



Heythrop College

The Specialist Philosophy and Theology College
of the University of London

Research Student Handbook

2011/12

This Handbook is a source of general information for all students of MPhil/PhD degree programmes at Heythrop College. You will find more detailed information about the practicalities of daily life as a Heythrop student on the Heythrop website. Some of this may be particularly relevant to new students.

You will also need to consult the Library Handbook for further information on library resources and the Research Code of Practice for detailed information regarding the conduct of the research degree programmes.

This handbook contains information on study skills and academic arrangements in and outside of the College. All information was compiled in the Summer 2011; you will be informed of relevant changes occurring during the year.

Please keep this handbook throughout the year as a source of reference

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PART A: GENERAL AND PRACTICAL

Research Supervision

Your supervisor will be your main contact, and will arrange your supervision meetings. Other members of the academic staff will see students without appointment if they can, and will let you know of times when they expect usually to be in the office, but it is normally necessary to arrange a specific date and time. This can be done verbally, by phone, by email or by leaving a note at Reception.

You should keep your supervisor informed of things which will affect your work or your attendance – including illness, the illness of other members of your family affecting you, or significant domestic problems.

All staff details are kept updated on the Heythrop web page at:

<http://www.heythrop.ac.uk/about-us/college-staff.html>

Staff may be available during vacations but it should not be assumed that they will be in College, particularly during the months of July and August.

Research Degrees Convenor

The Research Degrees Convenor is Dr Edward Howells. He has an overview of all matters related to research students, and is available to help and advise if required.

Email: e.howells@heythrop.ac.uk

Phone: 020 7795 4217

Director of Research

Dr Michael Lacewing is the Director of Research. He is the Chair of the Research Committee and Research Degrees Sub-Committee.

During Michaelmas Term 2011 Dr Lacewing is on sabbatical. During this period the Acting Director of Research is Dr Michael Barnes.

Email: m.barnes@heythrop.ac.uk

Tel 020 7795 4257

Tutor to Research Students

Dr Tom Crowther is the Tutor to Research Students. His responsibilities include being a contact point independent of your supervisor.

Email: t.crowther@heythrop.ac.uk

Tel 020 7795 4261

Research and Policy Administrator

The Research and Policy Administrator, Ms Frith Hooton, is available to advise and help you with admin-related issues.

Email f.hooton@heythrop.ac.uk
Tel 020 7795 4162

You are welcome to call at any time. Other members of the administrative and finance staff are located in the Student Services Centre (*main building, 1st floor, via lift or the Alban Staircase*). Please go to the Student Enquiry Desk first.

Consultation, how you make your views heard

There are two Research Students' consultancy meetings in the course of the year which you are strongly encouraged to attend to give us feedback on your experience as a research student at Heythrop. We very much hope to hear from you, as this is an opportunity for us to improve the service we offer you. These will take place on:

Weds 11 Jan 2012 from 15.30-16.30

Weds 30 May 2012 from 15.30-16.30

A Research Student Experience Questionnaire will be circulated in the Lent Term, and this is another opportunity for you to let us know if there is more we can do to make your time here happy and profitable, so please do take advantage of this.

Research Students' Representative

The student representative on the Research Committee in 2011-12 is Mr Miroslav Imbrisevic. You are welcome to contact him to ask him to raise with the Research Committee any matters of concern to you.

Email: Miroslav.Imbrisevic@heythropcollege.ac.uk

Heythrop Student Union

The President of the Heythrop Student Union also sits on the Research Committee, and you are encouraged to raise with her any matters you would like brought to the Committee's attention.

Email: Gala.JC@heythropcollege.ac.uk

Meeting Staff and meeting one another

You are warmly encouraged to attend the three social events which take place during the year at which you can meet your supervisors and other staff members, and have a chance to meet and discuss your research with one another whilst enjoying some refreshments. These will take place on:

Weds 05 Oct 2011 from 17.30-19.30

Weds 11 Jan 2012 from 17.30-19.30

Weds 30 May 2012 from 17.30-19.30

New students are especially welcome at the first social, which will provide you with a chance to get to know students who have been here longer and share their experiences.

