

# Higher Degrees by Research Thesis Submission and Examination - Procedures



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## Definitions

Please refer to the university's Glossary of Terms for policies and procedures. Terms and definitions identified below are specific to these procedures and are critical to its effectiveness:

**Candidate** means a person admitted to a Higher Degree Research (HDR) program at the university.

**Candidature** means duration of enrolment in a higher degree by research program. A Research student is considered to be a "candidate" for the higher degree by research program in which they are enrolled. All research and related work towards fulfilment of the requirements for a higher degree by research must be completed during enrolled candidature.

**Creative work** means an original product designed, created or constructed by a candidate during candidature derived from one or more of the creative arts including graphical and new media techniques.

**Exegesis** means a scholarly, critical commentary on the original creative work in dialogue with, and informing that original work or collection of works, resulting from research undertaken and produced during. The exegesis also includes explicit reference to the research methodologies employed in the creation of the original creative work.

**Higher degree by research (HDR)** means a supervised research program that requires original research in an area.

**Principal Supervisor** means a USC academic staff member who meets the criteria for and has been approved for registration as a USC Principal HDR supervisor. A registered principal supervisor may join an individual student's supervision panel as the student's principal supervisor or as a co-supervisor. Refer to the HDR Supervision – Procedures for a principal supervisor's roles and responsibilities.

**Significant research component** means a substantial research project undertaken with appropriate research methodology.

**Thesis** means an original substantial piece of scholarly writing resulting from research undertaken by a candidate and produced during candidature to meet the requirements of the degree.

## 1. Purpose of procedures

These procedures provide the framework for HDR thesis submission and examination at the university.

They should be read in conjunction with the Higher Degrees by Research - Academic Policy, and the following associated procedures and guidelines:

- Higher Degree by Research Candidature – Procedures
- Higher Degree by Research Supervision – Procedures
- Higher Degree by Research Admission and Enrolment – Guidelines
- Higher Degree by Research Confirmation of Candidature – Guidelines
- Higher Degree by Research Thesis Presentation – Guidelines
- Higher Degree by Research Thesis Review – Guidelines
- Higher Degree by Research Examiners – Guidelines

## 2. Thesis preparation

This section should be read in conjunction with the 'Higher Degree by Research Thesis Presentation – Guidelines', the 'Higher Degree by Research Thesis Review – Guidelines'.

2.1 For an award of a PhD, the thesis must represent an original and significant contribution to knowledge of the subject.

### APPROVAL AUTHORITY

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation)

### RESPONSIBLE OFFICER

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation)

### DESIGNATED OFFICER

Dean, Graduate Research

### FIRST APPROVED

29 July 2014

### LAST AMENDED

27 March 2020

### EFFECTIVE START DATE

27 March 2020

### REVIEW DATE

30 May 2022

### STATUS

Active

[usc.edu.au/policy](https://usc.edu.au/policy)

2.2 The research described must have been completed during the period of enrolment for the degree.

2.3 The thesis must consist of an account of the candidate's own research and may include research

publications. All research performed conjointly with other persons must be fully acknowledged and include a statement of the candidate's contribution to the conjoint research.

2.4 The thesis should include appropriate acknowledgements in a prominent place. Recipients of a USC Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship are required to include specific acknowledgement of the "Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship". Any editorial assistance in the preparation of the thesis must also be acknowledged.

2.5 The candidate must prepare and present their thesis in accordance with 'Higher Degree by Research Thesis Presentation – Guidelines'. A candidate, with the support of their principal supervisor, may request approval for a variation in the Guidelines where good reason for such a variation exists.

2.6 Where an exegesis is required, the candidate must prepare and present their exegesis in accordance with 'Higher Degrees by Research Thesis Presentation – Guidelines'.

2.7 Candidates have ownership of intellectual property directly related to their research project or creative work, unless other arrangements have been mutually agreed in advance by the candidate and the university. (Refer to the university's Intellectual Property - Governing Policy).

