

# **A Student's Guide to Preparing Higher Degree Thesis Proposals and Plans**

(see Section 6 of the Handbook for Research Degrees of MPhil, PhD and EdD at the University of Waikato)

## **Conditional Enrolment**

Normally, all candidates are conditionally enrolled for the first six months of their candidacy. Only in very rare circumstances, where candidates provide evidence of exceptional academic and research ability, is this period shortened.

The research plan forms the basis of the research project and the subsequent work leading up to the preparation of the thesis. Its development should be a major part of the early work of the candidate (usually about three months for doctoral study and one month for MPhil) and have the pro-active support of the supervisor(s).

The plan should be reviewed at each scheduled meeting between the candidate and supervisor(s) and updated as necessary. The chief supervisor and the student should retain copies of all versions of the research plan.

A number of departments have particular requirements relating to the format of research proposals, so you are advised to check with the relevant department before preparing your proposal. However some requirements are common to all departments.

## **Preparing an Initial Research Proposal**

At this point it is necessary to use only broad terms to describe the intended area of research. Nevertheless it is desirable that the aims and methods of the research be clearly worked out between supervisor and candidate before work commences. The proposal should be between three and six pages long and reflect about one week's work.

Initial research proposals submitted to the Postgraduate Studies Committee for conditional enrolment consideration should normally contain the following:

1. A working title for the thesis
2. A clear and concise outline of the topic or research question, and the proposed aims or objectives of the study
3. A brief description of the research methodology and, if appropriate, the theoretical framework
4. An indication of the theoretical and research traditions which will inform the project
5. A timetable outlining the proposed stages of work, through to completion
6. A statement identifying any ethical issues raised by the research
7. An indication of the resources required (e.g. library, computing, laboratory equipment)

## **Confirmation of Enrolment**

At the end of the period of conditional enrolment the chief supervisor is required to assess the candidate's progress in a series of skill categories. In particular candidates are assessed as to whether a level of competence is demonstrated in the following broad criteria as appropriate for the discipline or field of enquiry:

- Technical language and skills
- Conceptual or theoretical knowledge of the field of study
- Ability to evaluate literature critically
- Ability to design appropriate methods of investigation
- Ability to develop and present coherent arguments
- Ability to focus on the research topic

## **Writing the Full Plan**

Full research plans submitted to the Postgraduate Studies Committee for confirmation of enrolment should be the product of up to six months work and should usually contain the following:

1. A working title for the thesis.
2. A statement of the research topic/problem
3. An outline of the significance of the topic (for example, its importance for advancing knowledge in the field, discipline or region and/or implications for methodology or understanding)
4. A review of the literature
5. A statement of research questions or hypotheses
6. The methodologies by which the questions or hypotheses will be investigated
7. The forms of analysis proposed
8. A thesis outline
9. The resource requirements including the impact of timing of resource availability
10. A timetable for the total project and thesis writing
11. An ethics approval statement (if relevant)

If you experience any difficulties when preparing your initial research proposal or your full plan please discuss these with your supervisor.