

## Higher Degree by Research Milestones Policy

Date of effect	1 January 2012
Approval	University Research Committee Meeting 2011/5 Academic Board Meeting 2011/6
Documents replaced by this policy	Gold Book Part 6: Section 6.4
Procedures and/or guidelines supporting this policy	Procedures are contained within the policy

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### A. Introduction

#### **Purpose**

1. This policy sets out the principles and procedures for the structure of a Higher Degree by Research (HDR) course through a series of significant milestones that must be achieved by the candidate.

#### **Scope**

2. This policy applies to all candidates enrolled in HDR courses at the University of Canberra, and to the staff involved in HDR supervision and management at the University.
3. This policy complements the *Higher Degree by Research Academic Progress Policy* and the *Higher Degree by Research Enrolment and Changes to Candidature Policy* (2010, pending).

#### **Legislation**

4. This policy is governed by the *Academic Progress Statute 1995* and the *Academic Progress Rules 1995*.

## B. Principles

5. HDR course milestones operate as clearly identifiable goals which a candidate will work towards during the course duration. A candidate's progress is monitored against his or her progression towards the timely achievement of milestones.
6. A candidate's progression through an HDR course will encompass the following milestones:
  - a) A Draft Research Plan and Introductory Seminar, which are complimentary, parallel processes – within the first 6 months of full-time equivalent (FTE) enrolment for Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and Professional Doctorate (PD) candidates and within the first 4 months FTE enrolment for Masters by Research candidates;
  - b) Confirmation of Candidature Seminar and Final Research Plan, which are complimentary, parallel processes – within the first 12 months FTE enrolment for PhD and PD candidates and within the first 7 months FTE for Masters by Research candidates;
  - c) Work-in-Progress (WIP) Seminar – PhD candidates only. To be undertaken within 24 months FTE enrolment;
  - d) Target date for thesis submission – by 36 months FTE for PhD and PD candidates and 24 months FTE for Masters by Research Candidates;
  - e) Final Seminar – to take place immediately before or immediately after the submission of the thesis;
  - f) Annual Progress Report – to be submitted by 30 September each year; and
  - g) Progress Update Report – to be submitted by 31st March each year<sup>1</sup>.
  - h) In the first year of candidature the Progress Update Report and Annual Progress Report do not need to be submitted, as the Draft Research Plan, Introductory Seminar Presentation, Final Research Plan and Confirmation of Candidature Seminar fulfil the requirements of these reports.
7. The Chair of the Supervisory Panel is responsible for assisting the candidate to meet milestone requirements. The Chair is also responsible for ensuring that the achievement of milestones are reported at the time and noted in the candidate's next Annual Progress Report.

## C. Procedures

### 1. *Draft Research Plan and Introductory Seminar*

#### 1.1. Draft Research Plan

- 1.1.1. The University requires the completion of the Draft Research Plan and the Introductory Seminar Presentation within the first 6 months of candidature (FTE) for PhD and PD candidates and the first 4 months for Masters by Research Candidates.

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<sup>1</sup> For procedures for the monitoring of progress, including the Annual Progress Report and Progress Update Report, see the *Higher Degree by Research Academic Progress Policy*.

- 1.1.2. The Draft Research Plan provides a rationale, timetable and structural outline for the research project, with particular focus on the first year of the HDR course. The Plan is a working document and it is expected that the details will be refined throughout candidature as new developments and opportunities arise.
- 1.1.3. The Draft Research Plan will be developed in consultation with the Supervisory Panel and using the Draft Research Plan Form.
- 1.1.4. The Supervisory Panel Chair will be responsible for final approval of a candidate's Draft Research Plan. The Panel Chair will also ensure the Supervisory Panel maintains a record of attendance for the candidate and evidence of meetings with the panel which will also be forwarded to the Research Students Office.
- 1.1.5. The candidate and the Chair of the Supervisory Panel should refer to the Research Plan in each year's Annual Progress Report and indicate how and in what ways the Plan remains valid or has altered.

## **1.2. Introductory Seminar**

- 1.2.1. The Introductory Seminar is organised by the Chair of the Supervisory Panel upon the development of the Draft Research Plan to the satisfaction of the candidate and the Supervisory Panel. The Seminar takes place after this approval.
- 1.2.2. The seminar will be based on the project rationale and outline developed through the Research Plan. It provides an opportunity for the candidate to introduce his/her research abstract and questions, literature review and project timeline. Disciplinary standards will dictate the format and length of the seminar. Attending academics are invited to provide verbal and written feedback to the candidate which is then discussed further in a supervisory panel meeting with the student. The intended objectives of the Introductory seminar are to:
  - introduce the candidate and their research to the wider Faculty or UCRC research community and welcome the candidate into that community;
  - provide an avenue for the candidate to receive feedback on their project from interested academics in the field;
  - provide an early opportunity for the candidate to test the validity of their research ideas and plans; and
  - provide an early, formative opportunity for the candidate and Supervisory Panel to evaluate course progress and implement early intervention measures if needed.
- 1.2.3. The Chair of the Supervisory Panel is responsible for scheduling the seminar into the Faculty or UCRC's seminar timetable and for ensuring that the seminar is held.
- 1.2.4. All members of the Supervisory Panel should attend the seminar, the subsequent panel meeting and sign off. They will report on the completion of the seminar and validity of the Draft Research Plan to the Associate Dean Research (or Delegate) or Director, who will forward the Completion of Introductory Seminar form to the Research Students Office.

