COMPSCI 30-Point Dissertations (690, 691, 789) and 15-Point 780 Projects

Clark Thomborson   John Hamer

Adopted 20 March 2006
Minor revisions: 12 July 2006

Purpose

This document describes department-level policies and procedures for admitting, supervising, and assessing students in our 30-point dissertation courses (COMPSCI 690, 691 and 789) and 15-point COMPSCI 780 projects.

University policies must take precedence over departmental policies; however, at the time of this writing there are no known conflicts between University policies and the policies and procedures in this document.

History

2006-03-20 v1.0 adopted as department policy

2006-07-12 v1.1 8h, replace "Supervisor" with "Examiner". 8a Change due date from "last day of semester" to "5pm on the first Monday following the last day of lectures".

Roles

Dissertation Coordinator   Clark Thomborson ⟨cthombor@cs.auckland. ac.nz⟩

Enrolment Manager   Conny Bluefeld ⟨c.bluefeld@auckland.ac.nz⟩

Policies and Procedures

1. Students must use nDeva to enrol themselves into a dissertation or 780 project course. This action will place the student's name

on a waitlist, where they will remain until the Dissertation Coordinator has confirmed the following:

(a) For 789, the student must be accepted into the BSc(Hons) programme. The student must select a topic in discussion with an academic member of staff.

(b) For 690 and 691, the student must be accepted into the Graduate Diploma or Postgraduate Diploma respectively.

(c) For 690, 691 and 780, the student must have a willing supervisor and an excellent academic record:

    i. Students with strong GPAs (A− or better) will be approved by the Dissertation Coordinator automatically, in the understanding that the student will find a willing supervisor by the end of the first week of lectures. If the student is unable to find a supervisor, they should drop their enrolment, otherwise they will fail the course.

    ii. Students with GPAs in the B range will not be approved until the Dissertation Coordinator has consulted with the prospective Supervisor, and the supervisor has indicated some point of "excellence" in the student's academic record.

    iii. Students with GPAs below a B− will not be approved for enrolment in an independent study course, except in extraordinary circumstances

(d) The student must not have enrolled in any other independent-study course (COMPSCI 380, 780, 690, 691 or 789) for their current course of study.

2. After a student has found a willing supervisor, either the student or the supervisor should send an email request to the Dissertation Coordinator. This message should be CC'd to both the student and supervisor, and should contain the following information:

(a) The student's name and ID number, and the name of the supervisor.

(b) The waitlisted enrolment: COMPSCI 690, 691, 780 or 789; semester (S1, S2); year (eg, 2006), and campus (City, Tamaki).

(c) Any agreements between the student and supervisor regarding the dissertation (or 780 project), such as its title, brief description, special arrangements for supervision, etc. See item 4 below.

3. The Dissertation Coordinator will acknowledge the email request to be taken off the waitlist by sending an email message (with a CC to student and supervisor) to the Enrolment Manager authorising the student to be fully enrolled in the desired course.

4. Every supervisor must inform their student and the Dissertation Coordinator of any policy that deviates from the guidelines in this document. Policies should be set as soon as possible, to allow students a chance to drop the enrolment if they do not find the policies acceptable.

    (a) Supervisors may impose additional requirements (such as to create a webpage or poster, see point 6 below) if these are documented to the student and to the Dissertation Coordinator prior to the start of enrolment.

    (b) Unless special arrangements are made with the Dissertation Coordinator (see item 2 above), only the report can affect the student's grade. If some additional requirement is not completed satisfactorily, the supervisor should recommend the fail grade "did not complete" (DNC). The supervisor should also provide evidence, in their Examiner's report, that the student was adequately notified of the additional requirement.

5. By the end of the 6th week of enrolment, every dissertation and 780 project student is required to make a brief (ten-minute) oral presentation on their initial research plan, either to their research group (where possible) or at a general session to be organised by the Dissertation Coordinator.

6. By the end of the 6th week of enrolment, every dissertation and 780 project student is strongly encouraged (and may be required by their supervisor) to create a webpage and/or a poster describing their work.

7. All dissertation and 780 project students must make a final oral presentation, briefly describing their preliminary conclusions. This presentation must be made either to a research group such as the CITR, or to a general session organised by the Dissertation Coordinator for City students.

    (a) Any student who fails to make an oral presentation will fail the dissertation (or 780 project) course; however, the oral presentation will not affect their final grade in any other way.

    (b) Supervisors are encouraged to schedule final oral presentations to occur in the penultimate week of lectures, so that students can accept feedback in time for incorporation into their final report.

8. The assessment of a dissertation (or 780 project) must follow the following procedures:

(a) The due date for dissertation and 780 project reports is 5pm on the first Monday following the last day of lectures. Reports submitted late, but within three days of the due date, will be accepted, but a graduated scale of penalties will apply. The scale of penalties is shown in Table 1.

