcher may find that because of their position they do not get full information from participants due to fear of repercussions. However if they did gain information not normally provided during the course of a therapeutic consultation it would become difficult not to use the information for a different purpose or not to pass it on. Let's say that the researcher learns that the methadone user has been selling his prescribed methadone on the streets (commonly grounds for removal from the methadone programme). How difficult will it be for that researcher to keep that information separate from the therapeutic encounter? Will that information change the therapeutic relationship? A researcher needs to consider such potential problems if they are utilising their patient pool as research participants. Perhaps there might be good reason to tap into a patient group in another geographical area.

Occasionally a researcher might find out information during the research that is unexpected and has implications for the health and wellbeing of the participant. For example, while testing a group of people who have had falls recently, a researcher might find that someone has extremely high blood pressure. What obligations might the researcher have to that participant? The researcher should consider eventualities such as this and make provision for them in the proposal. Participants would also need to be made aware of the process for dealing with these kinds of concerns.

Potential for harm

Some research, while it may not actually cause harm, is incapable of achieving its aims, for example because the design of the study is inadequate. Research that cannot meet its own aims is pointless and if the research proceeded then any risk or even inconvenience to the participants would be unacceptable. All research should have carefully defined aims. However, some research is exploratory, seeking a range of views or perceptions of some phenomenon.

Harm from research is usually thought to arise from drug trials or surgical techniques but even low-risk methods such as interviewing can cause distress, e.g. the recollection of emotionally difficult experiences can cause harm in participants. It is important that this possibility is identified. Recognising the possibility of harm is the first step to putting in place safeguards to prevent such harm.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a protection for research participants in that it restricts access to knowledge gained about them as part of or simply during the research. Confidentiality, similar to informed consent, can be seen as respecting autonomy: control over knowledge is similar to control over what one does. The participant is usually assured that only those actually taking data will get to know who the data came from, that the data will be kept hidden away from others, and that no third party (such as a statistician or the reader of a journal) will be able to connect the data with an individual participant. Efforts to protect confidentiality are understood to continue throughout the period of data collection and analysis, presentation and final storage and destruction. (Universities and professional associations may demand a storage period of raw data of a number of years.) Of course researchers are under an obligation to maintain confidentiality indefinitely. Where these safeguards of confidentiality can't be offered, the participants should at least be told, so they can decide if they're happy with whatever level of confidentiality can be offered.

Research involving Maori

Research must be conducted in a way that incorporates the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. It must be sensitive to the needs of Maori and consider and protect their cultural interests. It is for these reasons that appropriate Maori consultation is sought. Ethics committees will expect this. For further information, see: **www.otago.ac.nz/administration/policies/otago003272** or **www.otago.ac.nz/maoricentre**

WHICH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Your supervisor should assist with this aspect.

In 2012 four new Health and Disabilities Ethics Committees (HDECs) came into operation using a system of on-line application for ethics review. Information about this process is available at **www.ethics.health.govt.nz**

A number of changes affected student research conducted for the purposes of an educational qualification at Master's level. In most instances, student research is no longer dealt with by HDEC. Students/supervisors should first check if HDEC review is required by the Ministry of Health Screening Questionnaire available through **www.ethics.health.govt.nz**. If HDEC review is required, continue with the on-line process.

All research requires ethics review and if HDEC review if not required, an application will need to be submitted for ethical review to one of the two University of Otago Ethics Committees:

University of Otago Human Ethics Committee (UOHEC)

Considers research involving human participants but which falls outside the jurisdiction of the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee (Health) and the HDEC, i.e. it is not considered to be health research.

University of Otago Human Ethics Committee (UOHEC-Health)

Considers health research (observational and intervention studies) involving consumers of health and disability services but deemed exempt from HDEC.

If your research involves the use of animals, approval should be sought from the University Animal Ethics Committee.

A submission to any University of Otago Ethics Committee still requires the lead applicant to be an academic staff member of the University of Otago. Finally, the candidate/supervisor may still need to obtain locality authorisation when the research takes place in, or involves organisations (e.g. DHBs). These organisations have their own approval process. Seek advice from your supervisor regarding this.

