

L-UNIVERSITÀ TA' MALTA



UNIVERSITY OF MALTA

Faculty for Social Wellbeing¹

Doctoral Degree Guidebook

Version 2017

¹ The Faculty for Social Wellbeing would like to thank the Faculty of Education for permission to use and adapt the Doctoral Degree Guidebook of their faculty.

Applying for doctoral studies with the Faculty for Social Wellbeing, University of Malta:

Guidelines for Applicants

1. Doctoral degrees at the University of Malta are subject to a set of regulations stipulated in the Education Act (Cap.327 - 2008) and in a number of Legal Notices. Details are available at: <http://www.um.edu.mt/registrar/regulations/general/phd>
2. In addition, Bye-Laws regulating the award of a Ph.D. in the Faculty of Social Wellbeing of the University of Malta are available at: http://www.um.edu.mt/registrar/regulations/faculties/socialwellbeing/doctor_of_philosophy
3. These regulations and bye-laws constitute the contractual framework which binds students and the University alike, and it is important for all prospective applicants to be familiar with the expectations and responsibilities involved.
4. The notes in the following pages highlight some of the steps that students need to be familiar with. They do not replace the University and Faculty regulations and bye-laws, which are the formal guidelines by which students must abide.

Steps to follow

Pre-Application Phase: Letter of Intent

This phase precedes the writing of the Ph.D. proposal. It consists of the writing of a Letter of Intent aimed at **communicating, in a preliminary way, one's intentions regarding the area of study, the main research question, the theoretical orientation and the research methods** most likely to be employed in the study. A candidate should also suggest the name of a potential supervisor, keeping in mind, however, that the final appointment of thesis supervisors is made by the Faculty, with the approval of Senate. If a potential supervisor cannot be identified after contacting the respective Head of Department, this is to be indicated. The Letter of Intent need not be more than one to two pages in length and will be reviewed by the Head of Department and by an additional academic member of staff within the same department. Once a letter of intent has been accepted by the Faculty Doctoral Committee, the prospective student will be informed to submit a formal application and research proposal to Central Administration by not later than 9 months as from the date of acceptance of the Letter of Intent.

It is recommended that the prospective applicant reads widely and checks the databases available before deciding on a topic.

The Letter of Intent is to be sent directly to the Chairperson, Faculty Doctoral Committee, c/o Faculty for Social Wellbeing, Rm.114, Msida MSD 2080. Once received, the Chairperson will liaise with the respective Head of Department as indicated by the area of study.

The Faculty Doctoral Committee's response will be based on its reading of the study's research potential, importance and relevance, and on the availability of the proposed supervisor.

Application Phase 1 - Formal Application and Research Proposal

A positive response to the Letter of Intent from the Faculty's Doctoral Committee constitutes the green light for the author of the Letter of Intent to move on to the second phase—formal application and the writing of the Research Proposal.

The Doctoral Committee will not review a proposal unless it is accompanied by a formal University application. Forms may be obtained from the Admissions and Records Office, Room 111, Administration Building, University of Malta.

The length of the proposal should be around 3,000 words.

To enable the Doctoral Committee to decide on the quality and feasibility of one's proposal, the Committee recommends that the author of the Research Proposal covers the following headings:

Title: This should be as brief as possible. It should clearly indicate the main focus of one's research.

Rationale: In this section the author is expected to build a case for his/her study. The author should state why the proposed research is of interest and why it is important.

Research Questions and/or Hypotheses: In this section, the focus of the author's research should be expressed as a question/set of questions or hypothesis/es

Theoretical Framework/Literature Review: What disciplines or other sources of knowledge will you draw upon to build your conceptualization for the proposed research? What are the fundamental theoretical perspectives upon which the study is based? What are the major concepts informing your study, and how are they connected? What is the key literature?