2.8 The candidate must not submit as part of the thesis any work or material that the candidate has previously been submitted for a university degree or other similar award as the main content of the thesis.

2.9 The principal supervisor must arrange for:

(a) the thesis to be run through text matching software to support the avoidance of plagiarism, and

(b) an independent edit check of the thesis in sufficient time to enable the candidate to adapt the thesis in response to feedback as appropriate.

(c) a review of the thesis by one of the other supervisors or an independent peer reviewer prior to submission for external examination.

2.9.1 Refer to the 'Higher Degrees by Research Thesis Review – Guidelines' for further information on conducting the edit check. The principal supervisor will be required to sign a declaration at thesis submission to demonstrate that these checks have taken place.

### 3. Thesis presentation seminar

3.1 A candidate is required to present their research at a university organised seminar prior to submitting their thesis. To ensure sufficient time to respond to feedback, the presentation should occur ideally six months, and no later than three months prior to the due date for thesis submission. This thesis presentation is a thirty minute presentation and should be made to a university audience allowing additional time for questions and feedback. Presentation at external conference(s) is not sufficient grounds for exemption from the Thesis Presentation Seminar; however, all candidates will be encouraged to present their research to appropriate external audiences.

3.2. The candidate in liaison with the supervision panel and the Graduate Research School, organises the time for the Thesis Presentation Seminar. The supervision panel and the Head of School or Head of School delegate provides feedback to the candidate with regard to any revisions to be incorporated to their final thesis. Candidates must present a seminar satisfactory to the Head of School or Head of School delegate before their thesis will be accepted for submission for examination.

### 4. Examiner Nomination

4.1 The student must provide a minimum eight weeks' written notice of intention to submit a thesis or exegesis and creative work for examination to their principal supervisor using the notice of intention to submit form.

4.2 The principal supervisor, upon receipt of the notice of intention to submit form, discusses potential examiners with the candidate to ensure that only suitable examiners are nominated (the candidate must not be aware of the final nominated examiners). No later than three weeks after receipt of the notice of intention to submit, the principal supervisor submits to the Graduate Research School:

(a) the notice of intention to submit form

(b) the examiner nomination form

(c) a brief abstract of the thesis

4.3 The information provided to examiners on initial contact by the principal supervisor and prior to approval of examiners by the Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the committee should include:

(a) The topic or title of the thesis

(b) The degree for which the candidate is submitting the thesis

- (c) The planned submission date
- (d) The length of time available for the examination of the thesis
- (e) Reference to relevant USC procedures for examination.

4.4 The principal supervisor nominates examiners to the Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the committee, who approves a panel of potential examiners. On submission of examiner nomination to the Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the committee, the principal supervisor ceases communication with the nominated examiners. Subsequent communication relating to the examination is undertaken by the Graduate Research School.

An examination panel will consist of:

TABLE 0.1

| Panel role                           | Number appointed | Description  |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|--|
| Chairperson of the examination panel | 1                | Normally an academic staff member of this university with appropriate expertise in the research area. Must not be or have been a member of the candidate's supervision panel. The Chairperson does not have an examiner role.  |
| External examiners                   | 2 to 3           | Examiners hold a doctoral degree (or equivalent research experience), and must be an active researcher in the relevant discipline, as demonstrated by relevant and recent research publications. Examiners may not be members of the staff of this university (including adjunct appointments), nor have been a member of staff of this university within the past 5 years. A candidate's supervisors may not be examiners. Any persons acknowledged in the thesis as making a contribution to the work may not be appointed as an examiner. |
| Reserve examiner(s)                  | At least 1       | Meets the requirements of an external examiner as outlined above. A reserve examiner may be called upon by the Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the committee to fulfil the role of examiner (in the event that any of the originally nominated examiners are unavailable), or should an additional or adjudication examiner be required (see section 6.4)   |

4.5 Members of the examination panel are invited by the Graduate Research School on behalf of the Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the committee. Invited examiners respond via the form provided.