BIOSTATISTICS AND COMPUTATIONAL BIOLOGY CONSULTANCY

www.otago.ac.nz/christchurch/research/biostatistics

Consultancy involves advice on study design, methodology, computer software, data analysis and preparation, and revision of articles and reports. A brief overview of biostatistical guidelines for research projects: design, analysis and data management can be found on the following page:

www.otago.ac.nz/christchurch/research/biostatistics/guidelines/otago011947

The University of Otago, Christchurch (UOC) campus biostatisticians are Dr John Pearson and Dr Jonathan Williman (Biostatistics and Computational Biology Unit, Department of Population Health).

Research students who will require biostatistical advice are encouraged to consult a biostatistician early.

Initial Appointment:

The first appointment must be with the primary supervisor (other supervisors are also welcome) and the student.

The supervisor or student should make contact with Amanda Clifford, Co-ordinator Student Experience, Christchurch campus [postgrad.uoc@otago.ac.nz); Amanda will contact the biostatisticians to find out which statistician will see them; Amanda will then negotiate an appointment time with access to their electronic diaries.

Allocation of a student to a biostatistician will depend on the current workload of the biostatisticians and the types of statistics likely to be used in the thesis, in as much as this can be ascertained from the information available.

Information required for allocation to a biostatistician and the first appointment is:

- Student name
- Supervisors' names
- Department(s)
- Programme in which enrolled
- Title/subject area of research
- Possible times to meet

The statisticians would like students to bring to the initial meeting anything they have written to date relating to their research proposal and, preferably, would like this emailed prior to the meeting.

Repeat Appointments

Sometimes another appointment will have been set up at the last meeting. If not, then the student/supervisor can contact Amanda Clifford who will be able to negotiate an appointment time via her access to John and Jonathan's diaries.

Contact person for an appointment with the Christchurch biostatisticians

Co-ordinator, Student Experience
University of Otago, Christchurch
Email: postgrad.uoc@otago.ac.nz

GUIDELINES FOR TEMPORARY DEFERRAL OF MASTER'S THESIS STUDY

Guidelines to the submission of applications for deferral (temporary withdrawal) from Master's thesis study

- Deferral may also be called temporary withdrawal
- All applications must be sought in advance, or at the time of absences
- Retrospective applications for deferral will only be considered in exceptional circumstances
- Students need to go to their eVision portal to apply for deferral/withdrawal
- Once they have applied via eVision, an auto-alert comes to the departmental administrator and a form is produced which is signed off at departmental level, forwarded Manager, Research Degrees (for Christchurch campus applications) and then it is submitted to the PVC Health Sciences for approval.

Principles for the consideration of application for deferral (temporary withdrawals) from Master's study

1. Reason(s) for deferral (temporary withdrawal)
    - Deferral exists to allow short periods of absence from Master's research. A short period is defined as not less than 2 months and not usually more than 12 months in the first instance
    - Acceptable supporting evidence is expected to accompany applications to demonstrate that the period of absence is due to circumstances beyond the student's control. Evidence may include:
        - Letter from registered doctor or health practitioner
        - Supporting statement from supervisor or employer
    - Deferral is not intended to cover periods of holiday, or sick leave of less than 2 months' duration
    - The Convenor may, in some circumstances, consider and extension to the duration of a student's programme to be more appropriate than a period of deferral [but this involves extra enrolment/fees].

2. Duration of the frequency of deferral (temporary withdrawal)
    - Except in exceptional circumstances, the Division of Health Sciences would not normally approve more than two applications for deferral
    - Deferral would not normally exceed 18 months of time in total.

3. Progress to date and expectations of progress on resumption of study:
    - If reasonable progress has been made over the time the student has already been enrolled for Master's research, then an application for deferral will be considered.
    - If a student has not made reasonable progress on their Master's research, then it may be recommended that they permanently withdraw from the programme, rather than defer.
    - The supervisors' signatures on the application form indicate their agreement with the summary of progress made to date, and the estimate of the amount of work yet to complete.

Recommendations on return to study

- Student and supervisors are encouraged to meet at the end of a period of deferral to review progress and to agree what remains to be done. If the student and supervisors have previously completed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) then it would be appropriate for this to be revised at the meeting.