Higher Degree by Research Students

Candidature Assessment
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Introduction
The UTS Framework for Doctoral Education is a University-wide initiative involving Faculties, Research Centres and the Graduate Research School. It is a key component of the UTS Research Strategy aiming to improve the research education experience of our students and to help position UTS as a leader in researcher development.

Aim
To provide a structured approach for higher degree research students to assist them in building skills and becoming quality researchers who can contribute to their research community.

Application
This policy applies to all higher degree research students in the following course codes:

- C02031 – Doctor of Philosophy (hence forward, PhD)
- C02030 – Doctor of Philosophy in Mathematical Sciences (hence forward, PhD)
- C03029 – Master of Science (by Research) (hence forward, MSc)
- C03026 – Master of Science in Mathematical Sciences (by Research) (hence forward, MSc)

Definitions
In this document the following definitions apply:

- ‘Student’ is any UTS student enrolled in one of the higher degrees by research offered by the Faculty of Science.
- ‘Supervising Panel’ indicates members of the academic or research staff internal to the Faculty of Science plus any academic or research staff from external institutions as required to the project. One of the internal members of the supervising panel is the principal supervisor. The principal supervisor fulfils the Faculty and University Graduate School requirements for category 1 supervisor.
- ‘Principal Supervisor’ is the member of the supervising panel who has the responsibility for the academic progression of the student at UTS. This is operationally defined as the academic member of staff of the Faculty of Science who signs all documentation related to the student, including, for example, progress reviews and requests for leave of absence.
- ‘Doctoral Study Plan’, hence forward referred to as DSP, is the plan of activities that the student will undertake in each stage of candidature.
Overview of assessment requirements

Under normal circumstances with an average rate of progress, the ‘stage of candidature’ is approximately equal to the time equivalent period of candidature as follows:

**PhD** - Stage 1 covers year 1 of candidature; Stage 2 covers year 2 of candidature; Stage 3 covers year 3 (or part-time equivalent).

**MSc** – Stages 1 and 2 cover year 1 of candidature; Stage 3 covers year 2 (or part-time equivalent).

Ideally, this time corresponds to that expected for the student to complete the activities illustrated in each stage of the DSP. In educational terms, Stage 1 is when introductory/preparatory activities are undertaken; Stage 2 is the intermediate period when substantial progress is expected in the project, and the student becomes capable of working independently; Stage 3 concludes the student’s preparation, with the research project nearly completed and the student able to be recognised as a researcher by both internal and external professional communities. Where the level of achievement is not commensurate to that expected or planned, the stage is not considered to be completed and will therefore continue until satisfactory completion.

A summary of the specific assessment requirements at each stage is as follows:

**Stage 1**
- Submission and review of Stage 1 DSP
- Submission of two Faculty semester progress reviews (one per semester)
- Completion of written submission

**Stage 2**
- Submission and review of Stage 2 DSP
- Submission of two Faculty semester progress reviews (one per semester)
- Presentation of progress seminar

**Stage 3**
- Submission and review of Stage 3 DSP
- Submission of two Faculty semester progress reviews (one per semester)
- Presentation of final seminar
- Thesis submission

**A. Doctoral Study Plan (DSP)**

Each student and the supervising panel will prepare DSPs designed to:

a. meet the student's career and development goals; and
b. ensure a consistent and sustainable academic progression leading to submission of the research thesis within the maximum course duration relevant to the degree in which the student is enrolled.

The contents of the DSP will take account of the knowledge and skills needs of the student at the different stages of their candidature.
A DSP must be prepared at the beginning of each stage of candidature. It must be reviewed at the end of each stage to:

a. verify that the desired outcomes have been reached via the stated activities; and
b. build consistently with the achieved outcomes, the activities for the next stage of candidature.

A DSP is created and submitted online within RMENet according to the Graduate Research School guidelines available at:
http://www.uts.edu.au/current-students/science/higher-degree-research/candidature-assessment

The Graduate Research School provides a list of activities that may be used as examples to support the elements of the three stages of a DSP. Students in consultation with their supervisors may select activities from this list for inclusion in their DSP. Alternatively, students, in consultation with their supervisors, may undertake other suitable activities e.g. Faculty organised activities and workshops, or external activities which support their academic and professional development. The Faculty of Science encourages publication of work to be included as an activity in the DSPs as the communication of science to peers is one of the aspects in which candidates must be trained. The DSP will be structured in a manner that ensures a balanced range of experiences for the student, while aiming at closing gaps in knowledge/skills and building on each student's existing strengths. The DSPs will be assessed by the principal supervisor and the Faculty of Science Responsible Academic Officer (RAO) (the Director for Higher Degree Research Programs or appointee) at the end of each stage.