4.5.1 When a thesis requires examination under obligations of confidentiality, the external examiners are required to sign and return a Confidentiality Agreement in addition to the examiner acceptance form provided.

4.6 The examination is a confidential process. Candidates are not advised of the identity of their examiners until the end of the examination process, and only if the examiner has indicated that their identity may be made available. Members of the examination panel may not normally consult with one another. An examiner wishing to enter into dialogue with another examiner, should direct any questions to the Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the committee via the Graduate Research School. An examiner may not communicate with the candidate or a member of their supervision panel.

## 5. Submission of thesis for examination

5.1 A candidate is required to lodge:

TABLE 0.2

| Qty | Items required for submission:  |
|-----|---|
|     | Soft-bound copies of the thesis for examination (one for each of the examiners).  |
|     | Electronic .pdf version of the thesis (except where grant funding restrictions prohibit electronic submission of the thesis). |
|     | Completed 'Higher Degree by Research Thesis Submission Form   |

5.2 The Higher Degree by Research Thesis Submission Form includes a declaration for the candidate and supervisor that covers the items listed in Table 0.3:

TABLE 0.3

Declarations

- Candidate's declaration certifies:
- the thesis is my own account of research undertaken by me; and
  - the thesis has been wholly completed during candidature, except where the Committee has approved a transfer of enrolment from another higher degree by research; and
  - where work has been done conjointly with other persons, my contribution is clearly stated and the contribution of other persons is clearly acknowledged and recognised; and
  - the thesis does not contain as its main content any work or material which is embodied in a thesis or dissertation previously submitted by me or any other person for a university degree or other similar qualification at this or other higher education institution, except where approval has previously been granted by the Committee.
  - The thesis includes required acknowledgement of the Australian Government's Research Training Program Scholarship (where applicable).
- Supervision panel's declaration certifies:
- I have read the thesis and approve the submission for external examination; and
  - I confirm that the candidate's thesis / exegesis conforms to the academic policy governing the above degree; and
  - the thesis/exegesis has been run through SafeAssign and the report does not indicate plagiarism; and
  - one of the other supervisors or an independent peer reviewer conducted a review of the thesis; and
  - the candidate presented their research to a university audience

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5.3 This form must be signed by the Candidate, the principal supervisor, and the Dean, Graduate Research.

5.4 Submission is to be made to the Graduate Research School by the date on the notice of intention form and by the thesis submission milestone date. Where the candidate has been given permission to submit their thesis in a form outside standard requirements for their HDR, the candidate must comply with the directions of the Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the committee regarding the material to be presented for examination.

5.5 In the event that the supervision panel does not provide the required related thesis submission documents within two weeks of any due date, or if the principal supervisor declines to support the examination of the thesis or exegesis and creative work, the Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the committee will determine whether the thesis or exegesis and creative work will be accepted for examination and if required, identify an appropriate examination panel. In making the determination, the Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the committee may seek written or oral representations from the candidate, the supervisors and may seek information from any other sources.

5.5.1 If the Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the committee, determines that the thesis or exegesis and creative work may not be submitted for examination, the Graduate Research School will advise the candidate in writing of the decision, the reasons for the decision and, where appropriate, any actions that the candidate needs to take in order that the thesis or exegesis and creative work may be made ready for examination.

5.6 The school of enrolment covers the cost of printing and binding the thesis for examination. Candidates cover the cost of any final printed and bound copies of the thesis to keep as personal copies.

5.7 The Graduate Research School covers the cost of examiners honorarium payments and postage.

5.8 Enrolment is suspended when the thesis or exegesis (and creative work) is submitted. If the candidate has been in receipt of a scholarship, the Graduate Research School advises Financial Services to cease stipend payments (in accordance with the relevant scholarship conditions booklet).

5.9 The Graduate Research School confirms the candidate has successfully completed any coursework requirements, conditions and milestones of their candidature, as described in the Higher Degrees by Research – Academic Policy and other associated procedures.

