

THE DISSERTATION EXPERIENCE

MTL Dissertation Committee – mtldissertations.educ@um.edu.mt

Presented by Dr Maria Cutajar

Chairman, MTL Dissertation Committee

Ms Audrey Galea - Deputy Chairperson

6th December 2023

- **Unit Code EDU 5001**
- **20 ECTS Credits Value (approximately 500 hours of work)**
- **The dissertation has a strong tradition of importance as part of the MTL Study Programme in the Faculty of Education**
- **It represents the research component of the course**
- **It requires serious commitment**

WHY WRITE A DISSERTATION?

Rationale

- The dissertation provides you with opportunities to draw upon educational theory and methods to conduct an independent investigation under the guidance of a Supervisor and possibly an Advisor.

Student-teachers are expected to:

- **critically evaluate** - existing knowledge, findings and/or theoretical perspectives related to the chosen research area and to **identify a research theme or questions** with the guidance of a supervisor (and possibly a co-supervisor or advisor)

following which you ...

plan, design and conduct research

... thus help yourself to explore the
concerned knowledge area of interest

- The outcomes of the research are then presented in a manner that allows you, as the researcher, to engage in a **reflective and critical discussion** of the application of the research to your own personal and professional development

Ethical considerations

- Satisfying legal requirements and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- Persistently pursued through all stages of research development
- Come more to the fore in educational research for the case of:
 - vulnerable participants such as children, adolescents, neurodiverse persons
 - sensitive education contexts such as for the Core Curriculum Programme (CCP), catch-up classes, learning support assistance
 - sensitive issues such as mental health problems and addiction issues
 - research situations rendering participant data hard to anonymise

Ethical considerations

Committees directing ethical considerations

- **FREC** (within Faculty of Education)

Faculty Ethics Research Committee

- **UREC** (overseeing body)

University Ethics Research Committee

TYPES OF DISSERTATION

Bye-Laws of 2016 in terms of the General Regulations for University Postgraduate Awards, 2008 for the Degree of Master in Teaching and Learning (MTL) under the auspices of the Faculty of Education (FoE)

14. (1) Students shall be required to submit an individual dissertation of approximately 25,000 words, provided that, in specific areas approved by the Board where the nature of the study requires this.

Students may alternatively submit a combination of an activity or project and a project report of not less than 10,000 words and not more than 15,000 words, in accordance with the relevant Principle Regulations and any further guidelines that may be issued by the Board.

Bye-laws available online on the UM FoE webpages sharing the detailed description of the MTL study programme

Types of dissertation

1. **Research-based dissertation**

Demanding a commitment to collect data & analyse it using suitable approaches and methods for responding to research questions asked.

This dissertation type also includes variants such as,

a) **Extended literature review dissertation**

(25,000 words, excluding footnotes, appendices and List of References)

b) **Philosophical Inquiry dissertation**

(25,000 words, excluding footnotes, appendices and List of References)

2. **Project-based dissertation**

Demanding a commitment to design & implement the target creation using a principled design strategy and suitable implementation methods

(15,000 words, excluding footnotes, appendices and List of References)

Research-based dissertation

what social scientists might refer to as the 'traditional dissertation'

According to the bye-Laws of 2016 in terms of the General Regulations for University Postgraduate Awards, 2008 for the Degree of Master in Teaching and Learning (MTL) under the auspices of the Faculty of Education,

This type of dissertation requires students to submit an individual dissertation write-up

of approximately 25,000 words (+/- 10%)

“Traditional” Research-based dissertation

The researcher investigates an issue of concern starting out by asking a research question/s.

Using a suitable research approach appropriate for answering the research questions asked, the researcher proceeds to collect data and analyse it. In this way the researcher arrives at a response to the research questions asked.

Extended literature review dissertation

- Not a soft option
- Approx. 25,000 words
- Requires locating an extensive literature
- Using a suitable research approach which outlines key words used in searches, sources used, articles unearthed, and so on.
- Reading systematically and selectively
- Summarising, synthesising, and presenting results under analytically appropriate headings

Philosophical Inquiry

- Not the same thing as an ‘extended literature review’.
- Expected to engage with a number of **primary and secondary texts** related to the philosopher/s being focused on.
- Expected to present a **correct exposition** of the philosophical ideas being discussed, as well as **engage critically** with the texts, while also **eliciting the implications** of these ideas on educational theory and/or practices.
- The multiple tools of philosophy – **argumentation, deep engagement, exposition** – would need to be drawn upon to construct a coherent structure in a philosophical dissertation.
- **Some prior knowledge and background in philosophy** would be necessary if one wanted to opt for writing a philosophical inquiry as a dissertation in education.

