Departmental Guidelines for Postgraduate Thesis Students

7 November 2008

Welcome to the Department of Computer Science and Software Engineering research community. These guidelines address some important aspects of your work which take place at department level. These include arranging a research project and supervisor, monitoring your progress, assessing your work and involving you in the research community.

These guidelines may be updated from time to time. The latest version may be found at: http://www.cosc.canterbury.ac.nz/teaching/4thyear/postgrad_guide.pdf

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the relevant department and university documents including the University Calendar:
http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/acad/calendar/index.shtml

A number of relevant university policy documents are available at:
 http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/acad/phdtheses.shtml
and department policies are available from http://www.cosc.canterbury.ac.nz

If you have any queries about these guidelines, please discuss them with your supervisor, the postgraduate coordinator or HOD.

Admission and Research Proposal

1. Students enrolled in Master Thesis and Ph.D. studies begin by working on a research proposal. It is recommended that students start working on their research proposals even before officially enrolling in the program. Every student should email the departmental postgraduate studies coordinator at the time of enrolment, specifying the likely area of research and the name of the potential supervisor.

    Before an academic member of staff agrees to become a potential supervisor of a student, he/she may administer an exam on the relevant topics to judge the potential of the student to conduct research on the chosen topic. The exam will be used only in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the potential supervisor. The exams can be written or oral. If an oral exam is conducted, a representative of the Postgraduate (PG) Committee should be present.

    The research proposal should contain a research plan with a tentative schedule of tasks planned by the student. Master Thesis students have two months to complete their proposal (four months for part-time students), while PhD students need to submit their proposal within six months of enrolling. A typical length of full-time PhD studies is three years. Typically, full-time Master projects are 16 months long.

Every project proposal will be checked in TurnItIn. When submitting project proposals, thesis students will be asked to sign the following declaration:

"I hereby declare that his proposal is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a significant extent has been accepted for any degree of an institution of higher learning."

2. The proposal[1] for a Master Thesis research project is reviewed by the Departmental PG Committee, and is approved by the Faculty Dean. If approved, the Committee will then nominate supervisors for the M.Sc. project.

3. *Four months after the start of their studies, PhD students will be asked to submit a draft of the proposal to the PG committee. Selected members of this committee plus additional academics will then interview the student, and provide feedback on the project/proposal. When necessary, the interview might result in a recommendation that the student attends a course at UC or researches a particular area.*

4. The research proposal[1] for a Ph.D. is approved by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies based on recommendations made by the Departmental PG Committee and Head of Department. A supervisory team is then appointed by the Dean on recommendations made by the Departmental PG Committee and the Head of Department.

    The senior supervisor for Master Thesis or a PhD student must be a continuing member of staff from CSSE. This also applies in the case of students who are jointly supervised by CSSE and other departments (such as Electrical & Computer Engineering), research centres (such as the HIT Lab) or organizations outside the University. At least one member of the supervisory team must have experience in supervising students at the appropriate level (Master or PhD). For MSc students, two members of the supervisory team must be continuing academics from the University of Canterbury, while additional members might be adjunct fellows or industry collaborators.

Progress Reports

5. The Departmental PG Committee monitors progress in Master Thesis and Ph.D. studies. Master Thesis and Ph.D. students should produce progress reports every six months for both the Computer Science and Software Engineering department and the University. Registry will remind PhD students when progress reports are required for the University. The progress report should be at least three pages long, and should describe work done since the previous report, highlighting achievements and any difficulties. The report should also contain a research plan with a tentative schedule of future tasks, and any papers published by the students should be attached. Progress report forms are available from the Departmental PG Committee. The Committee will not normally approve research reports[2] if the student has not given a required seminar (see Regulation 6).

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[1] When reviewing research proposals, Research Committee may consult external experts.
[2] When reviewing progress reports, Research Committee may consult external experts.

The supervisor may administer an exam before a progress report is due to get a better evaluation of the potential of the student to conduct research and progress in the chosen area. The exam will be used only in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the potential supervisor. The exams can be written or oral. If an oral exam is conducted, a representative of the PG committee should be present.

In addition to formal progress reports, all supervisors should email informal extra progress reports to the Chair of the PG committee in the first week of the first term and the first week of the fourth term FOR ALL students (irrespective of full time, part time, Master, PhD etc). The informal report should state either that:

a)   they have not faced any problems affecting the progress of the student OR
b)   they have encountered problem(s), a brief description of the problem(s) and ways they intend to overcome the problem(s).