## 6. Examination

6.1 The Graduate Research School provides members of the examination panel with:

- (a) A copy of the thesis
- (b) A copy of the Thesis Revisions Summary Reports (in the case of revised thesis submission)
- (c) Examiners of Higher Degree by Research Theses – Guidelines
- (d) Higher Degree by Research Thesis Presentation – Guidelines
- (e) Examiners' Report Forms
- (f) Examiner Payment Form

6.2 Each examiner must submit to the Graduate Research School a concise written report on the thesis and must recommend one of the following:

TABLE 0.4

| Possible outcomes |  |  |
|-------------------|--|--|
| (a)               | Award  | The thesis be accepted as satisfactory and the candidate awarded the degree.   |
| (b)               | Award with revisions   | The thesis be accepted as satisfactory and the candidate awarded the degree, subject to revisions as listed being made by the candidate to the satisfaction of the Chairperson of the examination panel.                 |
| (c)               | Revise and resubmit for external examination                         | The thesis in its present form is not satisfactory and further work as described in the examiner's reports is required. The revised thesis should be subject to re-examination.  |
| (d)               | Non-Award  | The thesis does not merit the award of the degree and does not demonstrate sufficient merit to warrant resubmission. The thesis be rejected, and the degree not awarded.   |
| (e)               | [For doctoral examinations only]<br>Non-Award doctoral, award master | The candidate be admitted to the award for an appropriate alternative degree at the master level (with revisions as listed being made by the candidate to the satisfaction of the Chairperson of the examination panel). |

6.3 Examiners are requested to return their examiner's report to the Graduate Research School within 4 weeks for a Masters degree examination and 6 weeks for a PhD examination.

The workflow for late examiner's is outlined in table 0.5:

TABLE 0.5

|                                     | Action taken   |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 2 weeks before due date:            | 2 weeks prior to the due date, the Graduate Research School emails a reminder to the examiner of the upcoming due date.  |
| On due date:                        | If no report is received by the due date, the Graduate Research School advises Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the committee who makes a determination on how to proceed with the examination. The Graduate Research School communicates the delay to the principal supervisor who in turn advises the candidate. |
| Upon receipt of advice from the RDC | If it is agreed that the report will be unacceptably delayed, upon direction from the Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the committee, the Graduate Research School advises the examiner that their services are no longer required and requests the return of the thesis.  |
| Upon receipt of advice from the RDC | The Graduate Research School invites the reserve examiner to examine the thesis.   |

6.4 Upon receipt of the examiners reports, the Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the committee determines the outcome of the examination as one of the options described in section 6.2.

6.4.1 Where there is substantial disagreement between the external examiners, the Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the committee, may seek input from the Chairperson of Examiners, or may request that an additional external examiner be appointed to examine the thesis.

6.4.2 If the Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the committee determines an additional examination of the thesis, the Graduate Research School will invite the reserve examiner (in accordance with section 4.4) who will examine the thesis and provide an additional report for the Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the committee to consider.

6.4.3 In the case of referral to an additional external examiner, the Graduate Research School provides an update to the relevant principal supervisor to explain the delay to the final examination outcome. The principal supervisor is responsible for notifying the candidate.

6.5 The Graduate Research School provides the final examination outcome advice to the Chairperson of Examiners and the principal supervisor in the first instance, including any fee implications for period of revisions. This practice allows the principal supervisor time to consider the examiner's reports and to advise the candidate and other supervision panel members directly.

## 7. Additional requirements for HDR Creative Arts submission and examination

For candidates producing non-print creative work as part of a Master of Creative Arts or Doctor of Creative Arts, additional submission requirements are described in this section. Such candidates are required to submit for examination, creative work which is examined in conjunction with an appropriate exhibition (or recording of an exhibition), and an exegesis.

7.1 A candidate must advise the Graduate Research School of the date of their final exhibition and submit the relevant 'Notice of Intention to Submit Form', stipulating dates, times and locations of exhibition/s, two months prior to the first exhibition date. In cases where there is to be more than one exhibition, candidates must include a listing of all exhibition dates.

