SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA: PART III

The next meeting of the Board of the Graduate Research School will be held in the Chancellor's Room on Tuesday, 8 March 2008 at 2.15p.m.

The following item has been requested to be placed on the agenda under Part III for discussion and decision. Please bring this along to the forthcoming Board meeting to be held on Tuesday, 8 April 2008 in the Chancellor’s Room.

DR KABILAN KRISHNASAMY
Executive Officer
Board of the Graduate Research School
Part 3 – Item for Discussion and Decision

1. ADVICE FOR STUDENTS ON PRESENTING A THESIS AS A SERIES OF PAPERS – REF F

In recent times there has been an increasing trend for students to present their thesis in the form of a series of papers which have been published in refereed journals, manuscripts that have been submitted but not yet accepted or published and/or unsubmitted manuscripts. While there may be several advantages in organizing a thesis as a series of papers, members may note that this is one form of presentation that has often been criticized by examiners, particularly for the lack of coherence and the absence of a clear introduction and conclusion.

The advice on the Graduate Research School Website (http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/home/current/thesis/preparation/papers) clearly indicates that there must be a link between each of the papers and that the thesis overall should tell a coherent “story”. It further notes that each chapter must be presented in a “logical order and strongly linked together”. The thesis should include a general introduction “which sets out the context of the thesis and explains the organization and structure of the thesis and a general discussion which draws together the main findings of the thesis in the context of previous research, and establishes the significance of the work”. However, this advice often goes unnoticed by candidates and has become a common criticism by examiners for theses that are presented as a series of papers.

A related problem, as raised by several members at the March 2008 Board meeting, is the common difficulty of determining the status of each paper in the series at the point of examination. In other words, have all the papers been already published in refereed journals or are some of the papers as yet unsubmitted, or still in the process of being reviewed by international referees? Is this declared by students? If the paper is not accepted by a refereed journal, how does this impact on the examination of the thesis which is being presented and may have been declared as a series of published papers?

The combination of these issues have led members, at the last Board meeting, to request that the policies or instructions governing the presentation of a thesis as a series of published papers be revisited.

Attached is a copy of the instructions posted on the Graduate Research School website and also text from a Powerpoint presentation available on the web at http://www.psa.guild.uwa.edu.au/events/rc_week_07

Members are asked to view the attached and provide feedback with a view to clarifying the instructions/policy, where relevant.
Current Advice for Students on Presenting a Thesis as a Series of Papers

1. **Relevant Rules**


   1.3.1.33(1) A thesis may be presented in the form of a typescript, a published book or a paper or series of papers which have been published in refereed journals.

      (2) If any of the items submitted in terms of (1) have been jointly authored—

         (a) the work done by the student must be clearly indicated and certified as such by the co-authors; and

         (b) the co-authors must certify that they agree to the inclusion in the thesis of work of which they are joint authors.

   (3) A publication of which the student is sole or joint author may be submitted as an appendix in support of the thesis, but, in the case of joint authorship, the work done by the student must be clearly indicated.

   (4) If a series of papers is presented, there must be a full explanatory introduction and a review article at the end to link the separate papers and to place them in the context of the established body of knowledge.

   (5) If detailed data and descriptions of methods are not otherwise given, they must be included as appendices.

   (6) If, with the approval of the Board, the thesis is presented as a typescript in two parts comprising respectively a piece of creative writing and exegesis, the two parts must be strongly connected and the connection must be demonstrated clearly in the exegesis.

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2. **Advice on Web:**


   **NB:** This document was not written as an official guideline - it was originally prepared as a workshop handout. The document has been marked with suggested edits.

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**Organising your Thesis as a Series of Papers**

Many candidates organise their thesis as a series of papers. These may be papers that have been published, manuscripts that have been submitted for publication but not yet accepted, manuscripts that could be submitted, or any combination of these.

There are several advantages to organising a thesis in this way:

- It resolves the conflict between preparing the thesis for examination and preparing papers for publication, because they amount to the same thing. You need not feel
that when you are spending time on your papers you are running out of time to prepare your thesis.

- It increases the probability that you will publish the work from your thesis. This is not only to your advantage, but also that of your supervisor(s) and the University.

- If you have reviewers’ comments on your papers before submitting your thesis, you can use this feedback to improve your thesis. This is not only good for the quality of your thesis but also for your confidence. By the time you submit the thesis for examination, at least part of it will have been subjected to the scrutiny of experts other than you and your supervisor(s).

- Having part of the work published prior to examination establishes it as worthy of publication, which is one of the criteria for thesis examination. The larger the proportion that is published, the easier it is for your examiners and the Board of the Graduate Research School to recognise that your work is substantial and of value.

However, it is very important that you remember that a thesis is more than a collection of papers. Essentially, the chapters of the thesis can stand alone, but the thesis is a complete and coherent “story”, in which each chapter is an integral part. The chapters must be in a logical order and strongly linked together.

When presenting a thesis as a collection of papers it is easy to make the error of allowing the thesis to become disjointed. This will stand against it, as a thesis is not the same as a body of work. Sometimes, students who submit theses as a series of published papers introduce each new chapter with a foreword which introduces the chapter and establishes its links to previous chapters. More conventionally, this is in the introduction to each chapter. The chapters should contain references to each other, much as in a published article you would cite other references.

Despite that some or all of the chapters may have been published previously with different fonts and formats, it is expected that the formatting in the thesis be uniform so that the thesis as a whole has a professional appearance. However, the internal headings, and therefore the structure, might differ quite widely between the chapters.

In general, every thesis should include a:

1. **General Introduction** which sets out the context of the thesis and explains the organisation and structure of the thesis; and

2. **General Discussion** which draws together the main findings of the thesis in the context of previous research, and establishes the significance of the work.

These chapters frame the internal chapters and assist in establishing the thesis as a coherent whole (see the guidelines for thesis preparation).

You should include a section at the front of the thesis entitled “*Publications arising from this thesis*” (or similar words), where you list the published and submitted papers that have arisen from the work in the thesis. After each publication in the list, cite which part of the thesis it represents, e.g.

**Publications Arising from this Thesis**

- Student and Teacher (2003) Effect of number of published papers on pass rate of PhD theses *Journal of Higher Education* **22**, 23-33 (Chapter 2 and part of Chapter 3)

You will also need to complete a "Thesis Declaration" as part of the process of thesis submission. The examiners and the Board of the Graduate Research School will then be able to see clearly what has been published. Where papers included in your thesis have multiple authors, it is important that you indicate very clearly which portions of the paper/s are your work, and which are the work of your co-authors. You are also required to obtain the signed approval of your co-authors to include the work in your thesis.

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3. Text from Powerpoint Presentation, on the Web at http://www.psa.guild.uwa.edu.au/events/rc_week/rc_week_07 as "Designing your Thesis"

Presenting your thesis as a series of papers – to do or not to do....
Dr Sato Juniper
Manager, Graduate Research and Scholarships

What does “Presenting as a Series of Papers” mean?

• At UWA you usually can’t simply bind a collection of papers together and submit them, no matter how many or how good they are.

• What you submit must be coherent and tell a story, ie it must be a “thesis” in the traditional sense of the word - it must present an argument and demonstrate knowledge, understanding and wisdom as well as data and information.

• Usually you will have to write some additional text, even if you have already published all your findings.

Data, knowledge, information and wisdom

• Data are not information, information is not knowledge, knowledge is not understanding and understanding is not wisdom. (Russell Ackoff)

What do the Rules say about this?

• 1.3.1.33(1) A thesis may be presented in the form of a typescript, a published book or a paper or series of papers which have been published in refereed journals.

• ...

• (4) If a series of papers is presented, there must be a full explanatory introduction and a review article at the end to link the separate papers and to place them in the context of the established body of knowledge.

• (5) If detailed data and descriptions of methods are not otherwise given, they must be included as appendices.
What do the Rules mean?

* A thesis may consist of work that is:
  * all published
  * partly published
  * all or partly in the process of being published
  * published in a mixture of scholarly and other media
  * published in parallel
  * some mixture of the above
  * wholly unpublished (but not wholly unpublishable, if it is a PhD)

Publishing in Parallel

* It is ok to present information (and knowledge, understanding and wisdom!) in different ways in your thesis and in work that you publish.
  * Some students prefer to write all or some papers and thesis chapters in parallel, so that the thesis chapter is an expanded form of the published paper.
  * Other students present some or all of their published work in their theses exactly as it was published.

Publishing in Parallel (cont’d)

It is ok to present work in your thesis in a different order than that in which you undertook it or published it, and in different combinations of data and interpretations.

Non-negotiable Rules

* You must behave ethically in every aspect of what you do.
  * You must communicate what you have done, clearly and precisely, to the University and your examiners.

Reasons to Present your Thesis as Papers

* resolves conflicts between preparing the thesis for examination and preparing papers for publication
  * increases the probability that you will publish the work
  * you can use reviewers’ comments on your papers to improve your thesis: quality & confidence
  * having part of the work published prior to examination establishes it as worthy of publication, which is one of the criteria for thesis examination. The larger the proportion that is published, the easier it is for your examiners and the BGRS to recognise that your work is substantial and of value.

Possible Problems

* A thesis is more than a collection of papers. The chapters of the thesis can stand alone, but the thesis is a complete and coherent "story", in which each chapter is an integral part. The chapters must be in a logical order and strongly linked together.

* It is easy for a thesis like this to become disjointed. This will stand against it, as a thesis is not the same as a body of work.

* copyright issues (not yet encountered at UWA)

What You Can Do to Improve Coherence

* Choose the order of the chapters carefully. Use a storyboard or other outlining technique to decide the order of the main points of the story well beforehand, and update this as you go.
• Introduce each new chapter with a foreword which introduces the chapter and establishes its links to previous chapters. This could be in the introduction to each chapter.

• The chapters could contain internal references to each other, much as in a published article you would cite other references.

• Write the General Introduction and Discussion and linking sections very carefully, with the major aim to help the readers negotiate the story (knowledge, understanding and wisdom) as well as the data and information.

Structure
In general, every thesis should include a:
• General Introduction which sets out the context of the thesis and explains the organisation and structure of the thesis; and
• General Discussion which draws together the main findings of the thesis in the context of previous research, and establishes the significance of the work.

These chapters assist in establishing the thesis as a coherent whole and are required under the Rules for theses presented as series of papers.

Structure (cont’d)
• You should include a section at the front of the thesis entitled “Publications arising from this thesis” (or similar words), where you list the published and submitted papers that have arisen from the work in the thesis. After each publication in the list, cite which part of the thesis it represents, e.g.

  • Publications Arising from this Thesis
  • Student and Teacher (2003) Effect of number of published papers on pass rate of PhD theses Journal of Higher Education 22, 23-33 (Chapter 2 and part of Chapter 3)
  • Student, Faithful and Silley (2003) Influence of font size on pass rates of PhD theses Journal of Higher Education 22, 34-45 (Chapter 6)

Co-Authorship
• Where papers included in your thesis have multiple authors it is important that you indicate very clearly which portions of the paper/s are your work and which are the work of your co-authors. There is a Declaration Form for this purpose.

• You are required to obtain the signed co-authors, if possible, to include the work in your thesis.

Formatting
• The formatting in the thesis should be uniform so that the thesis as a whole has a professional appearance. However, the internal headings, and therefore the structure, might differ quite widely between chapters.