Research Design: This section should provide a clear indication of the methodology to be used, including (where relevant) information regarding participants and settings of the study. You should describe and justify each of the following aspects:

- **Approach and Method:** What general label would you use to describe your research (e.g., ethnographic, experimental, historical, survey research) and how will you construct the specific design for the study? What is the key methodological literature? Will you be using quantitative, qualitative or mixed design? Explain rationale for the approach.
- **Sampling:** What sampling strategy will you be using? From what sources will you gather data and/or information?
- **Data Collection:** How will you seek to collect valid and reliable information? In what contexts? Using what kinds of data and/or information collection procedures?
- **Data Analysis:** How will you organise data and/or information for purposes of analysis? What procedures will you use to analyse your data and/or information in order to address your research questions or hypotheses?
- **Report Format:** How will you present your findings?

Ethics: The Faculty expects high ethical standards in the process of conducting research. This section is meant to reassure the Doctoral Committee that the author is aware of the ethical issues underpinning the study. The author is to refer to UREC (University Research Ethics Committee) guidelines in the process of writing this section:

http://www.um.edu.mt/_data/assets/word_doc/0019/254521/Guidelines_for_UoM_Research_Ethics_Committee.docx

Timeframe: It would be useful for the author to present a timeframe for the research.

References: The main references are to be included in a select bibliography, using an appropriate and consistent referencing style.

It is expected that the proposal be written in clear and correct English.

The proposal is to be signed by the student, and countersigned by the proposed supervisor/s.

Application Phase 2 – Review of Research Proposal

The proposal will be reviewed by the Faculty Doctoral Committee. The Chair will eventually write to the author, asking him/her to attend a meeting. The letter will include the details of the meeting as well as a list of questions that the Faculty Doctoral Committee members expect the author to answer during the meeting.

The meeting is normally chaired by the chairperson of the Faculty Doctoral Committee and consists of a short presentation followed by an open discussion.

If the proposal is deemed suitable, the Faculty Doctoral Committee will recommend to the Faculty Board for Social Wellbeing that the application be accepted. If the Faculty Board also gives its approval, the application is submitted to Senate for approval, through the University's Ph.D. committee.

The result of the evaluation process will be communicated by the Registrar's Office of the University, following approval by Senate. Students are initially registered as M.Phil. students, and their application may be upgraded to Ph.D. status only after at least 12 months of full-time study, or 24 months of part-time study, if they have provided evidence that they have made sufficient progress in their work and reached the required level.

Research Phase 1 – Letter of Acceptance and Ethical clearance

The research phase commences once the author of the proposal receives a formal letter from the University of Malta indicating that his/her proposal has been accepted.

The Letter of Acceptance includes the approved title of the thesis, the approved supervisor and co-supervisor, and the time-frame in which the thesis has to be conducted.

Where applicable, the candidate should obtain ethical clearance from FREC (Faculty Research Ethics Committee) and the UREC (University Research Ethics Committee) before engaging in empirical research. Familiarity with UREC guidelines is indispensable at this stage. For further details students should consult the following link, from where the relevant form can be downloaded: <http://www.um.edu.mt/urec/gpropform>

Research Phase 2: Research Progress – Transfer from M.Phil. to Ph.D. status

Supervisors are required to send an annual, progress report to the Doctoral Committee, normally in June of each year.

On the basis of progress achieved, students may be allowed to transfer from the M.Phil. degree to the Ph.D. degree, after at least 12 months of full-time study or 24 months of part-time study, and on condition that the work they have submitted is approved by an ad hoc board appointed by the Faculty Board for the purpose. Students are normally expected to submit two chapters from their work in progress. Examples of such work include [a] a critical literature review of the field the student is investigating; [b] a critical discussion of the research methodology being used; [c] a critical engagement with the main argument of the thesis, showing the student's ability to handle theoretical analysis in a sophisticated manner.

The candidate is obliged to maintain a log-book. This document, hereto attached as Appendix I, provides a step-by-step account of the candidate's progress.