7.2 Prior to the exhibition/s, candidates submit the 'DCA/MCA Exhibition Approval Form' to the Graduate Research School, signed by their principal supervisor and Head of School/delegate. This form demonstrates that the principal supervisor and Head of School/delegate agree that the creative work is ready for exhibition.

7.3 With respect to the exhibition of the creative work, the examiners are invited, but not required, to attend the exhibition.

7.4 The exegesis, exhibition recording(s) and digital copy of the creative work must be submitted within three months of the final exhibition.

7.5 The candidate is required to lodge:

(a) soft-bound copies of the examinable creative work/s and the exegesis for examination (one for each of the examiners nominated plus a university copy) and; a digital version where possible.

(b) A recording of the exhibition of the creative work (where appropriate).

(c) a completed 'Higher Degree by Research Thesis Submission Form'.

7.6 Submission is to be made to the Graduate Research School by the agreed thesis completion date. Where the candidate has been given permission to submit their thesis in a form other than a printed volume, the candidate must comply with the directions of the Research Degrees Committee regarding the material to be presented for examination. Submission is to the Graduate Research School.

7.7 At the conclusion of examination, prior to awarding of degree, candidates must submit final exegesis to the USC Research Bank in a manner and form to be prescribed by the Director, Information Services, and must provide the principal supervisor with a copy of the final exegesis. Candidates may apply for "restricted access" to ensure the exegesis is kept only for university records purposes and not to display the exegesis to the public. Applications for restricted access should be made in writing to the Chair, Research Degrees Committee prior to the conclusion of the examination process.

## 8. Submission of a revised thesis for award

For examination outcome b) (Accept with revisions) a candidate and their supervision panel are permitted to have one initial conversation with the Chair of Examiners to discuss and set expectations regarding revisions. The candidate will be permitted to amend and submit a revised thesis or creative work and exegesis for Chairperson of Examiner's review once only. The revised thesis must be submitted within three months of advice of the examination outcome.

8.1 The candidate is required to lodge to the Graduate Research School:

TABLE 0.6

| Qty | Items required for submission   |
|-----|---|
|     | Soft-bound copy of the revised thesis for the Chairperson of Examiners  |
|     | Electronic .pdf version of the revised thesis (except where grant funding restrictions prohibit electronic submission of the thesis). |
|     | Completed 'Higher Degree by Research Revised Thesis Submission Approval Form'   |
|     | Thesis Revisions Summary Report (1 report for each examiner)  |

8.2 The Graduate Research School liaises with the Chairperson of Examiners to arrange review of the revised thesis.

8.3 The Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the committee, is the approving authority to accept a revised thesis as satisfactory for award. If the Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the committee does not consider that the revised thesis satisfactorily responds to the original examiners' comments, specific advice on further responses required will be provided to the principal supervisor, who will liaise with the candidate.

## 9. Submission of revised thesis for re-examination

9.1 For examination outcome c) (revise and resubmit for external examination) a candidate will be permitted to amend and resubmit a thesis or creative work and exegesis for examination for award of the degree once only. The revised thesis must be submitted to the Graduate Research School within 6 months of advice of the examination outcome.

9.2 If the candidate is an international student, the requirement for the candidate to be re-enrolled in order to revise their thesis and resubmit for examination has implications for the student's visa status. USC International must be informed of the candidate's situation. USC International consults with the Department of Home Affairs and the candidate, the outcome being a decision on whether the candidate is permitted to remain in the country for the necessary additional period.

9.3 The candidate is required to lodge:

TABLE 0.7

| Qty | Items required for submission:  |
|-----|---|
| 3   | Soft-bound copies of the thesis for examination (one for each of the examiners nominated plus a university copy).<br>Electronic .pdf version of the thesis (except where grant funding restrictions prohibit electronic submission of the thesis).<br>Completed 'Higher Degree by Research Revised Thesis Submission External Examination Form'<br>Thesis Revisions Summary Report (1 report for each examiner) |

9.4 A thesis sent for re-examination will be sent to the original examiners, providing they are willing to re-examine the thesis.