PART B: ACADEMIC INFORMATION

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR RESEARCH DEGREES

The purpose of the Code of Practice (the Code) is to ensure that all MPhil and PhD students at Heythrop College are effectively supervised so that the full potential of their research may be achieved as rapidly as the nature of their research and other commitments permit, and to ensure that the standard of their award meets the requirements of the national Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ).

The Code contains information, including all important procedures and forms, for current students and supervisors. Please refer to it if you want to remind yourself about your responsibilities as a student and the responsibilities of your supervisor to you. It tells you in great detail about the timescale for completion of your degree and different steps and procedures you need to follow in order to complete the degree successfully.

You will be provided with the Code together with this handbook, but it is also available on the College Website and via the Intranet.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Induction

At registration, all students receive a copy of the Code of Practice, this Research Student Handbook, and the Research Student Induction Handbook (for an overview of procedures). Updates may be issued by the College and will be circulated to all students. In addition, information for research students will be published on the College website and students should consult the pages regularly.

Skills and Training

A programme of generic research skills and methods for all new research students is held at the beginning of the Michaelmas Term in conjunction with the College's MRes programme. Sessions will run on **Monday evenings** from **18.00-20.00**. The room is still to be confirmed.

Dates and sessions:

26th September

Bibliographies, advanced IT/Helios support and web-based resource materials

3rd October

Academic writing

10th October

Research methodology

17th October

Project time management; academic speaking and listening skills

24th October

Personal Development; research proposal design

31st October

Dissertation workshop

The College is working on expanding the provision of the study skills seminars and career support. Information about these and other events is available on Helios and from the Research and Policy Administrator.

All research students are invited to attend tutorial assistant training, and dates will be made available in due course. The College will, wherever possible, offer senior research students the opportunity to assist with the conduct of classes for undergraduate or MA Students or to act as tutorial assistants; such opportunities will be advertised on Helios as they arise.

Research students are encouraged to present papers at conferences, and may apply for **financial assistance to attend conferences** at which they are making a presentation. An application form including guidelines is available on Helios, and should be completed, signed by your supervisor, and submitted to the Research and Policy Administrator, f.hooton@heythrop.ac.uk.

Supervisory Session

Research Students are required to meet with their supervisors at least twice a term in the case of full time students or the equivalent for part time students. Your supervisor will talk to you about your written work and give you advice on your academic progress. Most supervisors expect their students to hand in written work before each meeting.

College Research Seminars

Research students are expected to attend seminars and other research activities regularly. There are seminar series for Theology and Pastoral Studies, Philosophy, Interreligious Dialogue, and Psychology in Dialogue, and seminars just for the presentation of students' work.

A full list of seminars will be made available on the College website and on Helios and is also circulated by email and handed out on the Induction Days. The speakers at the seminars are members of College's academic community (including research students) and guests from other institutions.

Research Presentation Days and Philosophy Research Seminars

There will be three research presentations days this year, on

Friday 9th December 2011

Friday 23rd March 2012

Friday 1st June 2012.

These are organized by the Research Degrees Convenor and presentations are given by students from the Theology and Pastoral & Social Studies Departments.

The Philosophy Department has a Research Students' Seminar **every Thursday** during the Michaelmas and Lent terms, from 09.30-11.00, room to be confirmed.

Students are expected to offer presentations on the themes of their research. Information will be posted on website and the intranet. **As of Sept 2011 it is normally a condition of transfer from MPhil to PhD that you have presented a paper, so if you are approaching this stage of your studies make sure your name is included in the programme for one of these days.**

Themed Postgraduate Research Conference

Every year you have an opportunity not only to participate in the Postgraduate Research Conference but may also be able to offer a short paper if it is in keeping with the conference theme. This conference is an exciting academic event which brings together MA and Research Students and academics UK-wide. Keynote papers are usually presented by senior academics of international standing. In 2011/12 the date for the conference is Sat 19-May-12 from 09.30-17.00.

Seminars and Study events outside the College

There is a rich programme of seminars, colloquia, study days and conferences within University of London and in other Universities. Notifications about these will be sent via research email list, normally several times a week. Please check your emails regularly.

Research Directory

<http://www.heythrop.ac.uk/research/staff-research-directory.html>

This includes short descriptions of the main areas of interest of each member of staff.

PART C: INTRODUCTION TO STUDY SKILLS

WRITING THE THESIS

What Postgraduate Research is About

The distinguishing mark of postgraduate research is *an original contribution to knowledge*. The PhD thesis is a formal document whose sole purpose is to prove that you have made an original contribution to knowledge. Failure to prove that you have made such a contribution leads to failure. The MPhil thesis needs to be a comprehensive account of the field you are researching and contain independent, critical, assessment of ideas in the literature.

How to Organize your Thesis

Because the purpose of the thesis is to prove that you have made an original and useful contribution to knowledge (PhD thesis) or that you have critically handled your subject (MPhil) , the examiners will read your thesis to find the answers to the following questions:

What is this student's research question or argument?

Is it a good question or argument?

Has the student made a persuasive enough argument to convince me?

If it is a PhD thesis, has the student made an adequate contribution to knowledge?

In phrasing your argument or question you should take into account the following points:

What is the conclusion that is being argued for (what is the author trying to persuade the reader to believe)?

What is the argument by means of which the author is trying to persuade the reader?

The introduction to the thesis should explain the background to the conclusion and argument, and offer some signposts to the direction that the argument will take. This is essentially what you say. It is a slightly different way of expressing it.

A plain and unambiguous statement of the question/argument is essential to proving that you have made an original and worthwhile contribution to knowledge. To prove the originality and value of your contribution, you must be aware of the literature on the subject and take a critical attitude to it. Describing how you answered the question is usually easier to do, since you have been intimately involved in the details over the course of your research.

If your thesis does not provide adequate answers to the few questions listed above, you are likely to be faced with a requirement for major revisions or you may fail your *viva-voce* examination. For this reason, the generic thesis structure given below is designed to underpin the answers to those questions with appropriate thesis organization and section titles. The generic structure can be used for any thesis. While some supervisors may prefer a different organization, the essential elements in any thesis will be the same.

Always remember that a thesis is a *formal* document: every item must be in the appropriate place, and repetition of material in different places should be eliminated.

A GENERIC THESIS STRUCTURE

1. Introduction

This is a *general* introduction to what the thesis is all about -- it is *not* just a description of the contents of each section. Briefly *summarize* the question (you will be stating the question in detail later), some of the reasons why it is a worthwhile question, and perhaps give an overview of your main results. This is a birds-eye view of the answers to the main questions answered in the thesis (see above).

You can dedicate a brief section to giving background information about your thesis, especially if your work spans two or more traditional fields. That means that your readers may not have any experience with some of the material needed to follow your thesis, so you need to give it to them.

Literature Review - here you review the state of the art relevant to your thesis. The idea is to *present* (critical analysis comes a little bit later) the major ideas in the state of the art right up to, but not including, your own personal (great) ideas. You organize this section *by idea*, and not by author or by publication.

Then you can move more constructively to your Research Question or Problem Statement. This section has three main parts:

- a concise statement of the question that your thesis tackles
- justification, by *direct* reference to section 3, that your question is previously unanswered
- discussion of why it is worthwhile to answer this question.