Advanced Research Studies

Ph.D. candidates may be required to attend a number of study units, usually in advanced research methods and theoretical courses. A workshop on academic writing may also be offered.

Students are usually also required to participate in and contribute to the Faculty's Doctoral Students' Forum, where work in progress is presented to colleagues and faculty staff.

Submission and Examination of thesis

Students are to consult the University's Ph.D. Regulations issued in 2008 (<http://www.um.edu.mt/registrar/regulations/general/phd>) and the Faculty for Social Wellbeing's Bye-Laws (http://www.um.edu.mt/registrar/regulations/faculties/socialwellbeing/doctor_of_philosophy) regarding the final stages of their doctoral study, including submission and examination protocols.

In addition, the following guidelines should be adhered to:

Submission of the thesis:

[a] **Paper size:** International Standard Size A4 (29.7x 21cm).

[b] **Typing:** Double spacing for the main text. Single spacing for footnotes. Single spacing may also be used for long quotations in the main text. Left-hand margin of 3.5 cm. Top and right-hand margin of 1.5 cm. A top margin of 5 cm to be left on the first page of every division, i.e. chapters, bibliography, etc. Footnote(s) should appear at the bottom of the relevant page or after every chapter.

[c] **Format:** The main text, including the introduction (if any), the bibliography and any appendices of the thesis shall have Arabic numerals; the title page, dedication (if any), preface, acknowledgements, table of contents, etc. preceding the main text, shall have Roman numerals.

[d] **Referencing** should follow a standard academically-recognised style, such as APA.

[e] **Layout of title page:** title of thesis and subtitle (if any), followed by the name of the student, the subject, and the date of submission. For example, "A thesis presented to the Faculty for Social Wellbeing at the University of Malta for the degree of Ph.D., followed by month and year of submission.

[f] The following **signed declaration** should also feature on a separate page: "I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work, and has not been presented in fulfilment of other course requirements to the University of Malta or any other University."

[g] **Binding:** Three spiral-bound copies of the thesis and a digital copy shall be submitted. After a successful defence, two copies of the thesis as approved by the Board of Examiners, shall be sewn and bound as follows: in black cloth, with lettering in gold on the front and spine showing: the name of the student; the title of the thesis; the degree for which the thesis is submitted; and the year of submission.

[h] One **bound copy** of the thesis shall be deposited in the library of the Department and one in the library of the Faculty.

[i] A digital copy of the thesis must also be submitted to the Faculty. All copies must be submitted prior to graduation.

Students submitting a final draft of their thesis are required to submit a signed and dated copy of a declaration that can be found at:

http://www.um.edu.mt/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/254321/authenticityformdoctoral.pdf

This declaration needs to be countersigned by the principal supervisor signifying awareness that the thesis is being submitted. This does not imply, however, that the supervisor is in agreement with the contents of the thesis.

Students are also to **upload their thesis on VLE/Turnitin** to check for plagiarism prior to submitting their work. Students can upload their thesis only once.

Supervision

Thesis supervision: Students will be advised by a principal supervisor (usually from the University of Malta) and a co-supervisor (usually from a foreign University). Typically, students should expect to have individual face-to-face or virtual meetings with their supervisors for one hour not less than two to three times each semester, but the frequency may vary according to the time of year and according to the stage they are at in their research programme.

The role of the supervisors is outlined in a document available at:

http://www.um.edu.mt/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/125780/Procedures_for_Supervision_of_Masters_Dis.pdf

It furthermore consists in:

- Establishing a timetable of regular meetings for detailed discussion of the student's progress (the frequency of meetings will depend on the research progress, but typically students are expected to meet with their supervisors two or three times per semester).
- In case the student does not keep regular contact with the supervisors, the latter should submit a progress report to the Faculty Doctoral Committee to signal that there might be a problem.

