THE MTL DISSERTATION

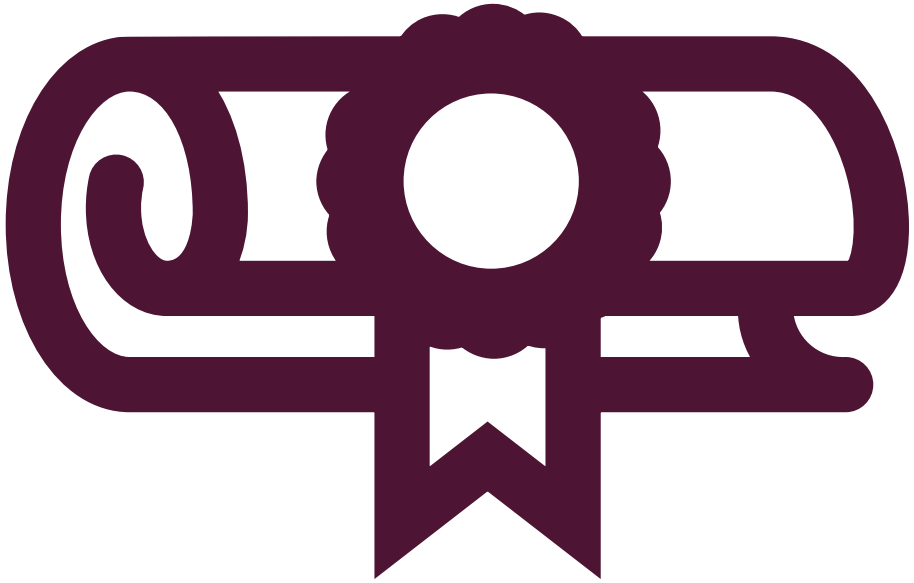
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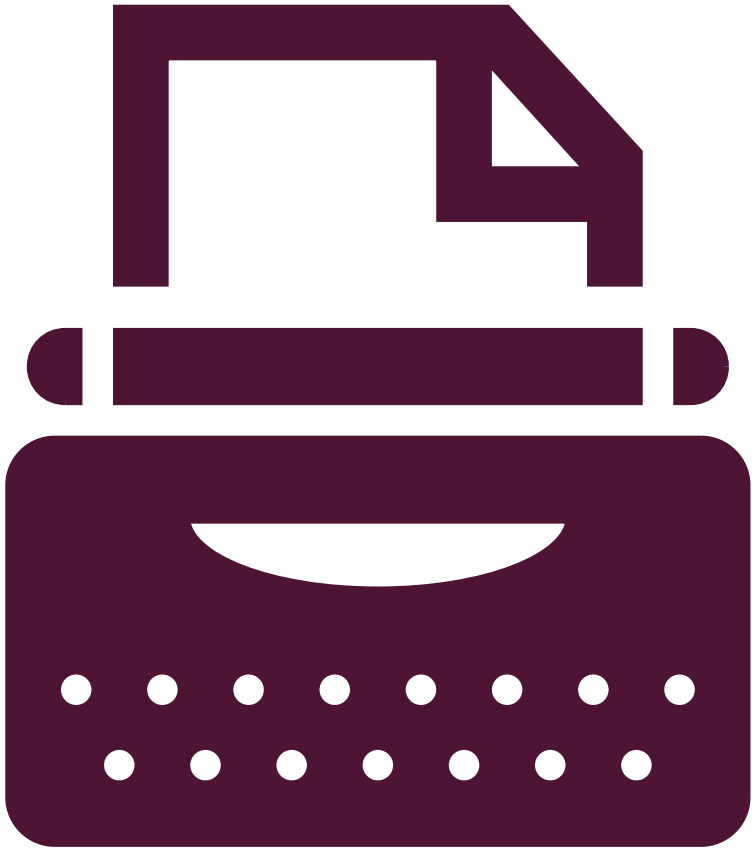
PROF. DOREEN SPITERI, CHAIR, DISSERTATIONS COMMITTEE

BASED ON EARLIER PRESENTATIONS DRAWN UP BY DR MARIA CUTAJAR , PAST CHAIRPERSON OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE AND

DR JANE SPITERI - DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON

- Unit Code EDU 5001
- 20 ECTS Credits Value (approximately 500 hours of work)
- The dissertation is the core research component of the MTL programme.
- It is a major requirement that demands serious commitment. [1]





WHY WRITE A DISSERTATION?