## **2. Confirmation of Candidature and Final Research Plan**

- 2.1.1. The University requires the Confirmation of Candidature process to be undertaken within the first 12 months of candidature (FTE) for PhD and PD candidates and within the first 7 months (FTE) for Masters by Research candidates.
- 2.1.2. Enrolment in the HDR course will be provisional until the achievement of Confirmation of Candidature.
- 2.1.3. Confirmation of Candidature involves the candidate's submission of a written Full Research Proposal document and presentation of a Confirmation Seminar. Both written and oral aspects of the confirmation process are formally evaluated by a panel of disciplinary experts outside the candidate's Supervisory Panel.
- 2.1.4. The intended objectives of the Confirmation of Candidature process are to:
  - facilitate timely completion of the research project by assisting candidates to focus and plan their research in a scholarly context;
  - increase the quality of postgraduate research by providing candidates with public feedback during the planning stage of their research;
  - facilitate the acquisition of research skills essential to effective researchers:
    - seminar presentation
    - proposal writing
    - scholarly writing appropriate to the discipline; and
  - ensure that adequate infrastructure, supervision arrangements and funds are in place for the candidate to complete the thesis in a timely, safe and ethical manner.

### **2.2. Final Research Plan**

- 2.2.1. Each candidate is required to prepare a Final Research Plan describing the research project. The research proposal will further develop the structure of the research project as addressed in the Draft Research Plan. The plan:
  - assists the candidate to define and plan the research by identifying its aims, outcomes, methodology and value; and
  - enables the host Faculty or UCRC and the University to assess the content and quality of the proposed research and resources required (including supervision) and to judge whether the intended project can be realistically and successfully carried out.
- 2.2.2. The content, format and length of the research plan will be subject to the specific requirements of the discipline area. Candidates should consult their host Faculty or UCRC's guidelines on the research plan and seek advice from the Chair of the Supervisory Panel in the first instance.

2.2.3. At a minimum, the research plan will address the following aspects of the research project:

- proposed title of thesis;
- research aims, including research questions, problems or issues to be investigated, the scholarly context and justification for the research;
- comprehensive literature review;
- research methodologies and how they will be employed;
- expected resources and conditions required to complete the research, including a project budget;
- finalised Ethics Committee approval (if applicable); and
- updated project timeline.

### 2.3. Confirmation Seminar

2.3.1. The Confirmation Seminar is organised by the Chair of the Supervisory Panel upon the development of the Full Research Plan to the satisfaction of the candidate and the Supervisory Panel.

2.3.2. The Chair is responsible for scheduling the seminar into the Faculty or URC's seminar timetable and for ensuring that the seminar is held. Except in special circumstances (e.g. information that is commercial-in-confidence), the seminar is considered a public presentation and should be advertised as such.

2.3.3. The Chair, in consultation with Supervisory Panel members, will appoint a panel of assessors to review the candidate's Confirmation of Candidature and provide recommendations on the result. This panel will consist of at least two disciplinary experts who meet the following requirements:

- not a current or previous member of the candidate's Supervisory Panel;
- hold a research degree at the level sought by the candidate;
- research active in the field of scholarship in which the candidate is also engaged; and
- at least one assessor will be a member of academic staff at a tertiary institution.

The use of assessors from outside the host Faculty or URC is encouraged. It is mandatory that the panel of assessors for a seminar by a candidate who is also a member of academic staff be from outside the host Faculty or URC.

2.3.4. At least two weeks prior to the scheduled date of the Confirmation Seminar, the Chair will provide the panel of assessors with the Assessor Report Form and the final draft of the candidate's Full Research Proposal for their review.

2.3.5. The panel of assessors will attend the Confirmation Seminar and prepare a report at the conclusion. The Supervisory Panel and ADR of the host Faculty (or delegate) or Director of the URC will also attend the seminar.

2.3.6. The content of the Confirmation Seminar will draw upon the material developed in the Full Research Proposal. The presentation itself will usually be strictly timed at 20 – 30 minutes duration and will be followed by a question and answer session. Further requirements for the content, format

and length of the Confirmation Seminar will be as per disciplinary standards. Candidates should consult their host Faculty or URC's guidelines on the Confirmation Seminar and seek advice from the Chair of the Supervisory Panel in the first instance.