If serious problems persist, close monitoring will occur, which might involve meetings with the students and the supervisory team, and/or extra progress reports. Information about related activities will be added to the student's files.

Study

6. Master Thesis and Ph.D. students continue studies under the direct guidance of their supervisor(s), following departmental and university guidelines and rules regarding progress reports, examination of theses, etc.

    Master Thesis and Ph.D. students are expected to cooperate with their supervisors and observe mutually agreed schedules of study, timetables for consultations, etc. If a student is dissatisfied with the supervisors, the problem may be resolved in consultation with the Head of Department, members of the Departmental PG Committee, or other members of the academic staff.

    All other standard university regulations for resolving disputes between students and academic staff remain applicable.

7. During the course of your study you may have the opportunity to undertake employment, consulting or industry placement. Such activities may impair your ability to complete your thesis work satisfactorily. Before undertaking such activities, you should discuss with your supervisors the possibility of switching to part-time study, or suspending your enrolment for a period. It may be the case that you will be able to derive some academic benefit from an industry-related activity (e.g. gathering data or performing a case study). Before undertaking any such external activity you should write a brief amendment to your research proposal explaining the academic relevance, if any, whether a suspension of part-time enrolment is planned, and giving your revised schedule for your thesis work up to the next progress report due date. This should be forwarded, along with your supervisors' comments, to the postgraduate studies coordinator before you begin the employment or placement.

8. A Master Thesis student may apply to have his/her Master study converted to PhD study, in accordance with MSc regulation 17 of the University calendar. In determining the level of support for such applications, factors such as reviews of papers submitted for important international conferences or journals, or similar

evidence, will be taken into account. If the transfer is approved, the same procedure as with registration of a new PhD student has to be followed, including a new agreement between the PhD student and his/her senior supervisor and nomination of a (new) supervisory team.

9. Students are encouraged to publish the results of their research. The author or co-authors of any such publication should be decided according to the University's Guidelines on Collaborative Research. In the case of a publication in which a student is the sole author, the author's affiliation with the university may be mentioned only if the student's supervisor or the Departmental PG Committee approves the publication.

   Evidence of high quality of publications, as documented by reviews of papers submitted to journals or conferences can be taken into account when considering a Master degree with Honours or Distinction.

   Students are encouraged to discuss conference travel funding with their supervisors, and explore alternative sources of funding, such as Royal Society of New Zealand Travel Grants. Information on a number of sources is available at http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/scholarships/. Students who receive a grant-in-aid to attend a conference are expected to provide a conference report to their supervisor within 2 weeks after the conference ends. These reports are made available at: http://www.cosc.canterbury.ac.nz/research/reports/confreports/

Seminars

10. A Master Thesis or Ph.D. student (irrespective of full-time or part-time status) must present his/her research results to the department at least once a year. This enables the department to assess the current project status and provide critical input. From 2005, Master Thesis and PhD students will normally be presenting their research results at the departmental postgraduate conference. The last seminar presentation should summarise the final results of the Master or PhD research project (see Regulation 9).

11. Master Thesis and Ph.D. students are expected to attend departmental seminars and participate in other research-related activities at the departmental and university level. The departmental research seminars serve as a forum for presenting current research results, and for receiving feedback from academics and other fellow students. In some cases the students may be advised by their supervisor(s) to attend lectures and tutorials/laboratories of selected papers.

Final Stage of Studies (when the thesis is ready)

12. Master Thesis students present their final results during a departmental seminar scheduled normally not more than three months before the thesis is submitted and not later than three months after submission. PhD students present their final results during a departmental seminar which is normally scheduled a few hours before the oral examination. The senior supervisor is responsible for making sure that the seminar[3] is given.

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[3] The final seminar may also be presented during the departmental postgraduate conference, if timing is appropriate.

13. If an oral examination is required (see the University Master and Ph.D. regulations), the composition of the examination committee will be decided by the Head of Department in consultation with the Departmental PG Committee and the senior supervisor.

14. In addition to the two copies of the thesis required by the Registry, each graduate should send an electronic copy of his/her thesis to the senior supervisor.

15. In case of excellent results of Ph.D. research, as documented by the thesis and publications in high quality journals and proceedings of renowned conferences, on the recommendation of the examination committee and in consultation with PG Committee, the HoD may recommend a PhD thesis to be added to the Dean's list. This distinction is made on the basis of the submitted thesis only.