



Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation Guidelines

Introduction

The Department of International Relations runs a Ph.D. by research programme. The doctorate is the highest degree awarded in academia that signifies highest level of competence in a particular field of study. Applicants may submit their application form, together with a comprehensive research proposal outlining the proposed project, including research sources and materials, at any time of the year. Before formally submitting an application prospective candidates are advised to consult the Head of the Department of International Relations, Dr. Carmen Sammut, who will direct them to a member of the academic staff who will advise them on how to prepare the application.

Proposals for research leading to Ph.D. degree are accepted when they are related to the main areas of expertise within the Department. Current research interests within the Department and Guidelines regarding the required Ph.D. proposal are available online.

Every Ph.D. candidate in the Department of International Relations is required to successfully complete and submit a dissertation to qualify for degree conferral. This document presents Guidelines for the Ph.D. Dissertation. It neither replaces nor amends the University of Malta general regulations governing the Ph.D. degree, which all applicants must fully comply with. The normal minimum entrance requirement is an upper second class Honours or Master's degree relevant to the proposed area of study from a recognised higher education institution. Experience of academic research in the previous four years is necessary, normally in the form of either an undergraduate degree with a research element in the final year, or work-related experience with evidence through research undertaking reports.

Further information regarding University of Malta Ph.D. Regulations and requirements is available online. For information regarding admissions, please contact Ms Marie Claire Finger, Secretary to the Faculty of Arts Doctoral Committee. For queries on the Ph.D. research programme of the Department of International Relations please contact Dr. Carmen Sammut, Head, or Ms Marie Claire Finger, Secretary to the Faculty of Arts Doctoral Committee.

Definition

A Ph.D. is a Doctorate of Philosophy, a prestigious qualification. It is important for employment and career considerations as well as for name recognition. Over a four-year period of full-time study (eight years part time) the candidate investigates a research topic and develop his/her research skills, while making own arguments and reach own conclusions, culminating in the completion, submission and defence via an oral examination of a 100,000-word doctoral dissertation.

The dissertation is not the thesis. Ph.D. degree requires the writing of a dissertation that documents the work used to set forth proof of the candidate's own claim, conjecture, hypothesis, or thesis. An effective thesis in the field of International Relations should generally answer the 'how,' 'what,' or 'why.' It must be significant and expressive in originality and critical judgement, contribute to the present understanding and extend the state of scientific knowledge in that particular academic subject. It must be worthy of publication.

The dissertation is a formal, stylized document used to describe, in detail, the propositions, arguments, analyses, and conclusions of the candidate. It must demonstrate academic excellence and thirst for knowledge with evidence of the ability to undertake further research without supervision. The dissertation must be clear and complete, appearing exhaustively comprehensive in research and literature review on the key question. The statements in the dissertation must relate to the thesis, be common knowledge, supported by citation to technical literature, or else original results proved by the candidate.

Sources of information and data that the writer has consulted as well as the ones from which it was quoted have to be accurately cited with properly constructed bibliography and references list. Considerable importance is attached to matters of presentation of the Ph.D. dissertation as a piece of advanced academic work. Adherence to proper academic writing and presentation style is mandatory and is taken into consideration when assessing the work submitted, and candidates are urged to familiarize themselves with it early in the course of writing.

The Department of International Relations

Ph.D. candidates in the field of International Relations face the inevitable challenge of exploring what can feel like an overwhelming area of research. Planning is important and self-discipline is needed for doing it well, and completion on time. The writing of the dissertation remains, by definition, a self-directed process in terms of management, usually

with no regular discussions with classmates, effectively no reading assignments and no weekly deadlines from tutors and supervisors.

The Department of International Relations assists in formulating a valid Statement of Question / Statement of Problem / Statement of Project Objective that expresses the candidate's own thoughts and ideas. Once the candidate has a statement of thesis, he/she begins to develop the dissertation. The supervisor/tutor will assist in gradually working toward a sharper definition of the analytical and conceptual framework of the thesis.

The Department provides doctoral training programme with a range of courses and workshops that offer the opportunity for Ph.D. candidates to develop personal and professional skills and acquire transferable know-how that will be invaluable in subsequent career. The research techniques and methodologies will enable candidates to make a direct contribution to the advancement of knowledge in his/her particular subject area.

The Department holds Ph.D. seminars to assist candidates in the preparation of their work. This form of academic instruction would allow each candidate to present an overview of the status of his/her research in front of other candidates and members of the Department. It is very useful in offering feedbacks, advice and criticism, and adding value with different insights and points of view.

The research background and the skills gained through the doctoral degree are essential within academia and learning centres or in research-intensive occupations in industry. They are also very useful in a variety of other fields. They signal to employers the possession of appropriate training in methodology with requisite analytical skills to carry out rigorous research, and give certain advantages in the job market.

Ethical Considerations

The set of guidelines drawn up by the Research Ethics Committee appointed by the University Senate in June 2002 states that: Each university member, student or member of staff, undertaking research involving human subjects will fill in a proposal form and present it for approval to the faculty research ethics committee. The form clearly identifies the person taking responsibility for the research and for compliance with the regulations and with Data Protection legislation. These guidelines first published in 2004 were reviewed and slightly amended by Senate in September 2007. For a summary and full details of the guidelines, and to download the proposal form, itself revised in September 2007, <http://www.um.edu.mt/urec/gpropform>

Structure of Ph.D. Dissertation

The Structure is very important. It plays a central role in making the thesis understandable. The lay out and the sequence of the chapters should lead the reader to the places in the text where answers can be found to the following questions:

- What is the purpose of the thesis?
- What is known already about the subject-area?
- How does the research methodology compare to other work in the subject-area?
- What are the original findings?
- What is their wider significance in the field of International Relations?
- What has been achieved in terms of the objectives?
- Are there any recommendations?

Each dissertation is often arranged in the following order:

- Title Page
- Copyright Page (optional)
- Abstract
- Acknowledgment page (optional)
- Preface (optional)
- List of abbreviations (optional)
- Glossary (optional)
- Nomenclature (optional)
- Dedication (optional)
- Table of Contents
- Lists of Tables, Illustrations, Figures, or Graphs
- Introduction
- Text body (divided into chapters following a logical outline)

- Tables, Illustrations, Figures, Graphs: If not incorporated into the main body of the text, these items should immediately follow the text, not at the end of chapters.
- References
- Appendices (optional)
- Vita (optional)

The exact shape and order of the dissertation, and the number of chapters and pages that the research work will involve could vary depending on the subject and type of study. In All dissertations however, subsequent chapters must be inter-linked with smooth transitions in a coherent way that present a sustained line of thought. The use of brief introductions between chapters that link different parts and explain each stage of the thesis is very helpful in terms of purpose and structure. A common way of ordering of text materials usually found in most Ph.D. dissertations in the field of International Relations is shown hereunder, although numbers do not necessarily coincide with chapter numbers:

1. An introduction
2. Necessary subject-area background information
3. Necessary theoretical background
4. A critical review of other researchers' work and conclusions
5. The thesis research approach and methods
6. Presentations of evidence/findings
7. Analysis of (6) in terms of (5)
8. Discussion of (7) in the framework provided by (3) and (4)
9. Conclusions and recommendations
10. A reflexive account of how the research process qualifies conclusions in (9) given (5)