RATIONALE

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

YOU ARE EXPECTED TO:

Identify	identify a research theme or questions with the guidance of a Supervisor (and possibly an Advisor/Co-supervisor)
Evaluate	critically evaluate existing knowledge, findings and/or theoretical perspectives related to the chosen research area
Plan, design, and conduct	plan, design, and conduct your research \ explore your chosen area of interest.

ABIDE BY LEGALLY BINDING REGULATIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES

Devise a research proposal that aligns to one of the alternative research routes identified in the MTL bye-laws.

Submit a research proposal to the MTL dissertations committee endorsed by the supervisor as per proposal form requirements and direction.

If necessary, apply for Research Ethics Clearance after you obtained unconditional acceptance of the research proposal from the MTL Dissertations Committee.

Any changes to the accepted proposal demand request and approval of the MTL Dissertations Committee (and in follow up also clearance from the research ethics committee)

Be careful with Generative Artificial Intelligence apps (Gen-AI) in the development of your MTL dissertation (and beyond)!

Submitted dissertation is an authentic report of the research that you carried out.

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?*

TYPES OF DISSERTATION



Bye-Laws of 2025 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 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 Principal Regulations and any further guidelines that may be issued by the Board." (p.13).

Bye-laws accessible also from the UM FoE webpages

Types of dissertation

1. **Research-based dissertation (traditional research study)** (25,000 words, excluding footnotes, appendices and List of References) 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**

   b) **Philosophical Inquiry dissertation**

2. **Project-based dissertation**
Demanding a commitment to design and implement the target 'product' using a principled design strategy and suitable implementation methods (10,000 – 15000 words, excluding footnotes, appendices and List of References)

1. RESEARCH-BASED DISSERTATION - what social scientists might refer to as the 'traditional research'

According to the bye-Laws of 2025 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 of approximately 25,000 words (+/- 10%)

1A EXTENDED LITERATURE REVIEW DISSERTATION

- Not a soft option
- Approx. 25,000 words
- Requires locating an extensive literature
- Using a suitable methodology which outlines key words used in searches, sources etc.
- Reading systematically and selectively
- Summarising and presenting results under analytical appropriate headings

1B. 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 (CONT.)

- 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

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

2. PROJECT-BASED DISSERTATION

This is a research project, equivalent and equal to what we conventionally refer to as a research-based dissertation.

It involves a practical undertaking (the development of a 'product') 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

- Educational project that involves artistic exhibitions/concerts/workshops
- Development of a curriculum /or textbook /or chapters of…….
- Development of a programme for a non-formal educational settings
- Educational software /or applications
- Organisation of seminars, workshops /or outings, fieldwork etc.
- Literary evenings
- Production of magazine or similar materials for educational purposes
- Organisation and setting up of educational clubs/organisations
- Creation of linguistic corpora or the equivalent in other areas of study
- Others… any other methodology or project that meets the requirements.he field of study

Project-based dissertation

Basic Assessment Criteria

- Presentation of the issues under study
- Description of the work carried out in order to implement the Project
- Methodology adopted
- Originality
- Quality of the work produced
- Quality of the written report, including the theoretical background

