

SPECIFICATIONS FOR RESEARCH DISSERTATIONS



1. Background

The expectations of dissertations/ directed research projects/ independent study projects (from now on, called dissertations) have varied greatly across the university. Dissertations have sometime been treated as par with master's theses in their expectations, supervision and assessment. Therefore, the introduction of a common and robust guideline specifying the range of allowable requirements for preparation, supervision and assessment of dissertations has become crucial in order to ensure the quality, academic rigor and integrity of the university's academic programs are uncompromised.

2. Interpretations

Dissertations: In many university courses, there may be an assessed subject that is student-initiated and student-directed. Depending on the course, this subject may be variously known as directed research project, independent research project, dissertation, or simply as project. The outcome of this component may be a document, product, portfolio, software or a combination of some of these. For the purpose of this guideline, "dissertation" will be used to refer to any subject with less than 120 credit points. The dissertation shall normally be offered in the final year of an undergraduate course or in a postgraduate course.

Research Theses: Higher Degrees research programs involving at least one year or longer (i.e. minimum of one year research masters or PhD, and 120 credit points) will normally lead to 'research theses'. At MNU research theses are governed by two documents: (i) 'Doctor of Philosophy Course Rules' and (ii) Specifications for Higher Degrees Theses, both approved by Higher Degrees Committee and publicly available.

Viva: Viva voce (*Latin: with living voice*) or public oral defence (outlined in PhD Rule document) is a prescribed part of the examination process ONLY for Higher Degrees (research Masters or PhD) programs. For Masters theses, viva will be optional and for PhD viva is essential. A viva shall never be conducted publicly for a dissertation.

3. Purpose Statement

The aim of this broad guideline is to specify the minimum and maximum requirements that the faculties/centres should fulfil in the preparation, supervision and assessment of dissertations.

The guideline should apply to dissertations and directed research modules with credit points less than 120 credit points, which are offered in undergraduate and postgraduate programs. This will typically cover one semester long research subjects such as minor research, action research, directed research and dissertations.

In instances where this broad guideline does not fit particular objectives of a subject, individual faculties/centres can make variations more suited to the needs of a particular subject or discipline. However, such faculty-level amendments must not compromise the overall spirit of this general guideline. Faculty-level variations of this guideline should be approved by a faculty-based academic review committee prior to the commencement of the courses which may be governed by it. It is mandatory to publish all such policies and made publicly available.

4. Some Guiding Principles for Dissertations

4.1.Preparation

4.1.1 The faculties/centers are responsible for providing students with the relevant subject outlines including any specific requirements such as timelines, rules and regulations relevant to the subject, in the first meeting with students. Supervisor(s) must be allocated at the same time, where applicable.

4.1.2 For major dissertations (i.e. worth 60 credit points), it is the responsibility of the students to select the appropriate format of dissertations and finalize the research title, in consultation with the supervisor. For full time students, a research proposal (with the final research title) must be submitted as per the specifications of the subject outline, no later than Week 4.

4.2.Format and Word Length

4.2.1 The student should consult the subject lecturer in relation to the format and word length and follow any specific guidelines or rules related to the academic program, discipline or degree.

- 4.2.2 The word limit for dissertations, projects, directed research and such other documents shall be part thereof depending on the credit points and must be within 8000-20,000 words. This applies to dissertations written in all languages including Dhivehi and Arabic. Under no circumstances should a dissertation exceed 20,000 words excluding figures, tables, maps, reference and appendices nor be less than 8000 words.
- 4.2.3 Faculties and Centers may specify acceptable word range within the above limits taking into consideration the nature of discipline and expected outcomes. Some dissertations may constitute a report on a product, the latter being the main outcome the work. In these instances the dissertation will be shorter than for dissertations of social sciences. Dissertations are submitted usually printed in 12 point Times Roman font with one-and-a-half line spacing. At nearly 350 words per page, 20,000 words should be less than 60 pages.

4.3. Supervision and Examinations

- 4.3.1 Dissertations/directed research subjects would normally be both supervised and assessed by the respective subject lecturer (s) using detailed marking criteria (rubric) provided to the student with the subject outline.
- 4.3.2 Students should normally submit their research report or dissertations for examination as per the procedure and deadline stipulated in the subject outline.
- 4.3.3 There should be no public viva for a dissertation. However, the faculties/centers may encourage students to present their research at a faculty based seminar before submission of the final report for examination. This is only to give the student the opportunity to receive feedback from fellow students and other researchers to improve the report.
- 4.3.4 In cases where an oral examination has been prescribed in subject outline, a faculty based viva is allowed as per detailed written guidelines and assessment criteria approved by relevant faculty based academic committee.
- 4.3.5 All dissertations with credit points between 60 and 120 will be marked by the lecturer/supervisor and a second marker. Lecturer/supervisor's marks will contribute to 50% and second marker's marks will contribute to 50% of the final grade. For full semester (60-credit point), major dissertations, after examination of the dissertation, the student

normally receives the examiner's report and the marked dissertation. In cases where the dissertation gets 'a Pass with no revisions, or minor revisions', the student will be given 2 weeks to address the issues and resubmit to the supervisor for finalization of the result. Faculty based academic review committee (ARC) will need to approve the final grade.

- 4.3.6 There will be no re-submission allowed in case of a failed grade for dissertations been recommended by the faculty ARC. However, the student may repeat the dissertation as per the normal policy concerning repeating subjects, whereby the student may choose a new area of research or continue on the same research title but with a new supervisor.
- 4.3.7 If the final grade of a major dissertation, worth 60 credit points, received a grade less than 50 or greater than 85, prior to ARC decision, the dissertation should be re-evaluated by a second examiner assigned by the Dean of the faculty. However, this process is not considered a re-examination of the dissertation report.
- 4.3.8 The faculty/center may include additional assessment components in research related subjects (e.g. portfolios and journals, research proposals, class presentations etc.), in addition to the final research report. These are to be marked by the subject lecturer or supervisor and to be combined with the mark for dissertation towards determination of the final grade.
- 4.3.9 Should a viva or oral exam be included as part of the assessment, it must be specified in the subject outline as part of the assessment. Viva should generally follow the general guideline prescribed for Higher Degrees given in the 'Doctor of Philosophy Course Rules' document but must not be a public defense.

Approved by: Academic Senate
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