9.4.1 The Graduate Research School will contact the original examiners on behalf of the Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the committee and invite them to re-examine the thesis. The invitation will be issued 8 weeks prior to the due date of the thesis submission.

9.4.2 If they are unavailable, the principal supervisor will be asked to nominate new examiners for approval by the Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the committee. If the principal supervisor has not nominated new examiners within one month of the thesis submission due date, the Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the committee will identify new examiners.

9.5 The thesis examination process outlined in section 5 is followed, with examination outcomes as per section 5.2, with the exclusion of outcome (c), as a thesis can only be re-examined once.

## 10. Finalisation of successful candidature

10.1 The Graduate Research School sends advice of 'Finalisation of Thesis Examination' to the candidate and the Director, Information Services.

10.2 At the conclusion of examination, prior to award of the degree, candidates must submit their final thesis to the USC Research Bank in a manner and form to be prescribed by the Director, Information Services, and must provide the principal supervisor with a copy of the final thesis.

10.3 In the case of a thesis that includes published works or works that are subject to copyright or patent or similar intellectual property restrictions, the candidate must lodge with the thesis a copy of any contract or formal agreement or legal instrument that binds the candidate or the university with respect to those works.

10.4 The copy of the thesis lodged with the university Library will be available to any person for consultation or copying unless, on the application of the candidate concerned, the Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the Committee, determines that it will not be made available without the written consent of the author for a period which must not exceed 52 weeks or unless prohibited by any restrictions required by any legally enforceable instrument lodged by the candidate.

10.5 Candidature ends when the final thesis is successfully submitted to the USC Research Bank.

## 11. Conferral of award

11.1 The Graduate Research School sends the 'Recommendation of Admission to the Degree' and a copy of 'Recommendation to Confer Form' to the secretary of Academic Board with copies to Student Services and Engagement. On receipt of the correspondence, Student Services and Engagement updates the student's academic record to indicate that the candidate has been awarded a Pass grade for their thesis. The Secretary, Academic Board administers the process for conferral of the award.

11.2 The Academic Board, or the Chairperson acting on behalf of the Board, considers recommendations on admission to degrees and conferral of awards from the Research Degrees Committee. When the Academic Board has approved the recommendations on the conferral of awards from the Research Degrees Committee, the Secretary, Academic Board advises the Graduate Research School and Student Services and Engagement of this decision.

11.3 Student Services and Engagement prepares and sends a letter to the graduand officially informing them of the conferral of the award, inviting the graduand to participate in the next graduation ceremony, and, where appropriate, informing the graduand that they are entitled to use the title of Doctor.

## 12. Grievances

Candidates who can demonstrate grounds to appeal a decision by the Research Degrees Committee, or Chairperson acting on behalf of the committee, may access the Student Grievance Resolution – Governing Policy, via Stage 3 of the Student Review and Appeals – Procedures.

END

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### RELATED DOCUMENTS

Authorship and Dissemination of Research Findings - Procedures  
Copyright - Governing Policy  
Higher Degrees by Research - Academic Policy  
Higher Degrees by Research Candidature - Procedures  
Higher Degrees by Research Supervision - Procedures  
Intellectual Property - Governing Policy  
Intellectual Property: Student IP - Procedures  
Managing and Investigating Breaches of Responsible Research Conduct - Procedures  
Research Data Management - Procedures  
Responsible Research Conduct - Governing Policy  
Student Academic Integrity - Governing Policy  
Student Conduct - Governing Policy  
USC University Research Centres and Research Institutes - Academic Policy  
USC University Research Centres and Research Institutes - Procedures

### LINKED DOCUMENTS

Higher Degrees by Research - Academic Policy

### SUPERSEDED DOCUMENTS

Higher Degrees by Research - Procedures

### RELATED LEGISLATION / STANDARDS

Higher Education Support Act 2003  
Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2018)  
Australian Qualifications Framework