Institute of Digital Games

Doctoral Degree Guidebook

Version 2013

Guidelines for PhD Applicants at the Institute of Digital Games

1. Doctoral degrees at the University of Malta are subject to a set of regulations stipulated in the Education Act (Cap.327 – 2008) and in a number of Legal Notices. Details are available at: http://www.um.edu.mt/registrar/regulations/general/phd
2. In addition, Bye-Laws regulating the award of a Ph.D. in the Institute of Digital Games of the University of Malta are available at:
http://game.edu.mt/images/Phdfiles/PhDByeLaws.pdf
3. These regulations and bye-laws constitute the contractual framework which binds students and the University alike, and it is important for all prospective applicants to be familiar with the expectations and responsibilities involved.
4. The notes in the following pages highlight some of the steps that students need to be familiar with. They do not replace, but complement, the University and Institute bye-laws, which are the formal guidelines by which students must abide.

Formal Application and Research Proposal

Further to regulation 7 of the Principal PhD Regulations, applicants should submit their application form, together with a detailed Curriculum Vitae including the contact details of 3 referees, transcripts of educational degrees and certificates of education, and a comprehensive research proposal outlining the proposed project. In addition to the statement from the principal supervisor (a faculty member of the Institute) the application should include a statement from any co-supervisors (if available) supporting the candidate and agreeing on supervising the doctoral student. In the case of a PhD position that is funded by a research project the Research Proposal is not necessary and can be replaced by the Description of the project work that the candidate will have to undertake.

The PhD proposal

The Doctoral Committee will not review a proposal unless it is accompanied by a formal University application. Forms may be obtained from the Admissions and Records Office, Room 111, Administration Building, University of Malta. The proposal shall include the research questions to be addressed, the hypothesis to be tested, and the methodology to be adopted in dealing with the research issues (see details below). The length of the proposal should be maximum 2000 words. To enable the Institute's Doctoral Committee to decide on the quality and feasibility of one's proposal, the Committee recommends that the Research Proposal covers the following:

Title: This should be as brief as possible. It should clearly indicate the main focus of one's research.

Rationale: In this section the author is expected to build a case for his/her study. The author should state why the proposed research is of interest and why it is important.

Research Questions and/or Hypotheses: In this section, the focus of the author's research should be expressed as a question/set of questions or hypothesis/es

Theoretical Framework/Literature Review/State-of-the-art: What disciplines or other sources of knowledge will you draw upon to build your conceptualization for the proposed research? What are the fundamental theoretical perspectives upon which the study is based? What are the major concepts informing your study, and how are they connected? What is the key literature? How does your question may potentially advance the state of the art?

Research Method: This section should provide a clear indication of the methodology to be used, including (where relevant) information regarding participants and settings of the study. You should describe and justify each of the following aspects:

- **Method**: What general label would you use to describe your research (e.g., ethnographic, experimental, historical, survey research, empirical)? What is the method followed? What is the key methodological literature?
- **Sample**: From what sources will you gather data and/or information?
- **Data Collection**: How will you seek to collect valid and reliable information? In what contexts? Using what kinds of data and/or information collection procedures/protocols?
- **Data Analysis:** How will you organize data and/or information for purposes of analysis? What procedures will you use to analyse your data and/or information in order to address your research questions or hypotheses?
- **Report Format:** How will you present your findings?

Ethics: The Faculty expects high ethical standards in the process of conducting research. This section is meant to reassure the Doctoral Committee that the author is aware of the ethical issues underpinning the study. The author is to refer to UREC (University Research Ethics Committee) guidelines in the process of writing this section: http://www.um.edu.mt/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/29045/ethicsguidelines__UREC.pdf

References: The main references are to be included in a select bibliography, using an appropriate and consistent referencing style.

Study plan: the PhD candidate should include a study plan with key milestones integrated in the timeframe of 3 years (or 6 years if part-time).

It is expected that the proposal be written in clear and correct English. The proposal is to be signed (or e-signed) by the student, and countersigned (or e-countersigned) by the proposed supervisor/s.

Review and Acceptance of Research Proposal

The proposal will be reviewed by the Institute Doctoral Committee. The Chair will eventually write to the author, asking him/her to attend a meeting. The letter will include the details of the meeting as well as a list of questions that the Institute Doctoral Committee members expect the author to answer during the meeting.