Additional Assessment Criteria

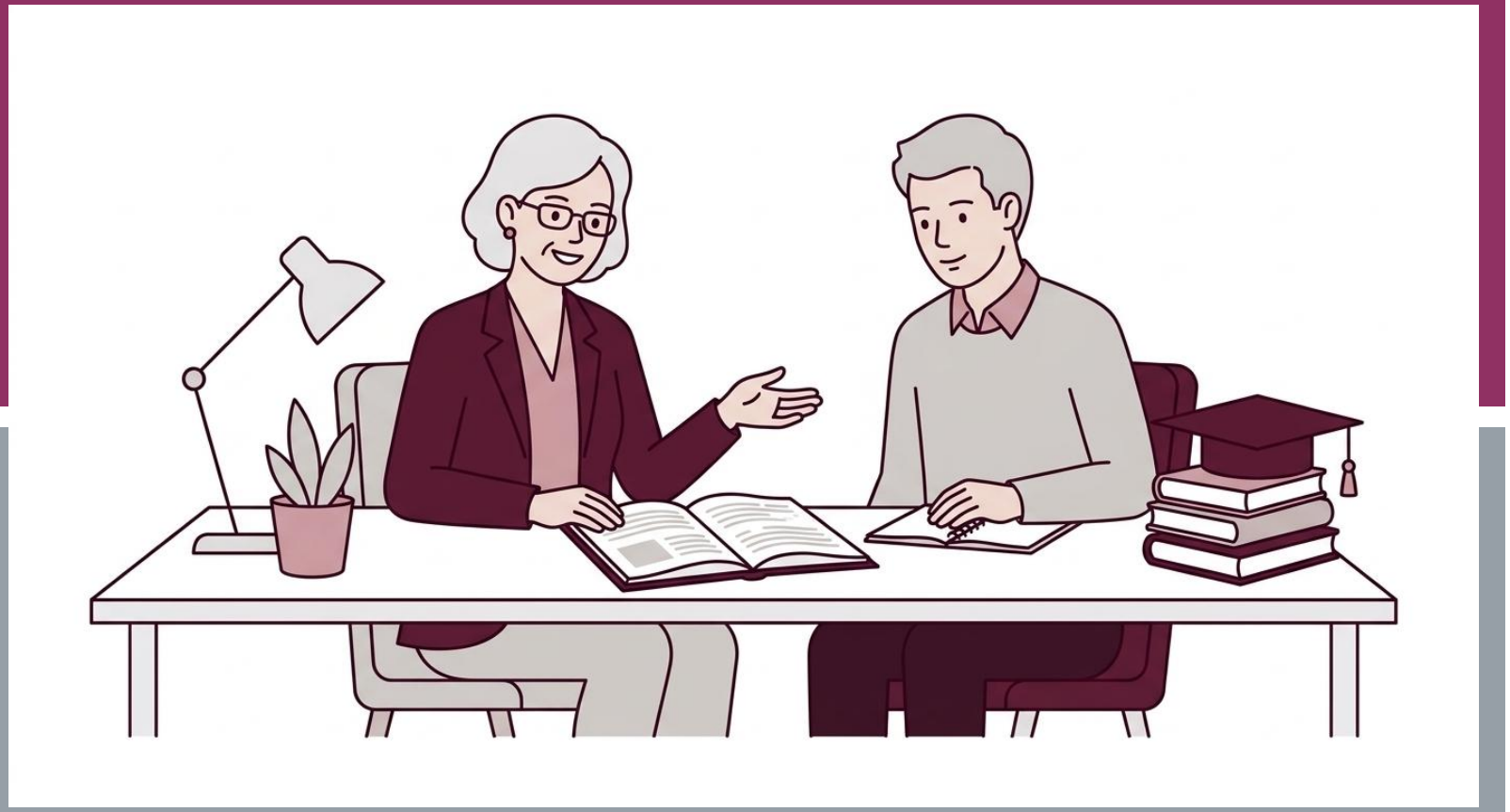
- Use and Knowledge of the literature in the field
- Justification of the chosen design and methodology
- Quality of the reflection & critical analysis on the educational issues
- Strengths of the product, limitations and suggestions for future research and/or similar initiatives

- Project-based dissertation - documents

- Information can be downloaded from the Guidelines & Policies Web page
- https://www.um.edu.mt/educ/students/guidelinesandpolicies

- Relevant Documents
  - *Guidelines*
  - *Criteria for Proposal assessment*
  - *Writing and style guidelines*
  - *Citation style*

THE SUPERVISOR



How to find the right supervisor?

Discover the specialisms and areas of interest of academic staff through different sources:



A.I.D. (Website)

1) Areas of Interest Document (website)

- Check central university web portal
- Search by research cluster



Prof. Profiles

2) Academic members' profile pages

- Digital researcher card/ online profiles
- Search by research topic or expertise



Lecturing Portfolio

3) Academic members' lecturing portfolio

- Check university course listings
- Review modules taught by staff



Academic Advice

4) Discussion/advice from academic staff

- Have a constructive conversation
- Seek guidance from faculty members

SUPERVISORS HAVE A KEY ROLE IN YOUR DISSERTATION JOURNEY

- in assisting you to select a research problem and formulate a proposal
- in offering ideas, guidance and encouragement on the planning / progress of the research
- in providing instruction in research methodology
- in guiding you in appropriate generic skills
- in making you 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

Eligible Supervisors and Advisors

Supervisors must hold a PhD and ideally belong to the Faculty of Education.

Exceptions require special approval from the Dissertation Committee and Faculty Board



- Can't find a supervisor? Consider adjusting your topic.
- If you still have no supervisor, contact the MTL Dissertations Committee at least 4 weeks before the proposal deadline for help.