- 2.3.7. The University requires all candidates, including those who study remotely or off campus, to present the Confirmation Seminar in person. If exceptional circumstances (e.g. care commitments, a health condition that makes travel impractical) mean that a candidate is unable to deliver the seminar in person, the alternative will be to deliver the seminar via videoconference. Teleconference alone is not permissible.
- 2.3.8. The panel of assessors will normally meet with the candidate, the Supervisory Panel and the ADR (or delegate) or Director immediately after the seminar to provide more complete and explicit feedback. If this is impracticable, due to a Faculty Mini-conference or the like, then they will meet as soon as practicable after the event. Once the panel of assessors leave the meeting, the ADR (or delegate) or Director will chair closed discussions with the candidate and the Supervisory Panel respectively to ensure appropriate supervisory and infrastructure conditions are in place.
- 2.3.9. Following the seminar process, each assessor will prepare a written report on the Assessor Report Form in response to the candidate's performance in all aspects of the Confirmation of Candidature process. Each assessor will make a recommendation to the ADR (or delegate) of the Faculty or Director of the URC who will, in turn provide a final recommendation to the candidate and Supervisory Panel. The recommendations are as follows:
  - that candidature be confirmed and the candidate proceed with the course;
  - that the candidate proceed with the program subject to conditions as specified; or
  - that the candidate not proceed in the course.
- 2.3.10. Unless otherwise specified, the candidate must meet any conditions specified in a recommendation of Confirmation of Candidature within three months following the date of the Confirmation Seminar. The ADR (or delegate) or Director will assess whether these conditions have been met. Until conditions are met, candidature will be considered provisional. If conditions attached to continuation in the HDR course are not satisfactorily met within the approved timeframe, the candidate will be advised to discontinue enrolment.
- 2.3.11. Final approval for Confirmation of Candidature will not be granted until any required Ethics Committee approval has been obtained.
- 2.3.12. Upon approval of Confirmation of Candidature, the ADR (or delegate) or Director will forward all assessor reports and other relevant documentation to the Research Students' Office. Upon receipt of this documentation, the Research Students' Office will formally confirm the candidate via email and record this milestone.
- 2.3.13. A candidate who is unsuccessful in his or her first attempt at Confirmation of Candidature will usually be permitted to undertake a second attempt. A candidate will not be allowed to re-attempt the process more than once. If the candidate has failed to meet the conditions required for Confirmation of Candidature following a second attempt at the Confirmation Seminar and the

candidate is enrolled in a PhD or Professional Doctorate, he or she may be counseled to transfer the candidature to an appropriate masters course. If this option is not applicable or the candidate is enrolled in a Masters by Research, the candidate will be discontinued on grounds of failing to make satisfactory progress.

### **3. Work-in-Progress (WIP) Seminar (PhD candidates only)**

- 3.1. The University requires confirmed PhD candidates to present a Work-in Progress (WIP) Seminar within the first 24 months of FTE enrolment. In general and where practicable the WIP Seminar is to be completed in conjunction with the 24 month APR.
- 3.2. The Chair is responsible for scheduling the seminar into the Faculty or URC's seminar timetable and for ensuring that the seminar is held.
- 3.3. The WIP Seminar is a formative process for candidates; it is not formally assessed. It provides an opportunity for the candidate:
  - to seek feedback and direction on the research before the final write-up of the thesis; and
  - to test and defend major results and conclusions emerging from the research.
- 3.4. Requirements for the content, format and length of the WIP Seminar will be as per disciplinary standards. Candidates should consult their host Faculty or URC's guidelines on the WIP Seminar and seek advice from the Chair of the Supervisory Panel in the first instance.
- 3.5. The Supervisory Panel and ADR of the host Faculty (or delegate) or Director of the URC will attend the seminar.
- 3.6. The Supervisory Panel will meet as a group with the candidate directly following the WIP Seminar. This meeting is a time to provide further suggestions and feedback to the presentation and to revisit and update the Research Plan. The Panel will recommend action in accordance with the *Higher Degree by Research Academic Progress Policy* if it has concerns about the candidate's progress or considers the presentation unsatisfactory.
- 3.7. The Chair will ensure that this milestone is noted in the candidate's next Annual Progress Report or Progress Update Report.

### **4. Final Seminar**

- 4.1. The University requires all HDR candidates to present a Final Seminar to take place on or immediately after the submission of the thesis for examination. The Final Seminar shall normally take place within three months of the expected submission date.
- 4.2. The objectives of the Final Seminar are to:
  - provide an opportunity for the candidate to present the research outcomes to the host Faculty or URC and the wider community;
  - celebrate the achievements of the candidate in developing the research project to examination submission; and
  - promote the University and its research by showcasing the results of the research project.
- 4.3. The Chair is responsible for scheduling the seminar into the Faculty or URC's seminar timetable and for ensuring that the seminar is held.

4.4. The Supervisory Panel and ADR of the host Faculty (or delegate) or Director of the URC will attend the seminar. Host Faculty or URC staff and members of the wider University community should be invited.

***Other related documents***

Documents related to this policy are:

- Higher Degree by Research Academic Progress Policy
- Higher Degree by Research Enrolment and Changes to Candidature Policy
- Code of Practice for Higher Degree by Research Supervision
- Infrastructure Support for Higher Degree by Research Candidates Policy
- Examination of Higher Degree by Research Theses Policy
- Supervision of Higher Degree by Research Candidates Policy
- Council of Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies' Framework for Best Practice in Doctoral Education