Philosophical Inquiry

- Philosophical approaches to education are concerned with the nature and aims of education and the philosophical problems arising from educational theory and practice
- A philosophical dissertation in education can take different forms,
such as:
 - A dissertation on a particular philosopher's ideas on education
 - A dissertation on how a particular philosopher's ideas can inform educational theory and practice
 - A dissertation engaging with a particular debate in the philosophy of education, drawing on the work of multiple philosophers and theorists
 - A dissertation starting from a particular concern in educational practice and reflect upon it from a philosophical point of view

Philosophical Inquiry

- Approx. 25,000 words
- Clear presentation of research questions
- Clear identification of the philosophical issues and problems being engaged with
- Evidence of wide reading on the subjects/philosopher/s being discussed
- Engagement with primary sources of the philosopher/s engaged with
- Detailed exposition of the main ideas being discussed
- Critical engagement with the texts
- Nuanced use of concepts and ideas
- Logical flow between the different chapters and in the dissertation as a whole
- Clear and coherent writing, argumentation, and structuring of the dissertation
- Clear and consistent referencing

Project-based dissertation

“... provided that, in specific areas approved by the Board where the nature of the study requires this, students may submit a combination of a project **and** a project report”

This type of dissertation requires Students to submit an individual dissertation write-up

of approximately 15,000 words (+/- 10%) and project tangibles

Project-based dissertation

This is **equivalent and equal** to a research based dissertation

It involves a practical undertaking (the project) and an academic writing (the project report), that require approximately 500 hrs of work

Students submit a combination of a project and a project report of **10,000 to 15,000 words**, in accordance with guidelines that are issued by the Dissertation Committee

Project-based dissertation – some examples

1. Educational project that involves an artistic exhibition/concert/workshop ...
2. Development of a curriculum &/or textbook &/or chapters thereof ...
3. Development of a study course implemented in a formal or non-formal educational setting
4. Development of educational software &/or digital applications
5. Organisation of a seminar, workshop &/or outing, field study ...
6. Literary evening
7. Production of magazine &/or similar communication medium for educational purposes
8. Organisation and setting up of an educational club/organisation
9. Creation of linguistic corpora or the equivalent in other areas of study
10. Other ... consonant with & applicable in the field of study

Project-based dissertation

Basic Assessment Criteria

1. Presentation of the issues under study
2. Description of the research approach – the principled strategy used to help design and implement the project (arriving at the project tangibles)
3. Description of the research methods – the work carried out to implement the project (so devising the project tangible outcomes)
4. Quality of the work produced
5. Quality of the written report, including the theoretical background
6. Originality

Project-based dissertation

Additional Assessment Criteria

1. Use and Knowledge of the literature in the field
2. Justification of the chosen design approach
3. Quality of the reflection & critical analysis on the educational issues
4. Consideration of strengths and limitations of the product tangibles achieved, and suggestions for future development and/or similar initiatives

Project-based dissertation - documents

Information can be downloaded from the Guidelines & Policies Web page

<https://www.um.edu.mt/educ/students/guidelinesandpolicies>

Relevant Documents

1. *Guidelines*
2. *Criteria for Proposal assessment*
3. *Writing and style guidelines*
4. *Citation style*

THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL FORM

The Proposal Form

- A form that students fill in with the assistance of the Supervisor (Co-supervisor and/or Advisor if they have one)
- The proposal form briefly outlines the planned research
 - For the research-based dissertation (broadly involving data collection & analysis methods), this includes title, rationale, research questions and planned research methods, keywords, references
 - For project-based dissertation (broadly involving creation of product tangibles), this includes the title, rationale, and intended research objectives clarifying research outcome tangibles, keywords, references

Available from FoE webpage [Guidelines and Policies](https://www.um.edu.mt/educ/students/guidelinesandpolicies) (<https://www.um.edu.mt/educ/students/guidelinesandpolicies>)

Click on: [MTL Dissertation – Proposal Form](#)

Where to start? ... Consider the following:

- What topic would I like to work on?*
- How much do I know about the subject area?*
- How can I increase my knowledge?*
- What literature can I read?*
- Are there any dissertations on the subject?*
- Can I draw up tentative research questions?*
- Is the intended work/ methodology feasible?*
- Who can act as my supervisor?*

Filling in the Proposal Form

1. Fill in **ALL** the relevant entries carefully
2. Be focused in your wording
3. Respect indicated word limits
4. Do not submit insufficient info

Careful consideration avoids rejection, resubmission and loss of your precious time

Proposal Form Submission

Submit your Proposal Form by email to
the MTL Dissertation Committee,
mtldissertations.educ@um.edu.mt

Proposals to be submitted by:

>> 9th February 2024 (for Full-time & Part-time students)

Proposals will be received by

Mr William Curmi,

MTL Dissertations Committee Administrator

Any queries please forward to mtldissertations.educ@um.edu.mt²⁹

THEN WHAT?