Consanguinity / Affinity / Dual Relationship

Conflict of Interest Policy: Your supervisor or examiner cannot be a relative or have a close personal/dual relationship with you. Check the full UM Consanguinity Policy online.

Check '*Consanguinity document*':
https://www.um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/directorates/registrar/policiesproceduresguidelinesandforms/policiesproceduresandguidelines/Consanguinity,Affinity,DualRelationshipPolicyinrelationtoEXAMINERS-SUPERVISORSSTUDENTS.pdf

Also linked on the FoE Webpages >>*Guidelines & Policies:*
https://www.um.edu.mt/educ/students/guidelinesandpolicies



THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL FORM

The Proposal Form

- A form that students fill in with the assistance of their Supervisor (and Advisor/co-supervisor if they have one)
- It briefly outlines the planned research including the title, rationale, research questions and planned research methods
- It requests permission to carry out the research

Downloadable from FoE webpage >>*Guidelines and Policies*

- https://www.um.edu.mt/educ/students/guidelinesandpolicies
- Go to MTL Dissertation – *Proposal Form*

Filling in the Proposal Form:

Fill in ALL the relevant entries carefully

Be focused in your articulations

Respect indicated word limits

Do not submit insufficient information

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

THEN WHAT?



The Dissertations Committee will evaluate your proposal against various criteria, e.g.:

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

Following a discussion by appointed committee members, each proposal evaluation outcome may result in :

- Acceptance – you may proceed to apply for research ethics clearance (if applicable)
- Acceptance with minor amendments – fill in minor amendments form
- Acceptance with major amendments – resubmit the proposal form with the same proposal number
- Rejection – submit a new research dissertation proposal with a new proposal number (next count)

POST DISSERTATION PROPOSAL ACCEPTANCE

After you obtain unconditional acceptance of the MTL dissertation from MTL Dissertation Committee you MUST submit an application and obtain Research Ethics clearance BEFORE proceeding with data collection & analysis – if your research involves people.

Later you may be required to make minor amendments or major amendments to the accepted dissertation proposal

- For minor amendment fill and submit an MIAF form
- https://www.um.edu.mt/educ/students/guidelinesandpolicies/
- For major amendments fill and submit a proposal form ticking the next proposal number (top right of form)

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Satisfying legal requirements and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- Persistently pursued through all stages of research development
- Especially important when your research involves:

✓ *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*

Committees directing ethical considerations

- FREC (within Faculty of Education)
  - Faculty Research Ethics Committee
- UREC (overseeing body)
  - University Research Ethics Committee

THE LOGBOOK

A LOGBOOK IS A WAY TO RECORD AND KEEP TRACK OF THE SUPERVISION PROCESS

HTTPS://WWW.UM.EDU.MT/MEDIA/UM/DOCS/FACULTIES/EDUC/GUIDELINESANDPOLICIES/MTLDISSERTATIONLOGBOOK.PDF

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 your responsibility to:

- **Maintain an up-to-date logbook** throughout your research.
- **Follow your Supervisor's (and Advisor's) guidance** as documented and approved in the logbook.

The Dissertation Logbook

The logbook has to be submitted together with the dissertation

You must submit a properly documented logbook with your final dissertation. Without it, the Faculty may refuse to examine your work.

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

- Additional to UM Postgraduate General Regulations, the FoE MTL Dissertations committee provides a suggested writing and style guidelines
  - 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

- Presenting Your Work Early:
- With your supervisor's approval, you may share parts of your ongoing research at conferences or in peer-reviewed journals. You must include a declaration of this when submitting your final dissertation.
- 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

You must sign this form to confirm the work is entirely your own. Using anyone else's words or ideas without proper citation is plagiarism.

WARNING ON UNORIGINAL WORK (REGULATION 38)

- If we suspect your work is not your own, you will face an oral exam. If your oral performance does not match the quality of your written work, you will be reported to the University Assessment Disciplinary Board. [1]

SUBMISSION DATES

Submission dates

Key Deadlines (Full-Time & Part-Time):

Dissertation Proposal: **Wednesday, 17 February 2027**

Final Dissertation: Early June 2028

MTL Dissertation Website
– your go-to page for most stuff related to the dissertation

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

Email address to use to correspond with the
MTL Dissertations Committee
mtl-dissertations.educ@um.edu.mt