Late Submission	Penalty	Example
Before 5:00pm Tuesday	1 grade point	B+ becomes B
Before 5:00pm Wednesday	2 grade points	B+ becomes B−
Before 5:00pm Thursday	3 grade points	B+ becomes C+
After 5:00pm Thursday	Report failed	

Table 1: Penalties applied to a late report, assuming a submission deadline of 5:00pm Monday

Notes:

i. The deadlines in Table 1 will be strictly adhered to. Reports will not be accepted if they are more than three days late.

ii. Compassionate grounds for late submission may be considered in exceptional circumstances, but the student must apply in writing to the Head of Department as early as possible, but in any event within three days of the due date.

iii. Late submission due to equipment problems associated with either producing or printing of the report will not be considered under the category of compassionate grounds. Penalties will be imposed automatically in such cases.

iv. Late material will not be accepted once a report has been submitted.

(b) The dissertation (or 780 project) report must be submitted in both electronic and hardcopy form. The electronic form must be submitted to the Assignment Drop Box. Allowable formats are PDF and DOC, with a five megabyte maximum length. The hardcopy form should be submitted to the supervisor.

(c) Assessment is based solely on the written dissertation (or 780 project) report. The quality of presentation is important, and care should be taken with English grammar and spelling. Scholarly references should be in an accepted bibliographic style such as the APA.

(d) The dissertation (or 780 project) report will be examined by the supervisor and a second (internal) Examiner, both of whom will independently write an Examiner's Report and assign a tentative grade.

(e) The Examiners are expected to check the final report for signs of plagiarism, and to investigate carefully in cases where plagiarism is suspected. If plagiarism is suspected, appropriate departmental and university policies should be followed, as described in the "Departmental Policy on Cheating in Projects, Dissertations and Theses."

(f) A successful dissertation (or 780 project) will demonstrate some or all of the following:

- evidence of independent thought;
- confident handling of theoretically sophisticated material;
- an ability to evaluate critically the findings and discussion in the relevant literature;
- an ability to engage in rigorous analysis, criticism and problem-solving;
- a mastery of the conventions of the discipline.

30-point dissertations will be held to a higher standard than 780 projects.

(g) The Examiners' reports should include the following elements:

i. A one-sentence summary of the report being assessed;

ii. Assessment of the student's capacity for independent thought, as expressed in the report;

iii. Assessment of the report's literature review;

iv. Assessment of the analysis, criticism and problem-solving in the report;

v. Assessment of the report's overall presentation and organization;

vi. Overall assessment and recommended grade.

(h) The Supervisor should transmit the student's hardcopy dissertation (or 780 project) report, and the Examiners' Reports, to the Dissertation Coordinator, within two weeks of the due date.

i. The Examiner should also send an email copy of the reports to the Dissertation Coordinator.

ii. The Dissertation Coordinator should evaluate the dissertation (or 780 project) report, in the light of the Examiners' Reports and his own judgment.

iii. If the Examiners' tentative grades differ, or the Dissertation Coordinator disagrees with the Examiners' tentative grade, they should attempt to reach a consensus. If no consensus is possible, the Dissertation Coordinator may appoint a third Examiner. Ultimately, the Dissertation Coordinator should return the hardcopy dissertation and

> 780 project reports to the Examiner, and transmit the third Examiner's Report to the Supervisor by email.
>
> iv. The third Examiner's Report should include the same elements as item 8g, however in addition it should clearly indicate whether or not a consensus was reached on the recommended grade.
>
> v. Both the Dissertation Coordinator's Report and the Examiners' Reports must be provided, in hardcopy, to the external assessor at the time of their visit to us. This visit is typically scheduled to occur sometime during the last few days before the final deadline for reporting grades to the examination office. Sufficient time should be allowed for forming a consensus (see item 8(h)iii above). Staff should refer to `http://www2.auckland.ac.nz/uaonly/acreg/exam` for deadlines and other University-level policy regarding assessment.

(i) The supervisor must communicate the name and email address of the proposed Examiner to the Dissertation Coordinator before the end of the semester. The second Examiner must not be involved in supervising the dissertation or 780 project.

(j) The Examiners' Reports, and the identity of the Examiners, are confidential: these should not be revealed to the student. The University will communicate the final grade to the student. The supervisor is nonetheless encouraged to give both positive and negative summary feedback to the student (indicating what was good, and what could have been improved in their report), without revealing the grade recommendation.

9. Supervisors are encouraged to web-publish excellent student work in their web area, after obtaining permission from the student to do so. Obtaining a signed copyright release from the student would be best practice, however an email message from a student clearly stating their assent to web-publication is deemed to be sufficient documentation at present.

10. Supervisors are expected to make themselves available to examine other projects.

<div align="center">(end of Policy)</div>