The meeting is normally chaired by the chairperson of the Institute Doctoral Committee and consists of a short presentation by the applicant followed by an open discussion. If the proposal is deemed suitable, the Institute Doctoral Committee will recommend to the Institute's Board that the application be accepted. If the Institute Board also gives its approval, the application is submitted to Senate for approval, through the University's Ph.D. committee. The result of the evaluation process will be communicated by the Registrar's Office of the University, following approval by Senate.

The PhD study commences once the author of the proposal receives a formal letter from the University of Malta indicating that his/her proposal has been accepted. The Letter of Acceptance includes the approved title of the thesis, the approved supervisor and co-supervisor(s) (if any), and the time frame in which the thesis has to be conducted.

Where applicable, the candidate should obtain ethical clearance from FREC (Faculty Research Ethics Committee) and the UREC (University Research Ethics Committee) before engaging in empirical research. Familiarity with UREC guidelines is indispensable at this stage. For further details students should consult the following link, from where the relevant form can be downloaded: http://www.um.edu.mt/urec.

PhD Study and Training – General Guidelines

Place of Study

Further to regulation 7 of the Principal Regulations, a student is required to spend a total of at least 18 months in a 3 year full-time study (or 36 months in a 6 year part tie study) at the Malta campus during which period they shall hold physical meetings with the Principal Supervisor.

Half-study report

On **18 months** of full-time study, students are required to submit a half-study report on their research work for consideration by an *ad hoc* board appointed by the Institute Board. The *ad hoc* board shall be composed of a chairman, who shall be the head of the Institute Doctoral Committee (or the Head of the Institute if the head of the Institute Doctoral Committee is the Principal Supervisor), and two examiners, one of whom shall be the Principal Supervisor and the other a member of the Institute's faculty. The *ad hoc* board shall examine the student orally (max 1.5 hours) and shall submit a written report for consideration by the Institute's Doctoral Committee in the first instance. The report shall contain recommendations according to the provisions of the Principal Regulations.

Taught Courses, Research Seminars

PhD students registered at the Institute will be required to participate in the Institute's research programmes and may be required to participate in the Institute's teaching programmes. In particular, PhD students registered at the Institute may be required to successfully complete a maximum of 15 ECTS of relevant graduate courses – as those are approved by the Principal Supervisor – before the submission of their thesis. A workshop on

academic writing may also be offered. Students are also required to participate in and contribute to the Institute meetings and Research Seminars, where work in progress is presented to colleagues and faculty staff.

The Institute attaches great importance to the association of doctoral students with other research students and members of staff. Students shall therefore be required to participate fully in the research seminars of the Institute and present their work regularly. They will also be required to join some of the Institute's faculty meetings.

Teaching

The Institute places a top priority and focus on high quality PhD training which involves pedagogical training, course development and learning to teach. PhD students registered at the Institute are highly recommended and expected to contribute to the teaching activities of the Institute upon the approval of the Principal Supervisor.

PhD Thesis Supervision

Students will be advised by a principal supervisor (from the Institute of Digital Games) and, if necessary, a number of co-supervisors. In certain situations the Institute's Doctoral Committee may decide to suggest the addition of a second supervisor. Typically, students are expected to have individual face to face or virtual meetings with their supervisors not less than four hours a month, but the frequency may vary according to the time of year and to the stage they are at in their research programme. Students are responsible of arranging the supervision meetings but the supervisor should respond timely and be available for the time indicated above.

The role of the supervisor includes:

- **Being responsible for the student's academic training** by meeting the objectives set by the Institute's Doctoral Committee. The PhD training objectives include: supervision of and training on research methodology, hypothesis testing and empirical validation; academic writing skills training; supervision of and guidance on teaching activities; agreeing on meeting the student for at least 4 hours per month; guidance on dissemination and outreach activities; guidance on the student's career development plan; introduction to university administration.

- **Supervision:** Maintaining regular contact with their students, and responding to them in good time. Meeting their PhD students not less than 4 hours per month including face to face and virtual meetings as well as other forms of communication (the frequency may vary across the study).

- **Establishing a timetable** of regular meetings for detailed discussion of the student's progress (the frequency of meetings will depend on the research progress, but typically students are expected to meet with their supervisors at least twice a month. In case the student does not keep regular contact with the supervisors, the latter

should submit a progress report to the Institute Doctoral Committee to signal that there might be a problem.

– **Agreeing to a research plan** and programme of work, and establishing clear and ambitious (nevertheless achievable) academic expectations and milestones for the 3-year (or 6-year if part-time) PhD programme.

– **Setting a timetable for the submission of written work**, and agreeing to providing critical comments on work submitted within a reasonable time.

– **Assessing the student's** subject specific and personal and professional skills training needs on a regular basis and ensuring that these needs are met.

– **Ensuring students are aware of the formal requirements** in relation to the final submission, and helping students to incorporate these into their plan of work.

– **Submitting a Progress Report** to the Institute's Board, through the Institute Doctoral Committee once every year in June. The progress report is usually one page long, and includes an introduction providing an overall assessment of the student since the last report, details of the work achieved thus far, including, where relevant, research papers published, dissemination and teaching activities of the student, and duty hours covered by the student. The student's study plan and updated PhD proposal should also be submitted together with the progress report, which should be endorsed by all academics involved in the supervision process. The report should be accompanied by a yearly progress report submitted by the student independently (without the contribution of the supervisor) and directly to the Institute's Board.

– The supervisory role of supervisors and advisers shall cease when the thesis is submitted for examination. The role may be reassumed, on the advice of the Board of Examiners, in order to provide guidance to students whose thesis is referred back for significant correction pending final acceptance.

– Supervisors and advisers are responsible for guiding the PhD student towards a writing a high-standard thesis It is not their responsibility to ensure that theses do not contain plagiarised parts. If plagiarism is detected by a supervisor in drafts or in the final version of a thesis prior to the formal submission for examination, the Principal Supervisor shall use discretion as to whether to reprimand the student and demand corrective action or report the matter to the Assessment Disciplinary Board, depending on the gravity of the offence.

– Principal supervisors shall signify, on the appropriate form, that they are aware that the student is submitting his/her thesis for examination by the Board of Examiners.

The role of the student includes:

– **Follow the PhD research programme:** Taking responsibility for their research programme, including the development of subject specific, research, teaching,

administrative, and personal and professional skills. Taking responsibility for academic tasks assigned to them by their principal supervisor.

– **Supervision:** Maintaining regular contact with their supervisors, and responding to them in good time. Meeting their supervisor regularly, updating their thesis study plan based on supervisory meetings and giving due weight to any guidance or corrective action proposed.

– **Yearly progress report and half-study report:** Cooperating with their supervisors to draft a detailed joint report on their progress at the end of each academic year (June) and the half-study report at the end of month 18 (full—time) of their studies. Students shall only be allowed to proceed with their studies subject to satisfactory progress reports from their supervisor and the student. If the reports are negative, the Institute Board shall make recommendations to Senate on the student's discontinuing registration for the Degree.

– **Thesis:** Taking responsibility for (i) the preparation and content of their thesis, giving due regard to any advice from their supervisors, and (ii) its timely submission in accordance with the timetable set.

– **Plagiarism:** Being aware of the University's guidance on plagiarism and of any ethical, legal or intellectual property issues arising from the research carried out.

– **Career development plan:** Pursuing opportunities to engage with the wider academic community at University, national and international level. Collaborate with the supervisor and request advice on career development plans (including dissemination, exploitation, networking, outreach activities etc.).

PhD Thesis Submission and Oral Defence

Submission and Examination of thesis

Students are to consult the University's Ph.D. Regulations issued in 2008 (http://www.um.edu.mt/registrar/regulations/general/phd) and the Institute's Bye Laws (http://game.edu.mt/images/Phdfiles/PhDByeLaws.pdf) regarding the final stages of their doctoral study, including submission and examination protocols. In addition, the following guidelines should be adhered to:

Eligibility for the Award of the Ph.D. Degree

Students are required to inform the Institute that they will be submitting their thesis for examination not less than three months before the submission deadline. The Institute's Board shall recommend to Senate the appointment of a Board of Examiners in accordance with the Principal Regulations.

Further to regulation 5 of the Principal Regulations, a thesis for the Degree shall report the discovery of new facts and/or demonstrate that the student has exercised independent

critical power in reaching the reported conclusions. In both respects, the student shall indicate clearly the extent to which the thesis embodies the results of his or her own research and observations, and to what extent the investigation advances the study of the subject.

Thesis formatting guidelines

Further to regulation 38 of the Principal Regulations, the PhD thesis must not exceed a maximum word count. There is no minimum word count. The PhD thesis must not exceed 100,000 words. The word count of the thesis includes the main text, preface material, footnotes and references/bibliography but does not include material in the appendices, bibliography, abstract or lay summary. In exceptional circumstances, on the recommendation of the supervisor, permission may be granted by the Institute Doctoral Committee to exceed the stated length on the ground that such extension is required for adequate treatment of the thesis topic.

Students shall be required to submit a soft-bound copy of their thesis for each member of the Board of Examiners (**four copies**), together with a copy in digital format. The officer in charge of the Institute shall issue a dated receipt.

PhD students of the Institute of Digital Games are **strongly encouraged** to use the LaTeX template package for the submission of their thesis available here:
http://game.edu.mt/images/Phdfiles/IDG_LaTeX_Package.zip

If the thesis is not submitted in the provided LaTeX template then the following formatting rules need to be applied:

- **Paper size:** International Standard Size A4 (29.7x 21cm).
- **Typing:** Double spacing for the main text. Single spacing for footnotes. Single spacing may also be used for long quotations in the main text. Left hand margin of 3.5 cm. Top and right hand margin of 1.5 cm. A top margin of 5 cm to be left on the first page of every division, i.e. chapters, bibliography, etc. Footnote(s) should appear at the bottom of the relevant page or after every chapter.
- **Page numbering:** The main text, including the introduction (if any), the bibliography and any appendices of the thesis shall have Arabic numerals; the title page, dedication (if any), preface, acknowledgements, table of contents, etc. preceding the main text, shall have Roman numerals.
- **Referencing** should follow a standard academically recognised style, such as APA.
- **Layout of title page:** title of thesis and subtitle (if any), followed by the name of the student, the subject, and the date of submission.
- **Declaration**: The following signed declaration should also feature on a separate page: "I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work, and has not been presented in fulfilment of other course requirements at the University of Malta or any other University."

Procedure during Oral Examination

During the oral examination, the student is expected to present a synopsis of the thesis of about 40 minutes, to provide a demonstration of the artefact if so required, and then to answer questions posed by the members of the Board of Examiners. Further to regulation 42 of the Principal Regulations, a thesis oral examination is open to the public and cannot be longer than 5 hours (in total).
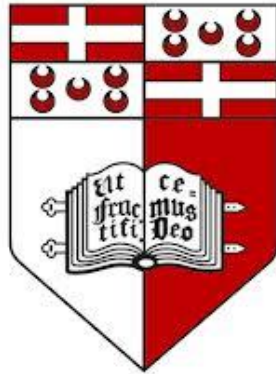
Final Version of Thesis

In addition to regulation 50 of the Principal Regulations, students shall be required to submit a copy of the final version of their thesis, within six weeks from the publication of the result, to each member of the Board of Examiners, as well as one copy in digital format and at least three hard bound copies to the Institute Office, one of which shall be retained in the University Library, another one in the custody of the Institute, and one copy for each supervisor and co-supervisor (where applicable). The latter copies shall be in the format required by the Institute.

Final draft: Students submitting a final draft of their thesis are required to submit a signed and dated copy of a declaration that can be found at: https://secure.um.edu.mt/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/121105/Submission_dissertation_or_thesis.pdf . This declaration needs to be countersigned by the principal supervisor signifying awareness that the thesis is being submitted. This does not imply, however, that the supervisor is in agreement with the contents of the thesis.

Binding: After a successful PhD oral defence, at least *three copies* of the thesis as approved by the Board of Examiners, shall be sewn and bound as follows: in black cloth, with lettering in gold on the front and spine showing: the title of the thesis; the name of the student; the degree for which the thesis is submitted; the Institute of Digital Games, University of Malta, and the year of submission. One bound copy of the thesis shall be deposited in the University Library and one in the library of the Institute. A digital copy of the thesis must also be submitted. All copies must be submitted prior to graduation. Students who do not comply with this bye-law shall not be awarded the Degree.

Acknowledgements

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