B. Faculty semester progress reviews
Each semester, a progress review form will be forwarded to the student for completion. This form provides an opportunity for both the student and supervisor to assess whether progress has been as planned for the semester. The Faculty RAO will determine whether the student project performance is satisfactory for the semester. This report also provides the student and supervisor to provide written evidence of any matters that may be the cause of delays in the project.

C. Stage 1 Written Assessment
The written submission must consist of a report up to 10000 words containing the following:

1. Definition of the research questions, with reference to the original research proposal and hypotheses to be tested.
2. Critical assessment of the literature used to provide background information to interpret the data and to frame the hypotheses tested.
3. Development of the research methodology, stressing how it addresses the research questions.
4. Any data/observations to date and how these are relevant to the hypotheses to be tested.
5. Problems or potential problems, and how these are to be managed.
6. A plan and timetable for Stage 2 of the project.

The report may contain figures and tables.
The student, in consultation with the supervising panel, has the freedom to choose to write their critical literature assessment as a stand-alone thesis chapter. If the student has published a review paper as first author, this can be acknowledged as a reference for the literature assessment and attached to the written submission. The student must state clearly the percentage contribution of each author of the published review. The student’s contribution to the review must be greater than 60% if there are more than two authors and at least 75% if only two authors. In referring to the review (submitted or published) the student must add any new relevant literature published since, and clearly place the review in the context of the project.

The due date for the written submission will be communicated to the student and supervisor with a minimum of 3 month notice.

The written assessment will be examined by two independent examiners appointed by the RAO. Registered supervisors are eligible for appointment as examiners.

The result of the assessment will be either satisfactory or unsatisfactory based on the written reports provided by the examiners. An unsatisfactory assessment of the written assessment will result in a recommendation for resubmission and reassessment of the report within 6 months.

D. Stage 2 Seminar

During Stage 2, the student is required to present an oral presentation of 30–40 minutes duration addressing the following:

1. Aims of the research
2. Overview of the literature
3. Methodology and experimental design
4. Progress to date and results
5. Health and safety issues and/or ethical issues
6. Timeline for completion

The presentation will be followed by a question and answer session.

The presentation will be assessed by a panel comprised of three independent experts. Registered supervisors are eligible for appointment to the panel. The panel will determine whether the seminar indicates a satisfactory performance by the student. If required, the panel will have an opportunity to convene a feedback session with the student in the absence of the general audience on completion of the seminar where further discussion is required.

The Faculty RAO will determine whether the Stage 2 assessment seminar is satisfactory based on the written reports of the assessment panel. Where this assessment is deemed as unsatisfactory, the RAO will convene a meeting with the student and the principal supervisor determine a recommendation for further work in order to attain a satisfactory assessment outcome.

The date of the presentation will be advised with a minimum of 3 months notification.
E. Stage 3 Seminar
During Stage 3, the student is required to present an oral presentation of 30–40 minutes duration providing an overview of the project prior to thesis submission.

The presentation will be followed by a question and answer session.

The presentation will be assessed by a panel comprised of three independent experts. Registered supervisors are eligible for appointment to the panel. The panel will determine whether the seminar indicates a satisfactory performance by the student.

The Faculty RAO will determine whether the Stage 3 seminar is satisfactory based on the written reports of the assessment panel. Where this assessment is deemed as unsatisfactory, the RAO will convene a meeting with the student and the principal supervisor determine a recommendation for further work in order to attain a satisfactory assessment outcome.

The date of the presentation will be advised following consultation with the student and principal supervisor.

F. Satisfactory performance
To maintain a satisfactory performance, the student must be awarded ‘satisfactory’ for all assessment components at each stage of candidature (including DSP reviews, semester progress reviews and relevant assessment task of stage).

A satisfactory assessment will result in confirmation of candidature, and the student progresses to the next stage.

An unsatisfactory assessment will result in either:

a. A recommendation for reassessment of candidature within 6 months with a recommendation for additional work to be completed by the student; or
b. A recommendation for the student to exit the doctoral programme and fulfil the requirements for completion of a MSc where relevant; or
c. Discontinuation of candidature.

G. Upgrade from MSc to PhD
Students enrolled in the MSc programme can apply to upgrade their candidature to the PhD programme at any time up to the end of Stage 2 of PhD equivalence. Candidates will be required to complete all relevant assessments at PhD level. This means if the application is made after completion of the MSc Stage 1 or Stage 2 assessment, they will be required to be reassessed at a PhD level. In addition to the normal assessment requirements, the upgrade assessment must specifically address the additional components being undertaken to perform at PhD level. This would normally include higher level skills, advanced knowledge and skills as well as modification to the research project.

Specific information about the upgrade process is provided at:
https://staff.uts.edu.au/howdoi/Pages/Researching/Research%20students/Research%20student%20administration/upgrade-or-downgrade-my-degree.aspx
H. Thesis submission
Once the student has successfully completed Stage 3, they will be permitted to submit a thesis for examination.

Details on the process for thesis submission are provided at: