

## Appendix C

### Research dissertation programme 2008/2009

#### Dissertation supervision, preparation and writing

##### C 1 Introduction

Dissertation preparation and writing takes place during weeks 8 to 14 of Semester two and the summer.

##### C 2 Dissertation topic

As the dissertation is part of a taught MSc course, rather than an element of a MSc obtained by research, it should not be seen as a research thesis. However, it should reflect scholarship and critical, innovative thought.

During the dissertation preparation module you should prepare a detailed dissertation proposal, identify suitable reading, and hold meetings with your supervisor. During these meetings agree your final topic and take advice on reading.

Dissertations should be student-led. That is, the student should be deciding on how the dissertation proceeds. The supervisor should be a 'sounding-board' rather than a director, helping to ensure that the topic is neither too narrow nor too broad and that the student is thinking deeply about the topic. The dissertation topic is decided by the student with the approval of the supervisor.

Dissertations should reflect the content and philosophy of the course. That is, as far as possible the technical, process and business implications of the topic should be investigated. Clearly, the emphasis may fall in only one of these areas, but the others should not be completely ignored.

It is recommended that you contact your supervisor as soon as possible after Easter, but remembering that you should have much more than 'a vague idea' of what you want to do before you meet her/him.

##### C 3 What is assessed

A good dissertation is one that is focused and that demonstrates scholarship and critical, innovative thought. In assessing the dissertation we will bear in mind the following considerations:

- Do you demonstrate a good knowledge of the literature on the chosen topic and closely related topics? To what extent have you understood the literature? Is the factual material accurate?
- To what extent is there a logical arrangement of an argument throughout the dissertation? We are looking here at the arrangement and structure of the dissertation rather than detailed arguments within it.

- To what extent are you able to look critically at other people's arguments and published 'facts'? Here, the presentation of detailed argument is important.
- To what extent are you able to evolve original criticism of other people's work and make original constructive comments of your own? Here, also, the presentation of detailed argument is important.
- Is the dissertation written in good grammatical English? Are your arguments as clearly written as possible? Are the statistical tables and diagrams relevant and do they explain the verbal text? Try to present statistical tables of your own and do not copy or photocopy them from a book or article where they have been published for a purpose quite different from your own.
- Finally your presentation: get your spelling right, sensible paragraphs, give correct references and bibliographical information.

#### C 4 Presentation

The dissertation will not exceed 20,000 words in length. If it does considerably exceed this length you run the risk of being required to reduce its length to 20,000 words.

You **must** provide a word count (of text only: that is, do not include in the word count figure and table legends or bibliography).

The dissertation should be typed in double spacing on A4 paper with a 2-inch left-hand margin to permit binding. References should follow the Harvard System (details of this system were provided as part of the research methods, The library also produces a useful description of this system in a handout. Footnotes should be kept to a minimum and be placed at the end of chapters. Statistical tables may be placed in appendices or in the text as desired. All citations in the text should consist solely of the author's surname followed by the year of publication in brackets. The dissertation should commence with an abstract and conclude with a bibliography arranged alphabetically by author's surname.

**The completed dissertation cannot be accepted unless it is in a form suitable for the Library.** Poor word processing or typing, bad spelling and untidy statistical tables are not acceptable. Remember good typing takes time, so arrange to have it done in good time. Typing mistakes are *your* fault and *not* the typist's. You must allow yourself time to read the typed script and have it corrected before submission.

#### C 5 Marking

Each dissertation will be marked by the supervisor and by one other assessor working independently. Viva voce examinations with the external examiner are held in late October or November.

The pass mark is 40 per cent. A student receiving a mark of 70 per cent or over will receive a Distinction if he/she also obtained at least 70 per cent for the part of the course examined by written paper. If a dissertation is unsatisfactory, the student may be requested to resubmit/revise it. A period of 6 weeks will usually be allowed for resubmission/revision, this period commencing the day after the Board of Examiners' meeting. If a resubmitted dissertation is adequate for the award of an MSc, a pass mark (40 per cent) will be assigned to it unless the Board of Examiners has agreed to recommend to the Board of Studies that there are exceptional circumstances for awarding the dissertation a higher mark. However, if revision, rather than re-submission, is requested and if the revisions have been completed satisfactorily, the Board of Studies

will be asked to assign a mark to the dissertation which has been agreed by the Board of Examiners.

Marks are awarded on the following basis:

**Presentation of the Dissertation (20 per cent)**

Is the dissertation written in good grammatical English (bearing in mind that English may not be the first language of the student)?

Are the statistical tables, diagrams and accompanying legends clear and informative?

Are references and bibliographical information presented correctly?

**Literature Review (20 per cent)**

Does the student demonstrate a good knowledge of the literature?

Has the student understood the literature?

Is the factual material accurate?

**Arrangement/Structure of the Dissertation (20 per cent)**

Is there a logical arrangement of arguments throughout the dissertation?

Are the arguments presented clearly? (We are looking here at the arrangement and structure of the dissertation rather than detailed arguments within it).

**Detailed Argument (20 per cent)**

Has the student been sufficiently critical with respect to other people's arguments and published 'facts'?

Is the presentation of the arguments balanced?

Are the statistical tables and diagrams relevant and do they explain the verbal text?

(Here, the presentation of detailed argument is important).

**Originality (20 per cent)**

To what extent has the student been able to evolve original criticism of other people's work and make original constructive comments of his/her own?

**C 6 Programme**

The dissertation must be, and be seen to be, your own work. Consequently, most contact between you and your supervisor will take place during the first part of the dissertation period, that is, during the Summer term (which ends on Friday 30 May). After this, you should not expect or need frequent contact. It is important to note that many supervisors will not be available for parts of the undergraduate summer vacation period due to research and conference commitments and family holidays, etc.

By Friday 16 May: a dissertation synopsis must be completed, signed by your supervisor and submitted to the Director of Studies. This synopsis should be 1-3 pages long and should comprise a summary of the arguments and issues that will be investigated, an outline of the structure of the contents and an indicative bibliography.

By 13 June: one or two draft chapters should be submitted to the supervisor for guidance on style and presentation. The supervisor will not read the whole draft of the dissertation before submission. To repeat what was said above, the dissertation must be, and be seen to be, your own work.

By Friday 11 September: submit dissertation title to Stephen Lo (Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering).

By Friday 18 September: submit three copies of the dissertation to Centre for Window and Cladding Technology (to Brenda Apted) by 3.00-pm (1500 hours). CWCT will then arrange for covers to be put on the dissertations. The three copies should be in a state suitable for binding (i.e. pages not stapled, margins correct width, pages numbered and in the right order, etc.).

**Note:** *No dissertation will be accepted later than the submission date unless accompanied by a medical certificate indicating that illness has prevented the candidate from submitting on time, or for other valid reasons. Moreover, **late submission must always be discussed with the Director of Studies prior to the submission date.** In such cases, the acceptance of a dissertation that is submitted late will be at the discretion of the Director of Studies. It is therefore crucial that you set yourself a personal deadline several days earlier than the official deadline, so that any last-minute problems (e.g. with printing) do not prevent you submitting on time.*

Late October/November: **Viva Voce Examination** (with Professor Ray Ogden, the External Examiner). Please note that although not all students may be asked to attend a viva voce, *if you are asked to attend you must do so.* Viva lists will not be known until a day or so before the vivas, after the dissertations have been marked. It is probable that each examination will be of a least 20 minutes duration. Professor Ray Ogden is Deputy Head of Department of Architecture at Oxford Brookes University.