- Agreeing to a research plan and programme of work, and establishing clear academic expectations and milestones.
- Agreeing to a timetable for the submission of written work, and agreeing to providing critical comments on work submitted within a reasonable time.
- Assessing formally the student's subject-specific and personal and professional skills training needs on a regular basis and ensuring that these needs are met.
- Ensuring students are aware of the formal requirements in relation to the final submission, and helping students to incorporate these into their plan of work.
- Submitting a Progress Report to the Faculty Doctoral Committee on a regular basis throughout the whole term of studies, at least once every year in June. The progress report is usually between 1 to 2 pages in length, and includes an introduction providing an overall assessment of the student, details of the work achieved thus far, including, where relevant, a brief outline of each chapter drafted, and the work plan for the next phase. The student's thesis logbook should also be submitted together with the progress report, which should be endorsed by all the academics involved in the supervision process.
- The supervisory role of supervisors and advisers shall cease when the thesis is submitted for examination. The role may be re-assumed, on the advice of the Board of Examiners, in order to provide guidance to students whose thesis is referred back for significant correction pending final acceptance.
- Supervisors and advisers are not responsible for proof-reading a thesis. Neither is it their responsibility to ensure that theses do not contain plagiarised parts.
- If plagiarism is detected by a supervisor in drafts or in the final version of a thesis prior to the formal submission for examination, the Principal Supervisor shall use discretion as to whether to reprimand the student and demand corrective action or report the matter to the Assessment Disciplinary Board, depending on the gravity of the offence.
- Principal supervisors shall signify in writing, on the appropriate form, that they are aware that the student is submitting his/her thesis for examination by the Board of Examiners.

The role of the student includes:

- Maintaining regular contact with their supervisors, and responding to them in good time.

- Meeting their supervisors regularly, keeping a written record of their discussions in the thesis log-book, and giving due weight to any guidance or corrective action proposed.
- Drawing up a research plan and timetable of work in consultation with their supervisors, and keeping relevant records of all aspects of your work.
- Co-operating with their supervisors to make a detailed joint report on their progress at the end of each academic year.
- Taking responsibility for their research programme, including the development of subject-specific, research, and personal and professional skills.
- Taking responsibility for (i) the preparation and content of your thesis, giving due regard to any advice from your supervisors, and (ii) its timely submission in accordance with the timetable set.
- Being aware of the University's guidance on plagiarism and of any ethical, legal or intellectual property issues arising from the research carried out.
- Pursuing opportunities to engage with the wider academic community at University, national and international level.

Appendix I

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UNIVERSITY OF MALTA

Faculty for Social Wellbeing

Doctoral Thesis Supervision Logbook

Version 2013

Name:

Contact Telephone N^o:

Email:

The Thesis Log Book

- 1. Purpose:** The purpose of the Log Book is to:
 - keep a record of your meetings with your supervisors;
 - clearly identify the outcomes of each meeting and the actions that are required on the part of the student;
 - support the self-evaluative and reflective process that is necessary when writing a thesis;
 - provide evidence of that process to the Board of Studies as well as the Board of Examiners.
- 2. Student's responsibility:** It is the responsibility of the student to keep this log book up to date. Students are expected to comply with the supervisors' suggestions and recommendations as noted by the student in the Log Book and approved by the supervisors. With the supervisors' permission, the template proposed below can be modified in order to render it more fit for purpose.

Key Information:

Thesis Title:

Thesis supervisors appointed by Faculty for Social Wellbeing Board of Studies (name/s):

..... and

Thesis Proposal submitted on (date):

Thesis Proposal approved by the Faculty for Social Wellbeing on (date):

Where applicable:

Amendments to Thesis title:.....

Amendments to title approved by Faculty for Social Wellbeing on:

Meeting No. __

1. Date of meeting:

2. Themes/Topics/Issues discussed:

.....
.....
.....

3. Suggestions/Recommendations/Agreed Actions:	Time frame:

Students' signature:..... Supervisor/s signature/s:.....

.....

Supervisor/s' comments, if any:.....

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.....
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