2. Describing How You Solved the Problem or Answered the Question: Parts, Chapters, Sections, etc

This part of the thesis is much more free-form. It may have one or several parts, chapters, sections and subsections. But it all has only one purpose: to convince the examiners that you answered the question or solved the problem that you set for yourself in the thesis. So show what you did that is *relevant* to answering the question or solving the problem: if there were blind alleys and dead ends, do *not* include these, unless specifically relevant to the demonstration that you answered the thesis question.

3. Summaries and Conclusions

You generally cover three things in the Conclusions section, and each of these usually merits a separate subsection:

1. Conclusions
2. Summary of Contributions
3. Future Research

Conclusions are *not* a rambling summary of the thesis: they are *short, concise* statements of the inferences that you have made because of your work. All conclusions should be directly related to the research question stated at the beginning of the thesis. The Future Research subsection is included so that researchers picking up this work in future have the benefit of the ideas that you generated while you were working on the project.

4. References (Footnotes or Endnotes) and Bibliography

It is best to decide before you start writing which style you are going to follow. Both footnoting and endnoting are permitted. There is a useful on-line tutorial on referencing and bibliography offered by University of London Research Library Services ([http://www.rls.ucl.ac.uk/](#)) which takes approx 30 minutes.

5. Appendices

What goes in the appendices? Any material which impedes the smooth development of your presentation, but which is important to justify the results of a thesis. Generally it is material that is of too nitty-gritty a level of detail for inclusion in the main body of the thesis, but which should be available for glance by the examiners to convince them sufficiently. Examples include program listings, immense tables of data, essential texts, etc.

Getting Started

The best way to get started on your thesis is to prepare an extended outline. You begin by making up the Table of Contents, listing each section and subsection that you propose to include. For each section and subsection, write a brief point-form description of the contents of that section. The entire outline might be 2 to 5 pages long. Your first task to undertake with your supervisor is to settle on a research plan.

How Long Does it Take to Write a Thesis?

Longer than you think. Start in the first term of your course. When you write your thesis:

Always keep the reader's background in mind. Who is your audience? How much can you reasonably expect them to know about the subject before picking up your thesis? Usually they are pretty knowledgeable about the general problem, but they haven't been intimately involved with the details over the last couple of years like you have: spell difficult new concepts out clearly. It sometimes helps to mentally picture a real person that you know who has the appropriate background, and to imagine that you are explaining your ideas directly to that person.

Don't make the readers work too hard! This is fundamentally important. You know what few questions the examiners need answers for (see above). Choose section titles and wordings to clearly give them this information. The harder they have to work to search out your problem, your defence of the problem, your answer to the problem, your conclusions and contributions, the worse mood they will be in, and the more likely that your thesis will need major revisions.

A result of the above: *it's impossible to be too clear!* Spell things out carefully, highlight important parts by appropriate titles etc. There's a huge amount of information in a thesis: make sure you direct the readers to the answers to the important questions.

Remember that a *thesis is not a story*: it usually doesn't follow the chronology of things that you tried. It's a formal document designed to answer only a few major questions.

Avoid using phrases like "Clearly, this is the case..." or "Obviously, it follows that ..."; these imply that, if the readers don't understand, then they must be stupid. They might not have understood because you explained it poorly. Avoid *red flags*, claims (like "software is the most important part of a computer system") that are really only your personal opinion and not substantiated by the literature or the solution you have presented.

Master's vs. PhD Thesis

There are different expectations for Master's theses and for Doctoral theses. This difference is not in format but in the significance and level of discovery as evidenced by the problem to be solved, the summary of contributions and originality of thesis; a doctoral thesis necessarily requires a more difficult problem to be solved, and consequently more

substantial contributions. The originality of a non 'PhD' thesis can be expressed in the way the existing literature is summarized.

The contribution to knowledge of a Master's thesis can be in the nature of an incremental improvement in an area of knowledge, or the application of known techniques in a new area. The Ph.D. must be a substantial and innovative contribution to knowledge.

Guidelines on how to prepare and submit a thesis are available from the Research and Policy Administrator.