

## PhD GUIDELINES

All doctoral students are required to abide by all procedures outlined in the University regulations for Doctor of Philosophy students, 2023, accessible through:

<https://www.um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/schools/doctoralschool/DoctorofPhilosophy-Ph.D.-DegreeRegulations2023.pdf>

Faculty of Laws students are also governed by the Faculty's Doctor of Philosophy regulations, which may be accessed through:

<https://www.um.edu.mt/registrar/regulations/faculties/laws/phd-bl-laws-2009>

Prospective applicants presenting overseas qualifications are required to contact the International Admissions Office when submitting their application using the contact details available at: <http://www.um.edu.mt/contact/intadmissions>.

## APPLYING FOR A DOCTORAL DEGREE WITH THE FACULTY OF LAWS

### Step 1: Choosing a Topic

Applicants are to ensure that they are genuinely interested in the area of study and it is crucial that the research in the chosen area of study will make a contribution to knowledge. It is recommended that the applicant reads widely and checks the databases available for this purpose.

### Step 2: Formal Letter of Intent

All prospective students are to make contact with the Chairperson of the Faculty Doctoral Committee through a formal letter of intent prior to submitting an online application. This letter should specify the appropriate department in the Faculty of Laws within which the proposed area of study falls and outline the theoretical position the applicant will be taking, the main research questions being tackled and the research methodology the applicant intends to employ. This letter should not exceed two pages in length.

All letters of intent will be reviewed by the Faculty Doctoral Committee.

### Step 3: Official Application

If the Committee deems the letter of intent to be acceptable, the applicant will be instructed to submit a formal application, including a research proposal of approximately 3000 words (see guidelines below) and a proposed time-frame for their study, through the University's online applications portal by a stipulated date. A suitable supervisor is also required to be indicated upon application. If an applicant submits an online application

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without complying with the formal letter of intent procedure, the said application will be kept on hold until the applicant complies with the said procedure.

### **Writing the Proposal**

To enable the Faculty Doctoral Committee to decide on the suitability and feasibility of the applicant's study, it is important that the applicant develops a well thought out research proposal. The Committee suggests that the proposal is developed using the following headings:

- 1. Title:** This should be as brief as possible but clearly indicates the main focus of research
- 2. Rationale:** In this section one is expected to build a case for the study. Why the proposed research is of interest and why it is important should be indicated. The applicant would also need to position themselves in the research and develop their own standpoint
- 3. Research questions or hypotheses:** In this section, the focus of the research should be expressed as a question/set of questions or a hypothesis
- 4. Preliminary literature review/proposed theoretical framework:** The questions/hypothesis should reflect a preliminary review of the literature in the field. An exhaustive list of references is not considered to be necessary at this stage
- 5. Research design:** This section should describe the research design and the methods the applicant intends to employ to gather and analyze the data. There ought to be clear indication of the quantitative/qualitative design to be used, including (where relevant) information regarding participants and settings of the study
- 6. Ethics:** The Faculty of Law expects high ethical standards in the process of conducting research. Participants need to be protected at all times. This section is meant to reassure the readers of the proposal that the applicant is aware of the ethical issues that underpin the study. It might be the case that the proposal will have to be referred to the Faculty Research Ethics Committee
- 7. Timetable:** It would be useful to present a timetable for the research
- 8. References:** The Faculty Doctoral Committee expects the main references to be included in a select bibliography, using OSCOLA and the University of Malta Library's Digitization document
- 9. Communication and presentation:** The proposal should be written in clear precise English. It should demonstrate the applicant's fluency of expression, a style which is grammatically acceptable, and have a professional standard of presentation
- 10. Type of study:** A statement on whether the studies will be undertaken on a full-time or a part-time basis, and, in the latter case, the number of hours that shall be dedicated to this research work
- 11. Language:** Where appropriate, a request to present the thesis in a language other than English
- 12. Research:** Where appropriate, a request to undertake the research outside the University of Malta

### **Evaluation Checklist (Make sure every answer is YES)**

1. Does my proposed dissertation make a significant contribution to knowledge in the area?
2. Does my rationale convince readers of the importance of the study?
3. Does my review of the literature show adequate reading in the area?
4. Do I have a strong research design based on a sound theoretical framework?
5. Have I discussed the ethical issues underpinning the study?
6. Have I set myself a realistic timetable?
7. Have I presented a set of references in OSCOLA and Thesis Digitization?
8. Is the proposal clear and well presented?
9. Can I defend my proposal in an interview?

### **Step 4: Review Process**

Upon receipt of application, the Faculty Doctoral Committee will review the research proposal and time-frame and, if deemed necessary, provide feedback which will then need to be incorporated in a resubmitted proposal within a specified deadline.

Research proposals will only be reviewed twice per application: once upon receipt, and a second time following resubmission incorporating feedback. Proposals deemed as not up to doctoral level following resubmission will be refused by the Committee.

### **Step 5: Presentation**

Upon approval of the proposal by the Committee, the applicant will be invited to present the research proposal during a meeting with the Faculty Doctoral Committee. The proposed supervisor will also be present.

### **Step 6: Recommendation**

Following the presentation, the Faculty Doctoral Committee will make a recommendation through Faculty Board to the Doctoral Academic Committee regarding the applicant's acceptance or otherwise to read for an M. Phil degree in the first instance with the possibility of transferring to the Ph.D. degree at a later stage.

Applicants will then receive a reply regarding the official outcome of their application from the Doctoral Academic Committee