Evaluation of the Proposal

This is carried out by the MTL Dissertation Committee

Proposals are evaluated against various criteria, e.g.:

1. Planned work can be completed in 500 hours;
2. Research Questions are clearly stated and attainable;
3. Abstract demonstrates preliminary reading;
4. Work is of an advanced or original nature in the area of study;
5. Research design permits enough time for adequate analysis;
6. Research method/s are feasible and suited for the research questions asked
7. References demonstrate emergent capacity locating relevant literature

Following discussions at Committee level,
each proposal evaluation outcome may result in :

1. Acceptance
2. Acceptance with minor amendments (fill in minor amendments form)
3. Acceptance with major amendments (resubmit the proposal form)
4. Rejection (submit a new research dissertation proposal)

AFTER proposal is **ACCEPTED** by
the MTL Dissertations committee
you need to obtain research ethics clearance
from **FREC**

FREC Chairperson, Dr Joseph Gravina

FREC Administrator, Ms Nathalie Formosa

<https://www.um.edu.mt/educ/aboutus/boardsandcommittees/frec/>

THE SUPERVISOR

Supervisors have a key role in your dissertation journey

- assisting students to select a research problem and formulate a proposal
- offering ideas, guidance & encouragement on the planning / progress of the research
- providing instruction in research methodology
- guiding students in appropriate generic skills
- making students aware of how research results are reported
- ... that they understand plagiarism; even unintentional plagiarism impacts you negatively
- ... and other unbecoming conduct in doing and reporting research that you may unaware of.

How to find the right supervisor?

You can find out more about the specialities / areas of interest of members of the academic staff from different sources

e.g.

- *Areas of Interest Document* (website)
- Academic members' profile pages
- Academic members' lecturing portfolio
- Discussion/advice from academic staff

Eligible Supervisors and Advisors

- Supervisors need to be in possession of a Doctoral Degree and be members of staff of the Faculty of Education
- However, in some circumstances, the Dissertation Committee may ask the Faculty Board to approve the appointment of Supervisors who do not have a PhD or who do not form part of the Faculty of Education

Consanguinity / Affinity / Dual Relationship University Policy in relation to EXAMINERS/SUPERVISORS and STUDENTS

Consanguinity refers to the existence of a blood relationship between an Examiner/Supervisor and a student sitting for any form of assessment

Check '*Consanguinity document*'

<https://www.um.edu.mt/registrar/secure/staffstudents/Consanguinity.pdf>

on FoE's '*Guidelines & Policies*' webpage

<https://www.um.edu.mt/educ/students/guidelinesandpolicies>

THE LOGBOOK

A logbook is a way to record and keep track of events

Why use a Dissertation Logbook?

- To keep a record of the student's meetings with the supervisor, whether fact-to-face or otherwise
- To clearly identify the outcomes of each meeting and the actions that are required on the part of the student
- To provide evidence of that process during dissertation examination

The Dissertation Logbook

It is the student's responsibility to:

- Keep this logbook up to date
- Comply with the Supervisor's (and Advisor's) suggestions and recommendations as noted by the student in the logbook and approved by the Supervisor (and Advisor)

The Dissertation Logbook

- The logbook has to be submitted together with the dissertation
- The Faculty of Education reserves the right not to accept dissertations for examination if the logbook is not submitted and/or properly documented
- Emails and other records of correspondence between the Supervisor (and Advisor) and the student can be attached to the logbook
- A student may be requested to hand in the logbook to the Dissertation Committee at any stage after work has started on the dissertation

OTHER INFORMATION

Dissertation '*Writing and Style Guidelines*' document

- https://www.um.edu.mt/data/assets/pdf_file/0012/421140/MTLdissertationwritingstyleguide_24012020.pdf
- Provides guiding principles on different aspects of writing and style ranging from:
- paper size, margins, fonts, numbering, layout, keywords, headings, word limit, tables, figures and more.

Presentation of research prior to submission

- During the process of writing, in conjunction with their Supervisors and/or Advisor, students may present part of the material (that will be submitted in the final version of the dissertation) at Seminars, Conferences, in academic peer-reviewed journals and other academic peer reviewed publications
- In such cases a statement to this effect is to be submitted on presentation of the dissertation for examination.

Authenticity and research ethics form

https://www.um.edu.mt/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/254320/authenticityformpg.pdf

- An official document where you declare, by signing, that you are the legitimate author of the dissertation and that it is your original work
- Presenting someone else's work or ideas as your own, with or without their consent, by incorporating it into your work without full acknowledgement constitutes **plagiarism**. To ensure that you do not unintentionally plagiarise, please consider the UM webpages on student regulations.

SUBMISSION DATES

Submission dates

Proposal submission deadline:

>> 9th February 2024 (for Full-time & Part-time students)

Dissertation submission deadline:

>> Early June 2025 – exact submission date TBA

To get an idea of the approximate dissertation submission deadline, this academic year the dissertation submission deadline is 10th June 2024 (for Full-time & Part-time students)

- If a student is not successful in finding a Supervisor for their research area, consider switching to another research area and approach different potential Supervisors

**Should a student remain unsuccessful in finding a Supervisor,
inform the MTL Dissertations Committee
by not later than 4 weeks prior to the Proposal submission date
[this academic year – 1st week of January 2024]**

MTL-dissertations.educ@um.edu.mt

MTL Dissertation Website

For all information in relation to the MTL Dissertation and all downloadable forms please visit:

<https://www.um.edu.mt/educ/students/guidelinesandpolicies>

**MTL dissertations that are graded above 70%
are made available in open access**

through UM Library services:

**search the OAR@UM depository using suitable keywords to help locate
past MTL dissertations.**



QUESTION AND ANSWER TIME

Thank you for your time & attention

MTL dissertations committee

mtl-dissertations.educ@um.edu.mt

